

TO ME CRUSE HAS ALWAYS BEEN something of a miracle. Its beginning in 1959 was intended to be a quiet experiment in social care, as befitted its subject. In those days no-one talked of widows or of bereavement. Little was known of their way of life or the statutory conditions which governed it. Certainly the first shock was to discover from the Abstract of Statistics that there were three million widows of all ages in Britain. It was easy to see that if the problems revealed by the first thirty widows I talked with were multiplied, our work would snowball. In fact, within a matter of weeks the Press had the story.

The then Medical Correspondent of the News Chronicle (Dr. Richard Mackarness) came to me. "This is important Press news. Would you like it handled from the medical viewpoint or do you prefer to leave it to the general Press?" My reply was: "You do it." And in this decision the work took an important direction with a professional influence which has stamped it throughout the years. Dr. Torrie's initial surprise at this new venture of mine quickly turned to deep interest and a desire to research into the whole situation of the bereaved women in our midst. We came to call them "the lost, the last and the least!"

I knew nothing about widows and their lot but family casework learned through the Charity Organisation Society (now the Family Welfare Association) in London's dockland and work among the poor of Harrow Road throughout the War, were a sound background. Added to this I had done many years of organising and group work. Now I had to learn from the widows themselves. This was done

through our pilot experiment at Richmond where a group of widows of all ages and backgrounds came to drink tea with me and to share their experiences.

#### HEDGED IN BY PROBLEMS

Initially they were a very insecure group but they were soon talking freely and I made notes, gradually forming a picture of their lives. Widowhood emerged as a very difficult experience, hedged in by economic problems, inadequate pensions, the Earnings Rule and by lack of understanding by family and friends. There seemed no

widows found themselves only partially covered by statutory benefit and always the pension was totally inadequate for one now maintaining a household on her own. Few had working skills. There were acute housing problems, difficulties with disturbed children, health frequently at risk and unending anxiety over the weekly budget. House and garden maintenance had their special problems.

Even so brief a sketch revealed what our young organisation had stumbled on. What was clear was that we had to build a good organisation. We needed to be legally constituted and to have charitable

## **MARGARET TORRIE, MBE, founder of *CRUSE*,**

### **describes**

# **HOW IT ALL BEGAN**



general grasp of what losing a husband really meant in a woman's life. The bewildering loss of love, comfort and support in the marriage partnership needed the sensitive understanding and practical help of clergy and doctors too, but often this did not seem to go much beyond the death and funeral. The widow was frequently told to "snap out of it", and resume a bland exterior as soon as possible. Grief and emotional distress were too disturbing to others accustomed to British reticence.

On the pension scene there was much disarray. Many

status if we were to appeal for the money we needed. With good publicity we hoped to reach people's hearts and pockets although the years were to show how hard this would be.

#### FEAR OF THE MARRIED

The subject of death and bereavement, we found, threatened more often than it touched hearts. We had to battle with fear and psycho/social factors. Publicity brought us hundreds of needy widows but rarely the corresponding help from the married in the community.

At the outset we worked with a small band of devoted volunteers but soon we needed more skilled help and salaries had

of self-inking stamps capable of printing many thousands of times before fitting a replacement pad. What is important is a facility for changing the "message" for a reasonable cost.

After carefully studying the economic aspects I can highly recommend Trodat equipment, for which a first-class direct service is available from Mark C. Brown & Son Ltd PO Box 69, 4 Baker St., Hull, HU2 8HS. They send a catalogue if you ask them. My recommendation is the self-inking stamp model 4204 which last year cost £12.24p plus VAT, including cost of die for the six line "message".

As a branch organising secretary for a limited period I had our letterheads printed with all officers names except that of secretary, for which I used a Trodat "Printy" model 4912. It had previously had another name and address. I bought a new rubber die and fixed it myself. Cost of die £5.25p plus VAT.

PATRICK LANGFIER

(Continued from page 3) HOW IT ALL BEGAN...

to be met. The counselling of widows, group meetings, Parents' Circles and amenity schemes had to be covered and routine office work as well. There were interviews to be dealt with, plans for local work, public speaking, publicity articles and appeals and an increasing number of publications were needed both to inform others and to help membership. Widows wrote in from all over the country and we kept our policy of helping all ourselves or making contact with organisations with whom they could be put in touch.

#### A CLEARING HOUSE

We worked through our statutory and voluntary contacts and with M.P.'s too. We were, in fact, soon to be known as a "clearing house" of information for the widowed. Men who had been widowed came to us too but so inundated were we with widows' work that we felt

the time was not then ripe to take on their problems. That we hoped would come later.

We always found the Press helpful but were soon aware that their interest loaded us with work without giving the financial help. We had to hold back until we could reach what people called "the big money." It was after my husband's death that we learned we might be given a Government Grant for administrative costs but we would have to raise funds to buy premises.

We secured the Grant and were able to move into Cruse House in 1975. Our Grant also covered the salary of our National Organiser who joined us in 1974. On my retirement Derek Nuttall took over as Director.

Looking back I can see how urgently our work was needed and how establishing an understanding of the bereaved has filtered through to every conceivable profession where caring for others is taken into account.

I do not see an end to the work of Cruse while people care for each other as individuals in a family setting.

## DIARY

INSTITUTE OF FAMILY THERAPY  
(LONDON), 5 Tavistock Place,  
London W.C.1.

Life Span Psychology: Implications  
for Family Therapy. Dr. Patricia  
Minuchin, PH.D.

Three sessions of three hours,  
5-8 pm April 21 and 28 and  
May 5, 1982.

\*\*\*\*

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED URBAN STUDIES,  
UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL, Grange Rd.,  
BRISTOL.

Seminar: Social services and  
Social Security - new developments  
and emergent issues. May 5-7.1982.

For details of all NVCO courses  
listed below, please contact  
Jenny Hill, Management Training  
Officer, National Council for  
Voluntary Organisations, 26 Bedford  
Square, London WC1B 3HU.

One day seminar for Chairmen of  
Voluntary Management Committees.  
May 13 London; June 24 Manchester;  
October 14 Leeds; November 11 Bristol.

Making Meetings Work, two-day  
seminar. May 4-5 Bristol;  
October 12-13 London.

Effective Speaking, two-day work-  
shop. June 3-4 London, November  
23-24 Leeds.

Grantmanship workshop. Two day  
discussion led by advisers from  
Government, Trusts and NVCO.  
April 20-21 Manchester and  
September 29-30 London.

Fundraising workshop - two days.  
September 27-28 London.

Management in a team setting.  
Two-day course to help partici-  
pants to take action to improve  
growth and performance of their  
team and individuals.  
April 15-16 Coventry; June 16-17  
Manchester; October 21-22 Leeds;  
November 18-19 Bristol.

Developing the Secretary's Role.  
Two-day course London November 2-3.