H. Murray Ellins, OLS # 820
1920 -2011

Harold Murray Ellins was born on May 3, 1920 and died ninety-one years later on May 3, 2011. His early life, as with everyone of his generation was dominated by the Great Depression that began in 1928 and lasted until the beginning of World War II. It was during the time of the Depression that Murray decided to become an Aeronautical Engineer. To understand that decision, it is necessary to look at the context in which it was made.

In the early years of aircraft, pilots were like rock stars or movie stars are today. Their exploits at pushing back the frontiers of air travel were heavily reported in the media (newspapers and radio in those days) and the design of aircraft represented the cutting edge of engineering science. A whole new field of endeavor had opened up, and it is not surprising that it would inspire a boy with Murray's particular talents for mathematics and engineering.

In those days, engineering was more of a traditional craft than it is today and one learned the job not by going to University but through a kind of apprenticeship with an engineering company that specialized in the kind of work one wanted to do. He apprenticed with De Havilland Aircraft in England.

The early De Havilland aircraft were the Gypsy Moth and Tiger Moth and these were used in some of the early aviation exploits and earned many records for distance flights. This then was the context in which a young man arrived in England in 1939 to study in Hatfield, Hertfordshire with a world famous aeronautical engineering firm. He had relatives in the area and was able to stay with them. Shortly after his arrival, his world was turned upside down by two events: the death of his mother and the start of World War II. The war in particular changed the course of his life, as he arrived at a company that was advancing civilian aircraft and suddenly became involved in top-secret design work on the Mosquito and Hornet aircraft.

During this time, Murray joined the Home Guard and bought himself a motorcycle. When not working or on duty, Murray would ride about the countryside.

After World War II, Murray returned to Canada a fully qualified aeronautical engineer and met and married Lucile Reuben, a concert pianist. With the typical good fortune that had so far dogged Murray's footsteps in the post-war period, the world market for aircraft crashed and jobs for aeronautical engineers became scarce. Murray had to retrain as an Ontario Land Surveyor and worked in partnership with Lucile's father's firm – C.G. Reuben and Sons. The firm was very busy in the post-war construction in the Toronto area.

The world market for aircraft started to recover. In 1967, Murray received an offer to work at Piper Aircraft in the USA. The family rented their cottage, got their Visas and actually started off for Florida. However, concerns about the Vietnam War and the draft that might affect his sons as well as uncertainty of the times led him to reconsider. Right about then, there was a phone call from de Havilland offering him an engineering position and he returned to de Havilland, where he stayed until his retirement in 1981. His major projects while back at de Havilland were the Dash 8 and Twin Otter STOL aircraft (Short Take-Off and Landing). Murray was an avid boater on the Trent-Severn Waterway, Thousand Islands and Georgian Bay.

Following his retirement in the 1980's, Murray and Lucile began to alternate between the cottage and Florida which they did until about ten years ago. When they decided to let their Florida house go, they lived in the condo in Burlington and spent about a month in Florida during the depths of winter.

We live today in a world in which safe air travel is considered normal, and we tend to forget all of the pioneering work that went into this. Murray's work was part of this. He lived a full and interesting life, had a loving family, four children and seven grand children.