Transcript
Dead Ladies Show Podcast Episode 53
Eva Crane

(Dead Ladies Show Music - ‘Little Lily Swing’ by Tri-Tachyon)

SUSAN STONE: Welcome to the Dead Ladies Show Podcast! The Dead Ladies Show celebrates women — both overlooked and iconic — who achieved amazing things against all odds while they were alive. And we do it through women’s history storytelling on stage — here in Berlin and beyond…then we bring you the very best of those stories here on the podcast. I’m Susan Stone, and I’m joined by Dead Ladies Show co-founder Florian Duijsens. Hey there!

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Hi Susan! It’s so nice to be here outside of ACUD for our first show of the year! Our 30th, if you can believe it, right here at ACUD, while people are trickling in and ordering their cocktails or their beers. We're outside recording this lovely intro for y'all.

SUSAN STONE: That’s right, it’s nice to be back here. It’s spring, at least in the Northern Hemisphere. And in Berlin, it’s time for blooms, birds, and…bees.

Now, when our other DLS co-founder Katy Derbyshire told me she was doing a Bee Lady, I was very excited because I’m a bee enthusiast myself! A bee amateur, not a bee professional. Katy’s Dead Lady, scientist Eva Crane, was a true bee professional who traveled the world to document everything to do with bees, and I can’t wait for you to hear all about it. But first, we need to tell you a little about Katy Derbyshire.

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Katy is an award-winning translator and a lover of German books, as well as the publisher of V&Q Books, which presents remarkable writing from Germany in English. There are three fresh new V&Q books just out in April, translated from the German and Croatian; one and a half were translated by Katy herself, so keep an eye out for those. Or listen to Katy speaking with the authors and translators on the V&Q Books podcast (woo!) produced by a certain Susan Stone, I believe? Now, here’s Katy, on Eva Crane:

KATY DERBYSHIRE: So I'm telling you about Eva Crane, who lived from 1912 to 2007. She was born Eva Widdowson in Southeast London. Her father, Harry, moved down to London from Lincolnshire. He started out as a grocery assistant, and he ended up with his own stationery business (so, selling paper and envelopes and stuff), and her mother, Rose, was a dressmaker. She had an older sister, Elsie (we'll hear a little bit more about her later), but here you can see them in their father Harry's first car. [SHOWS SLIDE]

So, Elsie is five years older than Eva. Eva's on the left. They're looking a bit chilly at the back of that open-topped car. Harry taught his daughters to drive this car, despite it being the '20s and despite the family being very religious. They were part of the Plymouth Brethren movement, who are non-conformist evangelical Christians, which meant that they went to church meetings three times on Sundays — also on Mondays, and Wednesdays, and often Fridays and Saturdays. So tonight, Tuesday, would have been Eva's night off. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] And the sisters, we know, often quoted Bible verses later in life. So it was an important part of their lives. They were frequent visitors as well to the Horniman Museum, which was near where they lived, which has a large insect collection. And Elsie and Eva kept themselves very busy with their homework, with knitting and sewing, and they would set each other maths puzzles. As you do. I know me and my sister were multiplying and dividing all the time. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]

Eva was often ill as a child, but she still managed to get into Sydenham Grammar School. [SHOWS SLIDE] You can see here on the front right of this group of girls in their gym slips, special dresses, smiling in a much more mischievous way than anybody else in the photo, strangely. I don't know why that is. And those maths puzzles really paid off, because she then got a scholarship to study mathematics at King's College in London, one of two women on the course. She said, "It was the hardest subject to learn, but when I had mastered the skills, it was the most beautiful." So she got her Bachelor of Science in only two years, and then an MSc in Quantum Mechanics, and then a PhD in Nuclear Physics, as you do in 1937. Interesting timing with the nuclear physics, I think, in 1937.

Anyway, that very same year Elsie, her big sister, bought herself a Morris 8 car. [SHOWS SLIDE] You can see a beautiful, modern photo of a lovely, red, shiny, big, expensive-looking car. And she had it shipped to France for them, and they had to put it on a ship with a crane because they didn't have car ferries at the time. So they lifted the car onto the boat and took it to France to travel around just the two of them. And before that, the sisters often went traveling together. They went youth hosteling in Ireland (which I did as well when I was 18, just realized that!). And they went cycling in the Harz mountains, which I have never done. So you can tell already that, even as quite young women, they had a definite taste for adventure. Eva, in fact, went along with her big sister to study seal nutrition in the Inner Hebrides in 1945. They went to this island with two human inhabitants and many seals, and worked out what on earth the seals were eating, I guess. I don't know.

Eva taught physics at Hull and Sheffield Universities. [SHOWS SLIDE] So in 1942, she married this man. You can see in the photo, they look — yeah, they look quite happy on a nice little hillock there in the countryside. Nice warm socks. James Crane was his

name, known as Jim. He was an insurance broker who was serving with the Royal Navy at the time, it being in the middle of the war.

[SHOWS SLIDE] So the story goes — let me just tell you, I made this slide only for Susan, for the bee enthusiast among us. The story goes that they received a hive and bees as a wedding present. So there was a sugar shortage on during the war. And I've just found all these beautiful pictures of bee-themed bric-a-brac from the 1940s to make Susan happy. Just perhaps some typical, uh, wedding presents, a hive-shaped teapot and so on. However, actually, we have a receipt issued to Eva Widdowson for three hives and beekeeping equipment, issued before she got married, in November 1940 in fact, and a letter from before she got married from 1941, telling her fiance Jim about the current state of her hives.

So we know she was already beekeeping before she got married. And I think it's weirdly fascinating to me that the accepted narrative frames her interest in bees and beekeeping as a kind of domestic issue, rather than a scientific one. Interesting... Even in her Wikipedia page, in obituaries, they all say, "She got a hive for her wedding present," blah, blah.

So, the couple lived with their hives in Hull, in this house that you can see here, and Eva began writing academic articles about bees in 1945. In 1949, she founded the Bee Research Association, which later became the International Bee Research Association. (I'm going to try not to call it "I-Bra.") She wrote, "My interest in bees started during World War II, when I decided" — note the "I decided!" — “I decided to keep a few hives, because honey would be a welcome addition to the rather dull wartime diet. Members of the Yorkshire Beekeepers Association gave me much practical help. But when I tried to find out about research which might improve the effectiveness of beekeeping, I failed."

So she had already subscribed to this magazine *Bee World*, and she then took over as editor in 1950. She had very, very exacting standards for the journal. "It wasn't the bees I was attracted to at all. I am a scientist, and I wanted to know how they worked." I think, though, that she did develop an interest in bees, or at least in kind of human-bee relations. I read this really fascinating article she wrote about human attitudes to bees, where she goes from bee phobias all the way to what she calls "apiphilia," people who are really, really into bees. She talks about bee beards. I am not sharing a photo of a bee beard for those of us who are a little bit more towards the phobic end of that scale. If you're interested to find out, do Google "bee beards"... [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] It's really disturbing.

So, other scientists, other than Eva, weirdly didn't want to publish in a magazine called *Bee World*. [SHOWS SLIDE] So in 1962, she sets up this more fancy-looking one, the

Journal of Apicultural Research, which is still going strong, as of course is *Bee World*. And you can see her on the other side of the screen, researching hard.

[SHOWS SLIDE] So yes, Eva and Jim, they move south in 1955 after Jim got a job in London, and lived in this building that you see on Google Maps — uh, what do you call that? — Street View. It's called Woodhill House in Gerrard's Cross, on the outer edges of London. Must have been a paradise for bees — look at all these beautiful flowers and trees and the very large houses.

Eva set up the headquarters of the Bee Research Association in the house. So they had one large room as the office, plus loads of books in a kind of Association library all over the house. I don't know if anybody else has books, but they do multiply, don't they? They had reprographic machines, they had a stationery store, they had a collection of different bee-related artifacts (which Susan can relate to). And, of course, hives in the garden. Eventually the IBRA got its own building, though.

Eva Crane worked with a team of typists, archivists, and translators. They were all women. They were working flexible part-time hours before that was even a thing. I'm going to tell you in a bit about her travels, but she was really fascinated with typewriters. She asked to see typewriters in all these different countries that have different non-Latin scripts, so that she could understand how they worked, including on a trip to Ethiopia where she looked at the Amharic typewriter. She was also editor for the 10-volume *Dictionary of Beekeeping Terms*, which is how I came across her. I have a copy of Volume 7! English, German, Danish, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish... and it saved my life on a translation. I don't— Susan mentioned that I was a translator, yeah! So it goes from French, German, Dutch, all the way to English, French, Swahili, via Norwegian, Swedish, Polish, Czech, Russian. And it's just a thing of beauty, although my copy smells a bit strange.

"What the world needs is a good book about honey," she told Heinemann publishers. And if you want a thing done well, you do it yourself. So she wrote a good book about honey! *Honey: A Comprehensive Survey*, which was published in 1975. And she wrote a lot of books for sort of general readers, many of which were published in the '70s with these really fabulously groovy covers, like a book of honey with more bee-artifacts on the cover.

So, as I mentioned, she traveled incredibly widely. [SHOWS SLIDE] This is her in Georgia in 1962 – Georgia in Europe, not American Georgia. She went to 60 countries where she did first-hand research on how people dealt with bees. You can see on the left, she's got this special, spotty hat on, which is a special Georgian beekeeping hat with a fold-down veil, just inspecting a hive there, as she did wherever she went.

And she was kind of lauded and celebrated wherever she went, and she writes a lot about all the — those kind of gatherings and get-togethers that she had. [SHOWS SLIDE] This is in Georgia, again, on the right here. They're having a picnic. Apparently this one was very rich in wine and song, and a fabulous time was had.

So, she would go somewhere. She would always, it seems to me, get invited to go on the radio, although I could not find any audio files of her, sadly. She was on a BBC Woman's Hour before she died, but it is not on the internet. She took all these adventurous routes by land, sea and air, and wrote: "I have been extremely fortunate to travel so widely in the world, and to see so many regions before they were commonly visited. The journeys involved hard work and was sometimes tiring, but my experiences were both interesting and enriching. I made many new friends and some of the friendships have been long-lasting."

While she was traveling, she photographed or collected artifacts. [SHOWS SLIDE] On the left, you can see South Australian models made of wax from stingless bees. She took this photograph in 1967. Turns out, who knew there's all these different strains of bees. I'm not going to go into it, but in a lot of places, the bees native to those places like Australia, they don't even sting! Which would bump you down the phobia scale. And on the right, you can see — uh, high on the kitsch scale — a Bavarian beeswax candle that she was given in 1969, which is not only beehive shape, but also has, like, silver decorations and, uh, you wouldn't want to burn it, would you? It's just so, um, so delightful.

She went into the pyramids in Egypt and documented evidence of ancient beekeeping there. She collected legends in places like India, related to bees. And wherever she went, she was given food made of honey. So she was eating baklava and halva, drinking mead.

She was a keen bird watcher, so she kept notes of all the birds she saw. And I think she saw nature as — well, as somebody who knows bees, she understood that everything is connected. [SHOWS SLIDE] And she published this book with a fabulous title, *Making a Bee-line*, in 2003, documenting her journeys in six countries, 1949 to 2000, which I have read a great deal of, although not all.

On her travels, she paid particular attention, again, to women. [SHOWS SLIDE] You can see a picture she took, here, of a woman working with traditional hives in Egypt. And she kind of looked at gender relations wherever she went. She was — do we have any Australians here today? No, I can't be rude 'cause of the podcast, but anyway, she was shocked when she went to Australia. She didn't expect it to be such a sexist place. And she would usually be the only woman in the environment she was working with,

but in the book she mentions every single man's wife (or whether he was unmarried) by name. And she basically made all these women her allies.

She went around the world looking closely. She talks about segregation in the U.S., when she first went there. She talks about apartheid in South Africa. She was very aware, I think, of human relations as well as bee relations. Those travels resulted in yet more books with an international outlook. [SHOWS SLIDE] Here we have a *Directory of Important World Honey Sources*. The hugely important, still, *The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting* and *The Archeology of Beekeeping*. All those things you need to know.

She facilitated communication between professional and amateur beekeepers all over the world, between countries. For example, when varroa mites (which you might've heard of) started killing honeybees in the U.S.A., researchers there knew from Eva's writing that there were some Russian bees that were more or less resistant to those mites. So they managed to import that strain, which are just known now as "Russian bees." She also — to get back to Australia — she also advised Australian beekeepers to keep things much cleaner than they had been doing. And she knew that people like the taste of honey that's similar to the honey they grew up with, which makes sense. Whereas the honey in Australia was really pungent because they have, I don't know, fancy flowers there, and the Australians felt they were being ripped off. But she just said, "No, just make a milder honey, and people will buy more of it." And they did.

She took late retirement in 1983 from the International Bee Research Association, but she continued to be active at conferences and traveling. She has over 370 publications to her name in total, through books and articles, which is terrifying.

So I'm going to go back to her sister, Elsie, now. [SHOWS SLIDE] You can see in this lovely black-and-white photo, Elsie is the second on the left, the shortest woman, grinning, looking rather happy — and Eva is standing to her right in a lighter outfit.

Elsie Widdowson became a highly influential nutritionist — not just for seals, but also for humans. And, in 1993, was awarded some kind of royal honor (not quite sure what was), and apparently she was very, very frugal and didn't care about clothes. So her friend took her to a high-end secondhand shop, and she bought the outfit you can see her wearing here. There is — I have no information about where Eva bought her outfit for the occasion.

Both the sisters have blue plaques, which are a, kind of, British honours thing for important historical figures, attached to buildings. [SHOWS SLIDE] So Eva's, you can see at the top, is on the building in Hull, where she founded the Bee Research Association. And Elsie's was inaugurated just this year, in June 2021! It says, "pioneer

nutrition scientist." This was confusing for me. It's on the site where the bakery once was that baked the bread that Elsie used to develop and test wartime rations. It's just a big empty field with a plaque in it. Eva also received some kind of royal honor (which I'm not sure what it was), but more importantly, she was made an Honorary Doctor at Ohio State University, which is weird because she was already a doctor. I don't know how honorary doctorates work. Anyway, she was a double doctor, I guess. I think her lasting legacy is that she set up the Eva Crane Trust: "to advance the understanding of bees and beekeeping by the collection, collation and dissemination of science and research worldwide, as well as to record and propagate a further understanding of beekeeping practices through historical and contemporary discoveries."

So basically, her life's work continued. And when she died in 2007, much of her estate went to that trust, which still works. Now, if you're interested in pictures of beekeepers (who isn't?), do go to the website of the Eva Crane Trust. They have this massive, massive gallery of all — maybe not all, but thousands of photos that Eva Crane took all over the world, including the bee beards (ugh) if you feel that way inclined.

Eva Crane went on exploring. [SHOWS SLIDE] You can see her here on the right, age 74 in 1987. You'll notice she has a sort of belt around her waist. That's 'cause she's just roped down the cliff face on the left of her, in Spain, to a little shelter in the rock, like a cave, where there were these ancient wicker hives and rock paintings. I don't know if I aspire — at the age of 74 — to be abseiling or not, but we'll see. The last article she wrote, “The beginning of beekeeping in Siberia,” was published just a couple of months before her death, age 95. I'd recommend these two books: *Eva Crane: Bee Scientist*, edited by her colleagues, Penelope Walker and Richard Jones. And of course, *Making a Bee-line*.

When I was looking into Eva Crane, I was struck by the similarities to two other women who came from quite modest, but very strictly religious households, and also went into science and then changed tack. The first of those was Margaret Thatcher, and the second of course, Angela Merkel [AUDIENCE LAUGHS]. And I would say that Eva Crane was sort of equally driven as Thatcher and Merkel, but I'm very grateful that she devoted her life to bees and beekeeping rather than conservative politics. [AUDIENCE APPLAUDS] Certainly did less damage than Margaret.

I'm going to leave you with a couple of final quotes from Eva. She wrote a kind of 10-point travel advice to herself on a transatlantic flight. One of them was this: "You will often be too hot or too cold, jolted about or uncomfortable, thirsty or occasionally hungry. At times you may have a cold or a headache, or some other minor indisposition. Try to discipline yourself to enjoy what you are doing and maintain your interest in it, in spite of such temporary inconvenience." And also: "Carry a few biscuits to eat, for the rare occasion when you need food, and nothing else is available.

Thank you very much!

[AUDIENCE APPLAUDS]

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: That was Katy Derbyshire, of course, on Eva Crane, from the Hof at Berlin's ACUD, recorded by sound engineer Alonso Boniche. We should be back in this lovely space soon, weather permitting, on June 9th. So if you're in Berlin, come and see us! We'll also be having a show in Münster with our friends at the Burg Hülshoff Center for Literature on June 18th. And our good friends in New York are starting their shows again soon, too! Woo! The first on June 1st and the second on July 6th, at the lovely Red Room at the KGB bar in New York's own East Village, I believe.

SUSAN STONE: Now, you can see some images of Eva Crane – and all those lovely bee things that Katy so kindly put in her slide show for me – over on our website, deadladieshow.com/podcast, as well as on our social media channels, @deadladiesshow. I may also include a short video of my bees! These are not honeybees like the ones Eva was expert in, but rather cute and friendly mason bees that come buzz about and nest in the two wooden bee houses on my balcony. Let it be known that while I do love bees, however, I do not have apiphilia, and I will not be sporting a bee beard any time soon. But of course we'll have a link for you to the Eva Crane Trust, where apparently you can see a bee beard and read all there is to know about bees.

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: And if you'd like to *read* our show – um, in the non-RuPaul sense of that word – we have transcripts of this episode and many others available on our website. Thanks in part to our lovely Patreon supporters, who help us out over at patreon.com/deadladiesshowpodcast, where we thank them with special book-themed audio features. Ooooh!

SUSAN STONE: And thank you Florian, and thanks to Katy for the bee-utiful presentation.

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: And thanks to everybody out there listening! We'll be back again next month with another fabulous Dead Lady.

SUSAN STONE: The Dead Ladies Show was founded by Florian Duijsens and Katy Derbyshire. The podcast is created, produced, and edited by me, Susan Stone. Our theme tune is 'Little Lily Swing' by Tri-Tachyon. Bye-bye!

(Dead Ladies Show Music - 'Little Lily Swing' by Tri-Tachyon)

FLORIAN DUIJSENS: Support for this episode of the Dead Ladies Show Podcast comes from the Berliner Senat.

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