

# My Journey to British Citizenship – Linda Scoles

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Linda arrived, fully prepared, complete with an orange stepladder and already wired for sound. As she climbed the ladder you could hear the audience slightly wince at the shock, horror of one of 'us' (age-wise, that is) standing on the platform of the steps. But Linda assured us that she had grown up picking cherries from high trees and she was not going to fall off. (She didn't).

Born in 1944 in Washington State, USA, Linda spoke about her early life raised on a farm in a stunningly beautiful region – but there was not a lot of money which meant the children had to work on the farm and do their chores. (It sounded idyllic to me, a bit like The Waltons.) They were a big, extended, close family where Linda would have been happy to stay forever but, as she said, *“there were no young men!”* And, even at the age of 18, she felt *‘left on the shelf’*. Linda enjoyed drama and the arts thus winning a trip to a ten-day drama convention. *“Yippee,”* she thought, *“I will meet lots of boys in their late teens”*. But she didn't.

On the train home, however, a young man boarded and began to engage Linda in conversation; she thought *“he will do”* and they were married within a year. He was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant James Michael Scoles (Jim) of the USAF.

In 1970, Jim was posted to Vietnam but thankfully came home to his wife and three children. Linda made her story so interesting with humour and excellent presentation skills. Jim then received a posting to Suffolk where Linda said the village welcomed them and encouraged this American family to become part of the community. Jim and Linda had found their *‘home’*. The posting lasted for 3 years which then turned into 5 years, after which the family had to return to the US – but 2 years later they came back to Suffolk! Linda said she had moved 14 times in 23 years.

Jim and Linda very much wanted to stay in Suffolk and make England their home. The USA has a policy that you can only be a citizen of one country and only serve one flag. In practical terms, this would mean the loss of any US pensions or privileges if citizenship was changed. Before he retired, Jim approached many upper echelons from his local area and engaged solicitors and lawyers to act on his behalf to be allowed to stay in the UK. The day before he was due to leave the USAF, Jim received a letter from UK immigration to state that as long as he was *“no charge on the Government”* he could stay – and so he did, becoming a Head Professor teaching American History to air force personnel working in American bases overseas.

In 2001 Linda was widowed and Jim was buried in the graveyard of Great Barton church in a place which he had chosen. This left Linda with very little income – she said Jim was not very good at insurance policies and things like that – so with her daughter she set up a property development business which for many years was very successful. Linda learnt to become an excellent wallpaper stripper and ‘sugar soaper’, commenting that often there would be layers and layers of paper over paper and even on the ceiling. *“Why would you*

*wallpaper a ceiling?”* All this was told with such charm and enthusiasm as we heard about the massive ups and downs of the business, which culminated in a bankruptcy after the property market crashed!

In 2008 a chance comment from a friend caused Linda to contact the American Embassy to enquire whether she could have dual nationality – she could. Linda then led us through the rigours of the UK citizen test that you have to take and pass to become a UK citizen, it involved registration, financial input, study books, paperwork and an exam with very obscure questions; not for the faint hearted! That, as Linda said, is the crux of the process – it is not easy and if you want to become a citizen of the UK you have to work for it. Linda and her daughter passed and had a citizenship ceremony in Bury St. Edmunds with 58 guests, a magistrate and ending with a rendition of the National Anthem.

At the end of her talk Linda asked us some of the questions taken from the study book. Suffice it to say that had we been in a real exam scenario most of us would probably have to surrender our UK passports (we were not very good even on multi-choice). When asked why she and Jim so much wanted to stay and be a citizen of the UK she said we as a people were *“generous, kind, cultured, loving and law abiding”*. What a delightful way to finish.

**Judi Embling**