

# Among My Souvenirs

**Wilfred Huskisson**

To those who may wish to know a little of my ancestry  
or more than they know already of the tears and joys  
of my childhood and youthful pursuits.

It has been said that inside everyone  
there is a book waiting to be written.  
For me it's true, so here it is.

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## INTRODUCTION.

Much that I have written concerns my own life but inevitably includes facets in the lives of innumerable associates, friends and relatives.

High in importance among the latter has to be my mother and father of whom mum was unique, ranking high as a woman, tallish, good looking, a perfect wife to my dad and mother to her children, with an almost uncanny gentleness. Although not well educated, she was of high intelligence, a superb manager of her affairs through many traumatic times.

One man who needed such a woman, especially at the very time he met her was to be our dad.

For many years I have come to realise that their beginnings should not be allowed to sink into the oblivion, and that is why I begin this work with a biographical outline of their early lives with those around them, information known to Ivy (my sister) and I, or gleaned from other information supplied by relatives etc.

The first three chapters then, cover their story from years 1889 to 1923 (the year of my birth), thereby setting the scene for what follows.

I must thank Ivy here for her considerable help to me as my memory checker, and her supply of facts I had not known but as a result have been able to add to my own recollections.

The odd swear word occurs here and there, where it is known to have been spoken, it intends to indicate truthfully the colour of the language of the people, period, place and situation depicted.

The exact chronology of some incidents is unknown but included in a manner that I hope makes for reasonable continuity.

Also there is much you may consider irrelevant, but I wanted to record here every known item, in order to impart as true a picture of the times as possible so that you may gain a sort of 'flavour' or atmosphere surrounding the events described.

These less than significant features are interspersed within the main stories in an attempt to avoid tedium as the narrative moves along. I do hope that in spite of my inadequate writing style you find the narrative reasonably enjoyable.

## **PART ONE**

## Chapter 1

MAY (Mum)  
Period 1889-1918

May Daisy Binks saw her first light of day on May 4th 1889 at 24m Peabody Buildings, Dufferin Street, Whitecross Street, Finsbury, London. Some (unknown) time later the family moved to 14 Woodbridge Street near there. It seems she was third or fourth to survive infancy, among a family of children which eventually numbered eleven out of a total of seventeen.

The maturing eleven were Esther (Ciss) b.1884 d.1956, Elizabeth (Liz), b.?. d.1924, Christina Emily (Emmy), b.?. d.1955, May Daisy (Maisie) b.1889 d.1960, Clara, b.?. d.1932, Joseph William Ernest (Ernie) b.1894 d.1973, Charles (Charley) b.?. d.1937, Vivienne Lillian (Lilly) d.1974, Albert Herbert (Bert) b.1899 d.1916, Edith Alice (Edie) b.1901 d.1971 and Cyril Charles b.1904 d.1973, we believe in that order.

To produce seventeen children may show an appalling lack of birth control knowledge but huge families, though maybe not the rule, were nevertheless common.

Their mother Emily hove from Somerset originally, we know not what brought her to London, but recall her well, a lovely cuddly lady, a picture book granny to Ivy and I.

The father Joseph's origin is unknown but was a London policeman, eventually sacked for having a drink in a pub while on duty, he was caught by a colleague who could have been shopped for thieving many a time it was said.

We never knew him, he died in 1919, he was held in high reverence by the entire family and referred to as "daddy", a term May used when talking about him even late in her life.

Even so, he was a very strict disciplinarian whose cane was placed along the table at meal times for use on those who dared to speak unnecessarily or tried any other misdemeanor. One recipient for example was Ciss who once on breaking wind said the mandatory "Manners" quite politely but followed it with "before pigs" not realising the gravity of her insult. On leaving the force Joseph became a warehouse man.

We never saw their home in Peabody Buildings (George Peabody had been a successful American business man in England who left part of his fortune for homes to be built to house London's poor, in 1865 I think).

Apparently the rooms were reached by great flights of stone steps that served the numerous floors. A lavatory for several occupants being provided on the nearest landings, young Cyril or Bert if on the toilet would to every one's annoyance, keep them waiting in queues on the stairs, while loudly singing some popular song of the day until the very last note had been reached, it was the girls of course who were the main recipients of this and other harassments.

For example young Edie was lucky to escape serious injury when in devilment young Ernie shot her with an air gun at point blank range.

It seems they were a happy family of course but like their heircontemporaries they did not have two halfpennies to rub together, and often no shoes, or at best had card-board insoles for shoes worn through.

These were the years embracing lives of the monarchs Victoria and Edward VII .

The local school was the Hugh Myddelton Complex (Sir Hugh Myddelton was the goldsmith who brought water by canal from Hertfordshire to London). Surprisingly, for those days, they taught French at the school, among the more usual subjects.

May thought the French mistress quite a case! her remarks included "Vot ees it you av in zee mouf ? no matter eef it be a votch I vill chuck it out of zee window!" but her teaching could not have been at all bad, for many years later May could recite a French poem she had learned there and also sing to Ivy and I the French song 'Sur le pont d'Avignon'.

We suspect that she had loved poetry, as quite late in life she was able to quote much of a very long poem called "The building of St Sophia" by S. Baring Gould, this was rediscovered in recent years by Ivy in a large old book of poems which she kindly gave to me.

Her embroidery was somewhat unique being exactly replicated on both sides of the cloth rather than the usual single sided method.

She also liked Bible studies and could quote whole passages from it, one we especially recall her reciting to us being John 14 "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God believe also in me. In my father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you ---- etc,etc".

On quotations her cheeky sister Ciss (real name Esther), when asked to state the Bible's shortest verse, responded with "Jesus wept----and well he might!" and another of her more punishable distortions was "There will come a time when the trumpet shall call!, not one of those penny buggers but a bloody great big un!" Once when Ciss was absent the teacher asked May "Where is Esther this morning?" May did not know to whom 'Esther' referred! she'd never heard Ciss called that before and was chastised for not responding to the question.

Singing was May's great joy, and in the course of her music lessons, she was able to learn the tonic sol fa system of notation, becoming more and more proficient with it, this was to serve her in good stead musically later on.

We imagine she adored school, but none of the girls could abide a certain Miss Hartley a rather cruel character by all accounts. May told us that she and Ciss encountered the woman in the distance one day, whereupon Ciss yelled out "Old mother Hartley, Old mother Hartley"! and ran off only to acquire a painful punishment by falling over heavily.

Few children knew what a holiday was but some of the Binks children were included to go away to Kent for a week's work hop picking which was such a change. May thoroughly enjoyed it all.

In the due course of growing up, the children of London became what we call today "Streetwise". There could have been no better example of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. Like kids of today, scathing insults were hurled at one and other. "May Binks stinks" was typical of such hurtful retorts for example. Witness too either Ciss or May's farewell remark to Miss Hartley on leaving the school----"If I die before you do, I'll come back and bloody well haunt yer"---- Let us draw a veil over whatever Miss Hartley would have thought to reply!

May, by now affectionally known as Maisy, (some called her 'Maidy') continued school on certain evenings for her singing lessons and joined a choir, a vast conglomerate of singers who performed at the Crystal Palace "in long blue sashes", she was so proud of being chosen for it!

Paradoxically, she had a soft, yet sonorous contralto voice of large compass and was strongly advised to be trained to go professional, an impossibly tall order without the necessary wherewithal in those days.

So she never did, but continued her singing (mostly of ballads) occasionally on the amateur concert platform.

Like her contemporaries then, she had to take on the most mundane jobs, Button gilding was one, Feather curling another, then Artificial flower-making (at the nearby John Grooms Home we think). All these we suppose reflecting a certain artistic skill that showed up from time to time. Anyway I recall her drawings were adeptly done, she liked drawing and painting flowers especially.

Eventually though she settled in the firm of Rendell's, (the chemists and contraceptive pioneers) where nearly all her friends were employed, much later most of her sisters worked there too. her sister Lilly becoming the company secretary.

May became so steeped in religion, including Sunday school teaching we believe, that she admitted to us many years later that it all became an obsession and rapidly becoming a mania!

This might have been relieved a little by her joining the singing and dancing around the barrel organs that plied the London streets (that's before the days of radio and television), or maybe her trips to the cinema. The film stars of her day she especially liked being Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Fatty Arbuckle, Douglas Fairbanks, Lilian Gish, Bronco Billy, John Bunny etc. She was fond of cowboy pictures with galloping horses but noticed that whenever the hero got wet by swimming in a river, he was shown immediately afterwards absolutely dry !

Another leisure activity she turned to was ball-room dancing, describing it quite vividly. How young gentlemen were given cards, on which they could write in advance dances they hoped their selected young lady would sign her name against, to confirm her willingness to participate.

She was fond of the Veleta, The Sir Roger de Coverley, The Lancers, The Quadrilles, The Waltz Cotillion, The Military Two Step, etc. and what we now term 'The Old-fashioned Waltz' of course.

She adored the theatre too, especially the singers, in particular Gerty Gitana who she said always appeared on the same bill as Leslie Stuart, though their acts were quite separate; she wondered whether they were married or intended to be.

Other turns she liked were Talbot O'Farrell, Florrie Ford, Eugene Stratton, Little Titch, G.H. Elliot, Bransby Williams, Vesta Tilley, Kate Carney, George Churgwin, Charles Coburn and the risque Marie Lloyd.

It's nice to know she had lots of friends, some becoming very close and long lasting. Late in life she was still mentioning Lil Bembridge, Eliza Codrington, Lizzie Meager. A girl called Ada who later married a Fred Robertson and Polly Thurlow, etc, being among her friends. They must have played a part in the formation of her lovely nature and therefore are more than worthy of a mention here.

She also had great respect for two of the Rendell bosses, both being members of the Rendell family and named Wilfred and Dudley after whom I was surprisingly named much later, (Charles, my third name being after her brother).

Her mum was always at her wits end trying to get enough money to feed the family even though those old enough to work were helping out.

Such anguish was a common 'fester' among London's poor, and thus provoked the rise of another evil, the Pawn shop. to which frequent journeys were made by her mum.

Now a young woman (and photographs show her to have been tall, slim and fair of face and figure, quite beautiful in fact). Maisy used any residue of her money for a decent array of clothes.

These she tried to store at the very bottom of her lowest drawer, in the forlorn hope that her mum would not find and pawn them, sadly they were soon found and being at the bottom, her mum thought they would not be missed when she pawned them!.

Of course this couldn't go on, arguments ensued until with great reluctance (and much trepidation) May left home, with Ciss we think, but remained close to all the family, including her mum whose motives were not misunderstood, so there was no real animosity.

Ciss and Maisy still found life a struggle to make ends meet, to the extent of even tearing open tea packets to retrieve the very last of the tea grains!

Of course they were great chums, and when walking in the park one day, probably man hunting, they were accosted by a couple of fellows who chided them for their apparent rejection of their verbal advances. One eventually referred to Ciss as a 'little cow' to which she replied "If I had been a cow, my horns would have been up your arse long ago!"

One chap who eventually stole her heart was Jim Davies who chose May to share his life.

With the first world war under way, any idea of May getting married worried one of her colleagues where she taught Sunday school and she exclaimed "What if you had a baby ?" to which May confidently replied "I shan't have any children".

So they did marry and she soon changed her mind, for in due course baby Christina came into their lives, but she died at only some one and a half years of age.

We know little of Jim save that he was awarded a solid silver pocket watch (now in my possession) for saving a drowning man from the river Thames. We know too that he was a keen cricketer, Maisy frequently watching him play.

Soon it seems she became pregnant again, Jim was sent to France, soon killed in action and so never saw the new baby, this time a little boy, called Cyril after May's brother.

She was now mentally shattered of course and having got to know his family, took baby Cyril to Liverpool and spent some time with them at their Wavertree home. She returned to Clerkenwell, and here, infant mortality (often from gastro-enteritis) being so rife in those days, her second baby also died!

Reeling from all this, and possibly on some sort of rebound, she met and ultimately married another soldier two years younger than May, he was Rifleman George Eldridge No 18074 and he too was promptly sent to France and killed (15/9/16) soon after he landed there! His platoon had attacked the Germans at Delville Wood at 8.30a.m. He was last seen wounded in a shell hole and unable to carry on in battle.

Compounding it all came news of the death of her youngest soldier brother Bert (at only seventeen years old, he was shipped to the Dardanelles and with hundreds of other boys, killed at Gallipoli.) Once she told us about that war, of the rationing, how boy scouts sounded the air raid and all clear warnings by bugle blasts, how the Zeppelins came over to bomb London. She saw one ablaze high over head, the fire so intense that men were jumping from it to their certain deaths. "Oh poor devils" she had cried, but another woman nearby yelled back "Poor devils be buggered! the only good German is a dead 'un", with no regard to the fact that "each was some mother's son!" as Maisy put it. Who knows though, perhaps the woman's own husband, brother or son had been killed by some German's hand? This particular Zeppelin ultimately fell in flames somewhere in Essex, Cuffley I think.

For now let us return to May's latest catastrophies and her appalling predicament. Her priest, a long time close friend, called to console her embittered state of mind, and endeavoured to qualify her string of tragic misfortunes with standard utterances such as "It's God's will Maisy" and that she must "seek solace in prayer" etc etc.

"Never again, Never!" she cried sending him away. She henceforth abandoned her church, priest and religion, but somehow, like most

of us, not entirely. Nevertheless, I'm sure you'll agree that if it was His will, He certainly 'worked in a mysterious way'.

These latest tragedies were not, even then, to be the end of her troubles as I will in due course reveal.

Of her other brothers, Ernie was now an Australian soldier (he had earlier emigrated to Australia). Charley was now in the army. Cyril though, had so far not been called up.

We now move her story to George Eldridge's home where his sisters Lillian and Beck lived with her husband Tom and her mother Alice, they and May were able to commiserate with each other following George's death.

It is not clear whether the Eldridges were friends from the past through whom May had met George, or whether she met George first, and through him became friendly with them all, it matters not, from now on, time slowly passed and their wounds began to heal.

George Eldridge's brother Albert (mostly called Alf) was seven years younger and also a soldier (in The King's Royal Rifles regiment) he was wounded in the head and shell shocked and admitted to Le Treport General Hospital on 21/5/17 and in June to the hospital ship St David for Dover and entered Newbury Hospital on 4/7/17. Then on 13/9/17 he was moved to the Sir Frederick Recuperative Hospital Hampstead and transferred to the Maudsley Neuro-clearing hospital on 30/9/18.

On improvement he was due to visit the other Eldridges with a hospital patient friend; they had invited a young lass called Hettie with Maisy to make up a foursome, this was to set the scene for a new drama, about which I shall tell you more later, but let me tell you first about 'Harry'.

## Chapter 2

HARRY (Dad)  
Period 1890-1918

Henry, William, John, Huskisson, entered the world on the 29th of August 1890 at 23 Pemberton Terrace, Upper Holloway, North London. moving (unknown when) to No 20 Salisbury Road near there.

The family were fairly well set up compared to many Londoners, his mother, Annie, running a laundry business on Highgate Hill, she had been on the stage in her youth as a bare-foot dancer. his father (Francis, John) was principally a zinc worker with substantial business, offering also plumbing decorating and roofing services, in his younger days he had been a drummer in the guards. We know little of his ancestry, but wondered if he was connected with a relative of the 19th century Treasury minister William Huskisson who was killed due to being struck by the 'Rocket' engine during the Rainhill railway engine trials of 1830.

William was married to Eliza Emily Milbanke but childless. However, he was the eldest of four brothers. They were himself (William), Richard, Samuel, and Charles, so the connection may be with one of the three younger men. An interesting account of the latter with considerable genealogy is given in the book 'Huskisson and his Age' by C.R.Fay. published by Longman and Co. The copy in my possession was given to me by Ivy and makes fascinating reading.

My grandfather Francis John is known to have died in 1918 at the age of sixty four (his grave is in St. Pancras cemetery, Finchley). He was born in 1854. Francis's father was a surgical instrument maker named Henry Huskifson, (a double 's' in those times was often written as 'fs') his mother's name was Jemima and they had married in 1843, her maiden name previously being 'Greener'. His name being entered as Huskison (note the 's' being singular). The ancestry has not so far been researched further back. We do know Francis's origins were at Somerstown, London.

Francis had been married before as had his wife (she to a Mr Rogers) and with baby Henry now on the scene, the family consisted of Henry's mother Annie, his father Francis (Frank), his half brother (also a Frank), his half sister Grace and his true sisters Lillian, Alma, 'Dolly' (really Elsie) and Edie, then Henry (Harry) himself, the children born we think in that order!.

We know nothing of Harry's schooling, nor much of his childhood. We know the children had expensive toys, They owned animals as pets, I think they even had a monkey and a trap pulled by a goat for example. There was a house-keeper lady called Hannah we believe who virtually brought up the family.

We do know Harry was full of fun and mischief. One prank was to buy pease pudding, sit on a high wall or tree with his pals, roll the pudding into balls and drop them onto the helmet of the local policeman as he passed to and fro on his beat!

Conventional schoolboy games included 'Tippy Cat' where a diamond shaped piece of wood was placed edgeways on the ground and struck hard on its point with a stick forcing the diamond high into the air. Then there was 'Diabalo' where a spool is set spinning back

and forth upon a string tied between two sticks held one in each hand the object then being to hurl the spool skyward and catch it again still spinning on the string. Also shops would sell a 'leather sucker' being a disc of leather threaded on a string, the disc if wetted was then trod down hard upon the pavement and by tugging on the string a loud 'crack' like a rifle shot would result. A spinning top whipped by a thong on a stick to keep it going was another game.

One prank was to tie a string across the road securing it to opposite letter boxes, so that knocking on one door induced the other knocker to work as the first door was opened.

Another concerned ice cream of the Italian variety called 'Hokey Pokey' (delightful stuff) that 'Jack' the vendor, if in a good mood, would oblige the children with who called to him "Give us a taster Jack". Unfortunately, he tired somewhat of young Harry and his friends, who one day when he'd refused their request, snatched up some horse dung and lobbed it into the ice cream tub on the cart!----Not funny! and Harry soon realised, fortunately, that their ideas were getting rather out of hand.

His half brother Frank was apparently far more adventurous though we know not what he'd got up to, save that he was Birched and also spent time in a Borstal institution. In later life he was a railway man and was very socialistic and became a staunch Trade Unionist holding considerable rank in his union.

Growing up, young Harry quite liked to help his dad on certain building projects, we're told that once he was on the roof of the Alexandra Palace, heating up a soldering iron for his father who was positioned a couple of feet higher up. On calling for the iron, Harry reached it upward and his dad took hold of it by it's hot end ! It seems the scene ends with father Frank chasing young Harry across the fields of Alexandra Park!

One of the jobs he had on leaving school was the making of luggage grids that in those days were fixed on the back of motor cars, but he could not retain any interest in the work, preferring to seek some out door occupation,-- i.e. to do his own thing.

After thinking it all out he decided he would take the plunge and join the army! so he did just that by giving a false age (18 instead of 16) in 1906! His parents were enraged! and told him they were going to buy him out of it again, a very expensive procedure, but he explained seriously his reasons for enlisting and threatened to re-join if they pursued with the idea.

Happily, in the end, they relented and he remained Private H. Huskisson, 2nd Battn: East Surrey Regiment. Thereafter they (the regiment that is), according to him were 'second to none'.

The barracks were at Kingston in Surrey though how he managed to get down there remains a puzzle, but he was soon earning promotions qualifying also as a mounted infantryman, and was thoroughly enjoying the life, and according to his sisters, they and all the girls loved him in his uniform. One was an 'Ivy Inkpen' who he dallied with for a while but the affair soon faded.

He was a fine figure of manhood to be sure, standing over six feet three tall then with a quite handsome countenance that I

think reminds me of the thirties actor, the Austrian, Anton Walbrook, he certainly looked every inch a soldier.

"The Army makes a man of you" they say, what a pity that those who join seem oblivious to the fact that its real purpose declared to be for defending a country is more likely for use as a government's killing machine. This of course he was eventually to realise first in a Chinese skirmish and potently in France and Belgium much later on. For now though, young Harry had obviously found his niche.

His leisure pursuits especially when on leave included playing cards, he learned all the card tricks and games, plus the gambling ones! but he also loved beautiful things, taking a great interest in flowers which indicates some measure of his inner self, showing his truly soft hearted approach to things that so many years later, Ivy and I would grow to love.

He adored the Music Hall whenever opportunities and the money coincided. Apart from the great Houdini and the other illusionists and magicians of the day, he was enthralled by ventriloquists including of course the inimitable Arthur Prince, the impressionists Hettie King etc, but in particular the memorable comedians Dan Leno, George Robey, George Formby (senior), Harry Champion, Gus Elen, Billy Bennett, Randolph Sutton, Dave and Joe O'Gorman, Billy Danvers, Wee Georgie Wood and Little Titch etc, etc.

He loved them all, but especially one he tried to emulate, his favourite --- Sam Mayo! and would sing his comic songs, including the intervening patter, at many amateur concerts both in, and on leave from the army. The theatre must have been in his blood. Remember, his mum had been on the stage, his dad a drummer, his sister Dolly was a keen amateur comedienne and singer, sister Alma too dabbled in the craft, and as the future unfolds it becomes evident that a dominant gene in that respect runs in the family.

Apropos the army, he was sent to India and grew very fond of that country thereafter. He would tell us about sleeping under mosquito nets and how hot it was, relieved only by the Punkah Walla (Indian boy manually operating a huge fan). I recall him describing the origins of the Taj Mahal at Agra to us, and the beauty of it that had so enthralled him.

Another town, another country, Chittagong in Bangladesh, though in those days it was still India. He said that he felt so adept at cards there, that he played against Jasper Maskelyne, (later the great stage magician of London's Maskelyne and Devant's emporium of magic), the pioneers of the now famous Magic Circle. He lost the game and much of his uniform too, he suffered demotion as a result, and was confined to barracks for twelve weeks (or 84 days as soldiers would put it!).

He spent some time in Burma near the Irrawaddy river but we don't know his involvement in any particular activity there except musically, at an army barracks theatre he did his comic act singing "My wife's cake" and "The blow almost killed Father!" the show was for the Rechabites society and was held at Schwebo. It would have been in Burma or India that he contracted malaria, the affliction that was to plague him intermittently for most of his life. He contracted it in the jungle and I remember him telling us

of the snakes there and how one could avoid them by whistling a tune or thrashing a stick through the undergrowth as they tramped along through the forest.

In 1911 they were fighting the Chinese (in one of those fracas we're not told about). He said the standard procedure was to tie the Chinese together by their pig-tails, then knock them to the ground where they found it very difficult to get up again or indeed to free themselves! Since then, he said, you never see a Chinaman with a pig-tail any more. perhaps that's true?

Dad could tell a fine old tale though, (well, so mum would say), perhaps he did stretch his stories a bit, but we never knew him to tell an out and out lie.

Ultimately, the war found him in France of course. His sister Lil told me once that he had been ordered to single handedly capture a German machine gun emplacement manned by several men. He achieved the objective but it was his C.O. she said who got the commendation! However, one could never get him to admit to have ever killed any of the 'enemy', in fact he was for ever reluctant to even discuss his actual warfare experiences.

We were told however of one of his buddies having a leg blown off in a shelling, then screamed as he held the good leg as though that was the leg causing his agony!

Harry suffered more than his fair share of woundings though, four wound stripes were on the sleeve of his uniform. Strangely, one bullet entered the back of his neck and they said it could not be removed, but in time it moved lower and lower down his back from where it was ultimately extracted! My aunt Lil was given (and showed me) the bullet.

He did tell us of an occasion when a friend 'Jock' was nonchalantly swinging his cane round and round and it was thought that it had struck dad by accident. Not so! It was a 'spent' German bullet that might otherwise have killed him, I assume this was the one in his neck.

In the midst of these events came the news that an air raid had been directed at Southend on Sea, killing his sister Edie, (by then Mrs Batty) and her husband Walter. Their children thereby orphaned were two girls, and a boy. We think all three were injured, (Connie, Elsie and John), they had had another son, Walter who had died previously.

The 2nd Battn. East Surrey Regiment are perhaps mostly remembered for the famous football, used (like their usual tot of rum), to give them 'Dutch courage' inducing them to kick the ball to each other as they went 'over the top' advancing across 'No man's land' to launch an attack upon the Germans.

Though never a lover of foot-ball, Harry took part of course and the whole action was highly successful and widely reported in the press.

Most of the foregoing incidents would have occurred after he was sent to Belgium, where he suffered a German gas attack fought in one or more of the appalling battles for Ypres (or 'Wipers' as the Tommies pronounced it) where even today there is occasionally dug

up odd parts of skeletons of the thousands of lads killed there in the great 'war to end wars' as the government of the time had the effrontery to call it!

I think the war ended for Harry though when the dug-out he was in suffered a direct hit from a German shell, he was buried alive for three days! (or as he put it in army terms "seventy two hours")

Thus he suffered shell shock, that mysterious affliction, his hair taking on an iron grey colour throughout and he became something of a mental wreck.

They shipped him home to England, then up to Scotland where for therapy he was put to work, scraping moss (for use in field hospitals as a substitute for cotton wool) from underneath the Bridge of Allan. Then down to Brighton, to the Royal Sussex Hospital.

For recuperation he entered the Maudsley Neuro-clearing hospital and in the next bed lay another soldier with whom he became very friendly as they were both slowly recovering. This new found friend was called Albert (Alf) Eldridge! His head kept rocking from side to side as though to indicate 'No' Thus when food and drink came around he didn't get any! He later said that were it not for Harry he would have starved to death!

They were not officially allowed out and indeed were far from well, but Alf induced Harry to join him on a visit to the Eldrige's residence at Priory Place Camden Town. So Harry was about to meet Alf's mother Alice, a girl called Hettie who had been introduced to the Eldridge family when working with Alf's sister Lillian, (they were dressmakers). his sister Beck, her hubby Tom and George Eldridge's widow May, presumably Lillian was there too. So leaving hospital in some secrecy Alf and Harry duly arrived still wearing their Hospital Blues. Alice must have been an extremely popular lady for later correspondence shows she was referred to as 'Mother' by both Harry and May's brother Charley with whom she had always been close.

With all the introductions made, the old gramophone came into its own with a record of Sidney Baines' 'Destiny Waltz', a spinning on its turn table and with the music begun, partners were selected, Alf danced with the girl Hettie and Harry with the other girl May, and thus unknowingly, the four of them were beginning entirely new lives.

### Chapter 3

MAY and HARRY, (Mum and Dad)  
1918-1923

War ended, and all the boys came home to live in what the politicians disgracefully promised would be the 'land fit for heroes to live in'. Dad was virtually out of the army (though his official thirteen years service discharge was recorded later as 29/8/19, his birthday). As an invalid, the army diagnosed him as suffering from 'Neurasthenia'. His discharge certificate indicated that at the time he was a corporal having four wound stripes and three blue chevrons, he was to continue care by sessions with a psychiatrist, I think this entailed some unbearable electrical treatment also.

On March the 29th 1919, May and Harry married in St Peter's Church Islington. the two witnesses at their wedding were her brother Charley and his wife Alice, (Alice was a girl from Saffron Waldon, so possibly Charley had been stationed there or at Colchester, not too far away for their own romance to blossom). May and Harry rented an upstairs flat at 28 Gerard Street, Colebrook Row there.

While the place was empty May jokingly told Harry "I've bought the furniture!" Surprised he climbed the stairs to see,--- and beheld just a little rectangular stool, some 18 inches by 10 by about 8 inches high! It was second hand and very old, and still in use today, though I had occasion to replace its two side panels several years ago.

When they were properly established, Charley called on them, just when Harry was on a sofa shaking, crying and shouting incoherently (as though still in the trenches), and with May trying to pacify him. Charley was appalled at what she was having to put up with.

It was evident that his 'treatment' had to be abandoned. With May's perseverance, love and care alone, they began to realise at last that he was actually improving, but presumably th had to forego any pension from the army that would otherwise have been his entitlement. We do know he never received any. (knowing my naive parents its even possible that they never thought to apply for it!)

They must have planned to have a child, for May became pregnant and they moved to an upper flat at 11 New Trinity Road, East Finchley, London, N.2. The flat had been vacated by Harry's sister Alma, her husband George and their boy Georgie (We think the Islington flat was then to be occupied by Charley and Alice).

May and Harry's first child they named Alma, (after Harry's sister) she was born on Christmas day 1919, at about six months they had the baby's photo taken in a London studio. Then as time passed the baby increasingly suffered with congested lungs. Toward the end of the year they were expecting to visit May's uncle Jack Leaves and his wife Edie for Boxing day.

Jack Leaves was May's uncle (her mother's brother). It had been the custom for years, for the (Binks) family to congregate there every Boxing day, a great occasion for all concerned.

As the day approached, the baby worsened and was having to have a steaming kettle in its room all the time in order to aid its breathing, she eventually became so bad that on Christmas day---her first birthday, the poor little soul died! It's staggering to hear that in those times one in every seven babies died! Three such events for May though was surely worse than unfair.

Assessing the situation, there being no telephone (nor post on Christmas day), May and Harry concluded that the best course of action would be to go as arranged, (a promise in those times was sacrosanct enough to overide their grief).

The journey, not too far, would have been by two L.C.C. trams, the first, a Number 9 to The Kingsway, the second took them under a sub-way and along the embankment of the Thames and over the bridge to Greenwich, then a little walk to No 4 Ashburnham Grove where her aunt Edie and uncle Jack lived.

Here they duly arrived, other visitors must have concluded that May and Harry had a baby sitter, so when they asked "how is baby Alma ?" May was able to reply "Just sleeping"----they merely exchanged the usual compliments of the season with every one, and returned home fairly shortly afterwards.

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At this juncture I have been reading what I've written so far, and am forced to admit that May's love life seems too incredible (far fetched even) to expect you to believe. Do please try though, it is however absolutely true and devoid of exaggeration in any way. but to continue:-

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How and why could this happen to them,? they were absolutely devastated and heart broken indeed. So what next? Well their love for the little one induced them to return Alma's photo to the photographer and have themselves pictured on either side of a table so that he could thereafter insert the babies photo between that of themselves to create a threesome group.

Having now lost three babies, May tried to accept that it must be folly to even dream of having any more children of her own, an appalling decision for any woman who's obliged to make it.

Harry wanted children though and deep down was absolutely crestfallen to be deprived of the chance to father a son or another little daughter. May, so dejected still saw children as an essential feature of any marriage. Well, a happy compromise prevailed, they both wanting a little child again, concluded it best to adopt one.

They investigated all the possibilities. One option (favoured by Granny Huskisson, Aunty Grace Green and Co. round in Church Lane) would have been to adopt young Elsie Batty or her sister Connie both orphaned in the Southend bombing outrage, but both had already been resettled (in the care of Aunty Grace), furthermore they were young girls and May and Harry naturally wanted an infant.

This ultimately led them to the Well-House institution, a work-house at Barnet. May and her sisters Lilly and Edie went there first to establish the adoption procedure, it being simpler in those days though it would entail considerable form filling etc.

There were several children available and when May and Harry went together they spotted a little baby girl sitting alone in the corner of a largeish room.

They learned that her mother was named Florence Rose, and had been deserted by the father of her seven children some seven years earlier, they having until then been living together as man and wife, but being unmarried, she and her children had to go into the institution.

She was basically of very good character, until she was unfortunately made pregnant and then abandoned. The man involved was Ivy's father. Her birth certificate shows his surname to be Rose also, perhaps only for the registrar's convenience, or maybe he and Florence had actually married before he absconded.

Her other children were very nice, well conducted and cared for, prior to coming under the care of their guardians.

After the formalities, May and Harry became the legal parents of Ivy, the little child they'd chosen and she now had the new name of Ivy, Rose, Huskisson.(a convenient name adjustment). She had been born on the 10th of January 1919. and adopted at 2,30 p.m. on the 2nd of July 1921.

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At last joy returned to May and Harry, this was to be a new experience and indeed it proved a very happy one. the little lass could speak clearly already, indeed if mum, dad or visitors ever said a word at all out of place, Ivy's standard retort would be "Oh, don't say that, its rude!, Oh, dear!"(surely indicating that she had at least had the start of a good up-bringing at the institution?) but of course the temptation to hear her say it became too great, and mischievously, she was frequently put to the test.

Time marches on and we find Harry now quite well and working for the Metropolitan Tramway Co at North Finchley, as a tram conductor. During his training for the job, they taught him tram driving too, but this didn't work out at all well.

He got stuck in a traffic jam behind a large lorry carrying plate glass windows for large shop fronts. As the traffic started to move, Harry moved his tram just a bit too fast forward, just lightly striking the corner af one of the enormous panes and---zzzzzzzzzzzz---a huge crack appeared across it before it completely disintegrated! So much for driving trams, conducting them became the norm.

Once Ivy caused he and May a dramatic few minutes, for the little girl swallowed a hair slide! Luckily dad was on hand, she was choking and rapidly turning blue when he swung her upside-down, and while hanging by her feet, he committed one of his rare acts of violence by thumping her back repeatedly until she was forced to cough it up.

Then she frightened May who, in bed on one occasion became petrified on seeing the bed room door handle very slowly turn and begin to open, then came a pause and sweet little voice quietly said "Mum! I've found a pin!"

Then around September 1922 what do you think ? May got herself pregnant again! it was a definite mistake, but not by them! (a contraceptive sheath had split). Naturally the prospect of a new baby at this time took some getting used to, for they feared another disaster of course.

By the time of delivery though, they had become quite keen on the idea and although any sex of the child would have suited Harry, May had got fixed on the idea of another little girl.

Come the 29th of June 1923, her new baby was delivered by the local mid-wife Nurse Normington, but it was a BOY! (with a rather blueish dark appearance) surely not another sickly baby ? For a minute or two she was so disappointed and actually pushed the child (me, yes ME!) to the foot of the bed!. Apparently she soon got used to the idea of having a son again though, especially as my appearance began to improve. and we were now at last a complete family (of four).

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Before I continue, let's re-cap on who was who, and what had happened to each that got a mention among the foregoing pages:-

Brother Ernie (Binks) had married a lass called Emily and had emigrated to Australia. They had one son and three daughters. Ciss (she occasionally signed herself 'Sis') had married a lad called Harry Stephenson, thought to be a descendant of the famed Victorian railway engineer, and they too emigrated to Australia in 1919 and had two sons . Sister Liz also married a Harry, (Servant) and were living in Islington with their three daughters May, Lil and Edie (after their mum's sisters). Their first child, Rene' had died, They also had a son Harry, named after his dad but became better known as 'Sonny'. That poor little chap had been born with only one arm.

Sister Emmie (Binks) married a boy called Alf Jones, and lived at Plumstead, very convenient for his job at the Woolwich Arsenal armaments factory, (strange isn't it how people are willing to design and manufacture weapons of death, even so soon after an appalling war? but perhaps unemployment was rife?) they had a couple of boys. Emily, our gran, had moved to No 4 Charlotte Terrace Islington after her hubby Joseph had died (in 1919). May's sister Clara married a builder, Albert Rex they had a daughter also called Clara and lived in a flat above grandma.

Possibly May's sister's Edie, Lil and brother Cyril, were unmarried and still living with gran. (Even May herself had once returned there following her loss of George during the war). Charley and Alice had by now two nippers, Gordon Charles Henry born in 1919, and Alice Peggy always known as Peg born in 1921, Hettie and Alf had married but their little one Bert was not born until October 1923, he was born with some foot deformity after his mum had been in hospital for eight weeks with her inside all septic. It was thought that the foot trouble would prevent him ever walking, but Hettie's "home made" brand of Physio-therapy got him going alright though his foot remained distorted somewhat.

Mum's friend Polly Thurlow married a boy called Sam, and her friend Lizzie Meager married a 'Len' they had had a daughter, May, (after our mum maybe?) Ada and Fred Robertson had a boy and a girl (Edie I think) We know not the fortunes of Eliza Codrington,

Miss Hartley, Jim's family, Wilfred or Dudley of Rendell's, or mum's other friend, her priest. Mum's uncle Jack and aunt Edie remained childless. Clara's Albert, Fred Robertson and Alice's Charley had all been soldiers during the war, in fact Albert had been a buddy of May's brother Bert before the latter was killed.

Of dad's circle, his father had died in 1918. His mum, our gran, lived now with his half sister Grace who had married a Harry Green, they had daughters (Grace and Edie) at 58 Church Lane, East Finchley, (quite close to us at that time) both daughter's first children died, Dad's sister Grace by the way, had been married before to a man called Larter and they had had two boys. Dad's brother Frank married a nice lady, May, and they had a couple of sons and lived in Surrey. His sister Lil married an engine driver, Fred Butler, they had daughters Ivy, Molly, Joan, and a son Jack, they were living at Leytonstone. Dad's sister Dolly married Arthur Greener and with their son Ronnie were housed at Brackenberry Road, East Finchley.

Elsie, Connie and John the orphaned children of dad's sister and hubby, were being raised by their aunt Grace and Grandma Huskisson but John had to enter a mental hospital from which he later discharged himself and was not heard of again. Dad's sister Alma I learn, had been very beautiful as a young teen-ager, but sadly contracted small pox, and that, while courting George Leggett, he kindly stuck by her, ignoring her disfigurement. As indicated earlier Alma married him, he was a master builder, and had earlier worked for her dad, and they now lived at Wood Green with their son Georgie, sadly, their second baby died.

Georgie, was to affect us all much later in life, for now though, we'll leave that part of the narrative in abeyance.

## **PART TWO**

## Chapter 4

### Genesis.

So I'm born. You will have observed that I have referred (and will always refer) to Ivy as my sister, this is out of no special kindness about her adoption, but because on my arrival, she was already well established in our family, legally owned by mum and dad as much as I was, having been already with them for about two years! So I had her with me right from my start in life, and 'leaned' on her for help in so many ways during my whole childhood. Even now she has helped me no end to make this work as accurate and complete as possible. Sister? sure she is! how could I even dream of regarding her in any other way? ☺

Now where to start? My Christening is a good place I suppose? but all we know of that was that I was Christened with baby Ken Maynard who lived across our road and it was either he or I who peed in the vicar's face at a dramatic moment during the ceremony!

The first incident worthy of mention, I do not personally remember either! It involved aunt Liz (mum's sister) and uncle Harry's girl, cousin Edie. She stayed with us for a while, I assume it was therefore during the school's summer holiday period and being Ivy's contemporary, was an ideal playmate for her. Also aunt Liz was very ill at the time and we believe Edie stayed for many weeks.

With the table fully laden for tea and mum momentarily out of the room, the girls, four to five years old, were anxious to play with the baby, apparently they had to struggle a bit to get to the cot, due to the proximity of the table. In so doing, the table cloth was pulled far enough from the table to tip the milk, sugar, bread etc, in to the cot and onto me.

The next scene has mum, now returned to the room, and little Ivy getting quite a wallop. It seems that mum then reflected on the situation for a while and decided that one should not be punished without the other, so poor Edie got one as well!.

As time went on of course I began to talk, unfortunately my first words, or phrase, was "Poop pot" and people would reap enjoyment by asking me "Say TEA pot" or "Say PAINT pot" or "Say JAM pot" etc, etc, but the only response would be "Poop Pot"!

My first actual memory is of a visit to granny Binks where I was put on the lap of uncle Cyril there. A tall wiry man he was and he tickled me and made me laugh. I suppose I would be then about eighteen months to two years old. I regret never seeing that lovely man again, he emigrated to Australia at that time and took up sheep farming there. He didn't take a wife along though but married many years later there, a girl called Lucy, they never had children.

Neither he, Ciss nor Ernie ever returned to England (they chose the environs of Adelaide in which to settle) but they never forgot their roots, corresponding with us throughout their lives. The name of Binks continues there today by virtue of Ciss and Ernie's children.

Around this time we visited Aunt Liz and Uncle Harry Servant. She, mum's sister, was ill in bed and we and their family were congregated around it. Their children were eating fish and chips and it was amusing and a surprise after they'd finished the meal to see them pour the remaining vinegar from their newspapers into the fire with a resulting cloud of steam pervading the room. I recall no more of that visit save that it was a dimly gas-lit almost Victorian style room. We learned shortly after that the poor lady had died of cancer. I'm glad I just remember her and to have visited her on that (only) occasion just described.

The next early recollection is of a large pile of gramophone records on a Christmas family get-together in 1925 I think. Mum's sister (our aunt Edie) had met and married Billy Vail. They were fascinated, (more likely staggered), that by selecting any record from the heap and revealing either the 'A' or 'B' side to my gaze, I could tell them what was on the record! I suppose they thought I was actually reading the labels when in fact it was just my familiarity with their colouring, size, etc. Having played and heard them all played frequently on mum and dad's table model gramophone, recognition was easy.

Indeed, I could do it today! for I still remember them. For example a ten inch one with a cream label I know now to have been of 'Bandmaster' (or 'Guardsmen') brand with a man singing "I'm off to Philadelphia in the morning" and 'My sweetie went away' on its reverse, another was a seven inch one, navy blue of 'Radio' make whereon was played and sung "U pi dee, U pi da", then there was a bright red one printed in gold, (Parlophone) containing two ballads of Victorian vintage, "I hear you calling me" on one side, with "Until" for the obverse. One that almost escapes me was "Roll away clouds!" but can't recall its label or reverse though I remember a sad song called 'Absent' on one disc.

One I loved though was "Ting a ling" played on bells with "All the best" on xylophone, both played magnificently by Billy Whitlock. (Dad had told me his name so I've always remembered it) a fine musician he was indeed, ----but back to aunt Edie and uncle Billy; -

Edie and Billy had been dance enthusiasts in there teens and it's probable that they met at a dance hall called the 'Blue Hall' I think. One that uncle Billy had been to began to develop an undesirable involvement with the then notorious Dominic Sabini who master minded the 'Sabini' gang (prominent around Islington) which it is thought maybe included the American, George Raft who years later was acting similar seedy roles in Hollywood films. Uncle Billy's fascination with aunty Edie thankfully changed that avenue of their lives entirely.

I must mention here that the war took its toll too, he was in the Essex Regiment and fought in France in the appalling battle of the Somme and suffered like our dad, from severe shell shock, but unlike dad, instead of going suddenly grey headed, he lost almost all his hair and furthermore was virtually deaf and dumb for eighteen months! He was an excellent craftsman becoming an artificial limb maker, generally for the Roehampton organisation and once showed me a fine example of his work, a complete hand and wrist with all finger and other joints moveable and the finger and thumb nails beautifully carved in the solid.

He and aunt Edie were a lovely couple to us children (and to every one else) and were to influence our young lives considerably.

I'm sure now that mum and dad were keen to show off their children by taking us to see our relatives on one or other side of the family, including old friends of course. Once we called on 'aunt' Hettie and 'uncle' Alf in their Camden Town flat at 5 College Place, but the only incident there I can recall to mind was playing a 'peep-bo' game with their son Bert, we being on each side of, and looking around their open parlour door. Bert Eldridge has always been regarded as our cousin, just as his mum and dad we only ever thought of as our aunt and uncle throughout our lives.

Similarly, I remember a visit to aunt Dolly and uncle Arthur and playing on the floor with their son Ronnie, he had a clock-work railway engine and my finger was cut by one of it's rotating gears. Aunt Dolly kissed it better and bandaged my finger for me.

In like vein, we had a holiday in a boarding house at Southend on sea where the land lady's little boy had a toy taxi cab with real lights and opening doors! fantastic! my! how I coveted the thing, it didn't hurt me, and he, me and the car together had great fun. We liked Southend, mum and dad that time took us on a charabanc ride to a pub called The Cambridge Hotel, Ivy and I sat at a table outside and a bar-man gave us a huge round buttered biscuit with a hunk of cheese to eat with our glass of lemonade.

We were taken on another ride, to Battlesbridge where a sign on the pub wall reads "If your optician orders you glasses, please don't take mine!", These Charabanc trips plied from Southend's sea front and were a lot of fun on a nice day, being open topped and with the wind blowing through your hair.

I had more fun at an engagement party. We think it would have been that of our cousin, the orphaned Elsie, to a sailor lad who possibly lived in Trinity Road, East Finchley, and therefore close to us. At the party I couldn't take my eyes off a Soprano Saxophone hanging on the front parlour wall, but nobody played it, presumably it served only as an ornament. However I decided that one day I'd own one myself and of course now I do. By way of compensation though, a huge drum-set was erected in a corner left of the fire place. I think it belonged to aunt Alma's son, (our cousin Georgie) who I knew much later had one at their Wood Green home. Anyway, with records playing, or piano, I dont know which, I was allowed to bash away on the drums! and actually had the sauce to think myself competent. Only the guests knew just how they suffered that evening! Incidentally Elsie later married a different chap called Vincent West, it was a very happy marriage commencing at Leopold Road, East Finchley.

This must be about the place to tell you of aunty Lilly (mum's sister}, who by now was well set up. Her husband was a Sheffield master cutler, a jewish gentleman named Eddie(Edward Emanuel) Sinclair (his cutlery products were always engraved "St Clair"). Together, and separately I believe, they travelled widely abroad and were always very happy, but sadly they had no children.

Evidently though, she adored little girls and two in the family circle came in for her love. One was our cousin Clara,(Aunty Clara's daughter), she nick-named her 'Poppy', the other was young Ivy, aunt Lil liked her to call her aunty 'Ninnie', shortened

sometimes to just "Nin", and bought her a new piano (by Boyd of London). a fine instrument that Ivy was eventually taught to play very well, it was in highly polished Walnut wood with those beautiful brass candle stick holders on its fascia.

Number 11 Trinity Road was just one terrace house in a row of about twelve extending down both sides of the road, with 'The Dick Turpin' pub and a grocer's shop (Surridge's?) on opposite corners at one end, (adjacent to Long Lane) and a 'Nevills' bread bakery at the other.

I'm thinking now that this period must have been equal to the best that mum and dad were ever to experience. They had quality photos of the family taken in a proper studio down in Junction Road near Highgate, the man having a dummy parrot rocking on the camera to occupy my attention. For a home snapshot Mum spent many hours dressing me up in clothing she had skilfully made to exactly imitate the costume worn by the laddie in Millais' 'Bubbles' painting, who she was convinced I resembled! To her annoyance though, I would not keep still for the photograph! However, everything otherwise was now going pretty well and thinking about it at this time, I now turn turn to that upstairs flat.

Being so small at the time my memory of the front parlour probably made it seem a lot bigger than it was in reality. Beautifully decorated in wall-paper of a Victorian design on which dad (or maybe uncle George when living there), overlaid by pasted paper frames in Regency style, with flowers, (roses I think), cascading down and out of the frames and onto the surrounding wall-paper.

The fireplace was beautifully tiled within its cast iron, blackleaded surround with a heavy marblesque mantle piece over. On this stood at each end a large black rearing black horse with a Cavalier astride.

There was a lovely solid brass fender guarding the fire proper, with matching companion set (that is a hand-brush, poker, tongs and shovel) Here if in season would be roasted chest-nuts, and on Sundays dad invariably bought us sweets from a little shop at the Church Lane end of Manor Park Road, especially 'chewing nuts' for us children (which weren't nuts at all, but little caramels coated in chocolate). He'd get coconut brittle that mum liked, but his own personal preference was for plain chocolate of 'Peters' make. At the opposite end of the room was a bed with its head board toward the window. Between its foot and the door was just enough room for a large wardrobe.

Along the landing from that front parlour was the room in which we had our meals, this was the first door on the left. Farther along the landing were two stairs down where a second door led into a sort of wash house cum kitchen, we had a galvanised tin bath in there, and a smaller one with a wood and metal wash-board with which mum did the washing.

Of course she spent much of her time there but we had one other room, it led off from the top of the main stairway, I reckon now, it must have been some fourteen feet or so long, by about eight foot wide.

This back room served as a bed-room shared by both Ivy and I, a projecting open fire-place centered the right hand wall with my

bed beyond it in the alcove. Entering the room, Ivy's bed was on the immediate left with a large wardrobe opposite in the other alcove. Our lavatory must have been downstairs and out in the back garden but I just can't call it to mind. The back garden was shared but there was little or no front garden.

The Marshalls downstairs were a bit noisy, he was quite nice generally but on occasion could get quite drunk and would kick hard the doors and slam them shut around the house. For some reason no one quite took to his wife.

They were kind enough to take Ivy to the British Empire exhibition at Wembley (in 1924) and bought her a packet of paregoric flat sweets with a soldier's picture printed on its white wrapper. They had a charming grown up daughter, Eileen, she was in service, they also had a rather huge dog, an Airedale it was, that barked and frightened me a lot, such that I've disliked that breed ever since, but let me tell you next of the other folk in our street.

## Chapter 5

### The growing infant.

We had likeable neighbours generally. Over the road toward the eastern end were a somewhat dignified family, the Maynards, Their baby boy and I as mentioned earlier were Christened at the same time. Near or next to them was the Muggleton family who many years later (and at Southend on sea) became close friends of Ivy, there was also a Mr Clarke who mum once accidentally mistook for an intending attacker when he was walking behind her and carrying a gun! Toward the other end was a policeman's family, Mullins I think, their daughter Violet being a tallish pretty thing with a mass of ringlets. On that side too there was a green-grocer chap called Ginger Norton who sold directly from his house.

On our (western) side were the Andrews' downstairs, they had a son Alec, upstairs were the Ansells changing later to the Armstrongs, that whole house a quiet living fraternity. So were those on the east side, though more outgoing, there was an oldish couple, Mr and Mrs Deary, upstairs (that had previously been occupied by friends of mum and dad called Mr and Mrs Hight) and the Reynolds family lived downstairs there.

The latter had quickly become mum and dad's firm friends, partly I suppose because they had known aunt Alma and uncle George who had been the earlier occupants of our upstairs flat. Mrs Reynolds recalled how little Georgie's trouser pockets were sewn up by Aunt Alma because of his "untidy" habit of keeping his hands in them during the cold weather.

We loved Mrs Reynolds, a rotund huggable lady, we would go to play in her house many a time, Like mum she would sing songs as she went about her housework I recall well her soft voice singing 'I've got yhe key to set you free' (Love will find a way' from Maid of the mountains) I liked to sit down on her hallway linoleum with her newly bought groceries and build things, especially putting her 'George Payne' quarter pound tea packets end to end, they were white with narrow red centre stripes and making a super 'train' in the imagination of me, a small toddler.

Ivy when small spent much time in the company of Mrs Reynolds and had a fit of screaming when once she was collected to come home, apparently she had been promised a lollipop that morning by Mrs Reynolds who had later forgotten the commitment! She and mum liked to converse, mum leaning from her wash-house window, and she, in her back yard directly below giving mum the nick-name "Ucko" and in return, mum calling her "Fan"!.

Her husband was a kindly man of slim build, a tram driver, they had two sons, the eldest called 'Gunner' the other was Ted, a jolly friendly boy (to me), who did clever tricks on his bicycle up and down the road, I thought him wonderful at the time. he would ride with feet upon the handle bars or sit backwards on the saddle and if at speed could stand upright upon it in perfect balance. Later on he was employed to ride a trades bike, a three wheeled affair with a huge box fitted between the two front wheels for the goods . The whole thing he would tilt over sideways so that he was riding it on two wheels only! He should have joined a circus I reckon.

They also had a young teen-ager daughter Peggy, oh!--dear, sweet Peggy! With mum down at her Rendell's job she would take me about in our push-chair, a rather posh affair of mahogany and dating from about the turn of the century, it had rubber tyred iron wheels and could be folded for easy storage and had a piece of patterned carpet for its seat and back rest and an exquisitely turned push bar handle. Peggy would be pushing me and singing popular songs of the day as we trundled along, one song sticks in my mind to this day being 'That's my weakness now!' We would go along laughing and joking and she would suddenly shriek out "Oh Wilf, you are a scream!" giggling in her infectious way.

Dear Peggy Reynolds! A lovely girl and a very happy memory indeed that I feel honoured to be able to record here. Peggy took me each day, back and forth to the creche, (or nursery) in Oak Lane, very nearby. All I remember there is a lady in a sort of nurses uniform, an enormous rocking horse that I was too scared to ride upon, it being so high, a wee blonde laddie who was 'took short' poor kid, and the others sniggering as yellow faeces slithered down his little legs. Apparently I suffered similarly by weeing myself, mum was a bit put out because they sent me home dressed in girls clothes!

Teddy Reynolds (Peggy's brother), Alec Andrews and Ivy once took a wooden go-cart (a home made trolley) to the railway bridge in Church Lane and with Ivy on the back, it charged down the hill there, with Ivy's arm rubbing on the tyreless wheel, unknowing that her arm was cut and bleeding, she had to hide it from mum's gaze.

Uncle Charley and Aunt Alice had taken over mum and dad's house in Gerrard Street when it was vacated for their move to our New Trinity Road flat, but some eight years later they were on the move again to the new Downham Estate in Bromley, Kent. We understand that the room's walls at Gerrard Street had become alive with bugs making living there unbearable. Their new home was a council house, a lovely clean dwelling in a countrified district and such a happy contrast for them, making mum and dad quite envious I suppose.

On Sundays it was the custom everywhere for all to don their best clothes, in fact they were known as one's 'Sunday-best'. Dad always displayed an erect soldierly carriage looking truly elegant in his best suit at such times, with his gold 'Albert' (watch chain) on display across his breast, straddling his waistcoat from one pocket across to the other. Hooked in the centre button hole was a gold locket carrying a photo of mum, another gold one held a photo of baby Alma and was carried in his right waistcoat pocket, the silver watch having been the original possession of (mum's) Jim Davies mentioned earlier was in the other pocket. His neatly combed iron grey hair was all wavy and brilliantined. His cigarettes he'd load into a rather posh cigarette case carved in the solid from wood, (bird's eye maple) of fawn colour and highly polished. He'd acquired it from abroad during his army days saying it was Japanese, and made by hand.

Mum would perhaps wear her long black satin dress, where below her waist was suspended long festoons of sewn tiny beads amid a discreet array of sequins I think. A real twenties creation.

If we went out, she would wear a fur neck-piece that terminated in a foxes head cleverly arranged so that its jaws could be opened and spring shut, to serve as a clip to secure it.

Dad wore a fine black bowler hat and carried a walking stick (he had no physical need of it) it being just a gentleman's accessory and a custom to carry one at that period. (A gentleman cum Tram conductor, certainly seems rather incongruous today!) His stick was of high quality with a silver ferrule at its base and another near the start of its curled handle. I liked to be carried on his shoulder or sometimes astride his neck.

If I walked however, I could have his walking stick and would sort of ride it hobby-horse style, or more often just hold onto its handle and let its lower end play a little scraping tune as it trailed along the pavement behind me, but this was not at all a good idea since it wore away the bottom ferrule badly at an angle of some thirty degrees! He also allowed me to reverse it so that its handle scraped along the pavement rapidly wearing the wood away, this really made the stick unserviceable, its former classic style eventually lost for ever!

One of our outings was to Hadley High-stone and the surrounding Hadley woods, I remember scrub-land nearby and we would pick black berries there with me getting depressed due to the time it took to fill up one's container! The area is near Barnet and here, dad lost a lot more of his dignity than that described earlier regarding his dress. It was a lovely hot day and we all decided to sit down on (or in) the longish grass. Unfortunately dad sat right into a wet and sticky cow pat!

He was soon up on his hands and knees with mum working vigorously with pages from a newspaper scrubbing his bottom! So much for his Sunday suit! He was even more demoralised when a bus whizzed along the road a hundred yards away, with fellows leaning out of an upstairs window and shouting at him with glee "Oi-yoi-yoi, ha-hee-hee" etc..

A further small disaster was to follow, for on our homeward journey we were upstairs on the bus and in fighting off a troublesome bee, it stung me in my mouth! not at all a pleasant experience.

Uncle Albert and aunt Clara bought a huge box of fireworks for their daughter (cousin Clara) at November time when all three visited us. We had a large bonfire going in the evening and a mere spark from it landed in the box and set it ablaze immediately, the fireworks showering everyone with an exploding and whizzing display to the accompaniment of the deafening bangers! Quite a disaster.

For Ivy and I probably the best experience was Christmas, just before hand one year, Mrs Marshall and mum went Christmas shopping and took me to the great Gamages store at Holborn to see Father Christmas. I don't recall him giving me any present though. It was dark as we waited for the tram home, and I can see even now the hundreds of lights a-flashing on and off, over a large theatre and its brightly lit awning, both advertising "Gracie Fields"!

I remember in 1928 Mrs Marshall and mum saw the first talking picture together, called "The Jazz Singer" with Al Jolson, at the

Coliseum in East Finchley. Mum didn't like it at all, mainly because the sound was out of sync with the film, but conceded a strong liking for its 'Sonny Boy' song, hence we acquired the record, on a cheap, mauve and white labelled version of 'Imperial' make and sung by Irving Kaufman, with 'A rainbow around my shoulder' on its 'B' side. (originally also a Jolson number). The film was the first she had seen since her early days, having completely ignored the Rudolph Valentino era. Although not at all close friends, Mrs Marshall and mum would also take an occasional shopping trip together,--- but back to Christmas at home:-

Mum had a dread of Christmases ever since baby Alma died. Except for minor ailments though, nothing untoward actually happened. In spite of their apprehension, she and dad always laid on a spectacular time for us. Paper chains, holly, mistletoe, balloons and a stocking on the morning containing an orange, some nuts, brand new coins just issued, and a pack of those chocolate ones wrapped in golden foil. They bought us toys of course, not a great deal but with the result paradoxically, that we were more appreciative than it seems are today's children.

So Father Christmas comes to mind again, and us children waiting sleeplessly in bed for his arrival. As in most of my life since, I was terribly naive and didn't cotton on to his actual non-existence, even when dad crept in with a lovely floral blue edged toy china tea set and placed it under Ivy's bed! Among his delivery I think was a nice sandy coloured teddy bear' I assume it was for me, (though I once got a gollywog) and we had the teddy for years though he lived most of the time on top of a large cupboard on the landing.

Ivy one year had a rather beautiful manicure set in a peach coloured velvet lined maroon box, a very well made affair that she still cherishes!. I had a little celluloid picaninny doll with side-glancing eyes and a painted-on little red jerkin, I adored that little thing.

There was also a toy Alsation-dog's head, painted in a hideous glowing green and attached to a red rubber bulb so that it barked when squeezed, also a multi-coloured celluloid wheel that a sprung plunger would cause to speedily rotate, it being then illuminated by a myriad of sparks from a flint that wore away quickly, but could not be replaced! and I had chocolate cigars and cigarettes made up as a smokers set. Often I'd get those delightful magic drawing, painting or tracing books. These were lovely times and we never expected as many presents as we got, but we admit to a certain envy when seeing outside, the near neighbours children pushing dolls prams or riding along the pavement on their new bikes, but there was no room for large toys in our flat anyway.

Once, aunty Lilly (Sinclair) brought or sent Ivy a most beautiful doll from Spain, its skin tones in velvet and clothed in gorgeous finery, it was maybe intended as a dressing table motif. (Our other aunt Lil [Butler, dad's sister] bought Ivy at Christmas a beautiful doll having dressed it herself).

On one occasion aunty Lilly bought mum and dad a fine ash tray in frosted glass with its centre clear, exposing a picture of a Mediterranean scene on its bottom face. There was a lovely glass tray too, showing through it two coloured pictures of Brussels, it was about fifteen inches by eight surrounded with polished

mahogany and a small brass handle at each end. She sent the family presents at Easter time too, in particular is remembered a large Easter egg for Ivy in marzipan of mottled colours and generously piped with chocolate. Yes aunty Lilly had real class, every thing she did was in high fashion and good taste including the way she spoke, A complete epitome of the twenties and a superb partner for uncle Eddie.

Our Christmas dinners were always elaborate with Turkey, Goose or Pork and all the trimmings, Bon-Bons(now more known as crackers), the plum pudding, hiding several threepenny bits of course. A huge jelly made of numerous coloured flavours to effect stripes, mince pies, peaches, pineapple chunks, prunes, custard or even tinned cream!-- the lot! all poised invitingly on a gleaming white table cloth that enveloped our huge table,

It was a mahogany Edwardian table, normally a yard square, but supplied with one or two separate leaves to insert for extra length as desired. Much of the cutlery was of plain steel (none of your E.P.N.S. stuff!) so probably young Ivy, (with ME in later years) had to clean it all with emery dust and 'Bluebell' metal polish. I can smell it now!

Winkles, shrimps, jam tarts and Christmas cake for tea, wines, beers, nuts, dates, figs and sweets displayed for any one's choice throughout the day, then come the evening, card games, tricks, puzzles and songs around the piano. One of dad's tricks was to offer someone a banana which on being peeled revealed the fruit inside was neatly sliced! It was no doubt taken from a bowl he'd earlier made by heat softening a gramophone record and forming it over a basin! Another trick was for someone to leave the room and on return point to the correct card of three that had been selected by another guest!

Lateish on such a Christmas night, dad had occasion to go down to use the outside toilet (it was never called a 'Loo' in those days) still loudly singing the current popular song "What'll I do, when you, are far away?" when a distant reply came through the night air,(probably from one of the drunks being turned out of the pub along the road), shouting "Shit your bloody self!"

No doubt a most appropriate answer! though not exactly a good example of language for Christmas time do you think?. One of the street's drunks was nicknamed 'Nugget' and another called 'Dido Plumb' who to everyone's amusement would stagger home from the pub throwing his remaining coins out into the road! Yes Christmas for us there was memorable indeed.

## Chapter 6

### Some thrills and ills.

I want to tell you more about grandma Binks's little home. Mum, desirous of seeing her mother would take us there more often than to other places. I recall only her living room some fourteen feet by ten, with two opposing doors at one end, one from the hallway, the other to her kitchen cum scullery/wash house. A large fireplace graced the other end of the room, being centred on the end wall and had a storage cupboard on each side of it. A sizeable window overlooking her long back garden was on the right hand side, the garden was at a higher level than the room and surrounded by a wall about seven feet high.

In fact the garden was really level with the street, her entire accommodation being below. Many of London's houses were built like that, and exist even today where for access at the front one has to descend about eight steps to an enclosed forecourt (then known as the "area" but usually pronounced "airee"). Down there is the door for entrance to the basement floor.

The outer wall of the "area" had latched match-board doors to huge cupboards for storage. One though was for coal, this when required being tipped into it through a man-hole cover on the pavement above this was an ornately patterned iron disc advertising the maker's name. Incidentally all this applied also to our great-aunt Edie's place at Greenwich mentioned in chapter three. However, great-aunt's living room was in the basement front, but gran's was at the back.

Gran's living room always had an atmosphere of cosiness with the fire brightly aglow (perhaps we went mainly on cold days) and on its hob would be "singing" a huge black enamelled kettle, one side of it thickly coated with soot from the fire. Below the window stood a large table with no cover, perhaps to show us how white she had scrubbed its plain wooden surface.

There was a large (rocking I think) Windsor chair at the side of the fireplace and a matching small dining chair adjacent to the hall door where uncle Cyril had sat with me (mentioned earlier). I can't recall the other seating but on the window wall I think was a longish "form" type stool between the other door and the table.

I can't understand why I liked being there so much, after all, there was nothing there really to entertain a little boy. From her outer pavement was a separate street door up some steps that led to aunty Clara and uncle Albert's flat for which one climbed several stairs. I don't recall it at all except for a stained glass window to the back about half-way up and a little toilet cubical on that landing. As a small lad I wrote to Aunty Clara and instead of addressing the post card to 4 Charlotte Terrace, Copenhagen Street London N.1. (which admittedly is only about five miles from Finchley), I wrote 4 Sharlot, Copenhagen. and unbelievably it got to her O.K. and of course it had no stamp on it either!

I liked the little sweetshop near gran's corner, just into Copenhagen Street. Diagonally on the opposite corner was the pub

to where she would occasionally take her jug to be filled with beer (known then as Porter).

In the centre of this road junction was a gent's public convenience, an oval structure some sixteen feet long by about six wide, open topped about seven foot high, and painted in that green shade favoured by everyone's local council. It was open at the bottom all the way around, so one could not help but view the men's lower legs and feet, plus the flowing urine dripping down. A disgusting design even for those days and not surprisingly it stunk to high heaven.

Near at hand was (and in 1991, still is) Chapel Street market, a long straight double row of all the usual stalls which in the dusk of evening were lit up by open flamed flares, thus creating a warming glow all the way along. Mum would buy me a hot black-currant drink there or a glass of Sarsaparilla----lovely!

Just out of Chapel Street was Liverpool Road leading into Upper Street where we would catch our No.9 tram home. A very short distance along is Islington Green, a convenient sort of grassed piazza fronting the then famous Collins Music Hall (long since closed) where one Christmas time we were privileged to see the pantomime "Dick Whittington". Mum, of course, like all the Binks's, knew every inch of that region of London, from there, eastward to Old Street, westward to Kings Cross, Farringdon to the south and Highbury to the north.

Going to Islington from our home by tram involved passing through Highgate where at 'The Archway Tavern' terminated the overhead wires system, so they had to lower the connecting arm and introduce a 'trolley', a small wheeled device slid under the side of the tram to locate and run in an additional track that was from now on parallel and central to the usual two.

Now I must write about a couple of set-backs we suffered. You will have heard of the general strike and how it affected virtually the whole nation, well mum and dad would not have been excluded from the shut down of factories and transport systems they were respectively employed in, yet we have no memory nor other knowledge of their resulting predicament. About that time, however, one disaster did befall them.

Poor little Ivy, unsupervised, had lifted a kettle of boiling water from the hob of our (guarded) back room fire, she never realised that its handle was very hot indeed, with the result that she had to drop it, spilling the boiling water over her foot! Yelling with pain she ran and sat upon the two steps on our landing.

My, oh! my! you never saw such a blister, as small as I was I could tell this was something really bad! it was embracing the entire top of her foot. Although mum made a fine nurse, she had a horror of doctors and clinics etc. Remedies for burns were quite different then, to today, so she smeared the burns with butter!

Dad carried Ivy down Oak Lane to the doctor who prescribed ointment pads that caused the poor kid excruciating pain when they were applied. Oak Lane was full of doctors, clinics, dentists, etc. I had to see the dentist once there but can recall only his waiting room, typical of council offices of the period,

no lino on the floor, dark brown painted woodwork and in this case, dental posters with Lucy Attwell cartoons for illustration.

About the time of Ivy's predicament, we heard that uncle Albert (Rex) got his builders hand cart caught in tram lines. Trying to dislodge it, it swung around and unbalanced him whereupon his foot and ankle were seriously injured such that his leg became much shortened and his career in building terminated.

Builders carts in those days were of ridiculous design consisting of a large but shallow tray fitted high above two large central wheels, the tray feature was extended by a long 'T' shape handle to push or pull it by, there was a short iron rigid prop to support it by at one end when standing idle, so its weighty contents could easily tilt and spill at the other end, a very silly arrangement. Uncle Albert ultimately became a "Reader" at the Waterlow Co's printing works.

In 1928, (summer I believe) there developed an intense pain in my lower right side and I had to lay on my little bed in the back room, with my right leg bent at both the hip and knee. This went on for some days during which time aunt Edie arrived to show us her new little baby (Jean), her first, yet I was in no state to appreciate the visit.

After this I showed signs of worsening, becoming feverish, etc. Mum began to panic, the doctor came and diagnosed appendicitis and told dad to get me to hospital right away! It was quite a serious illness in those days I'm told, so from their past experience mum and dad were in a terrible state of apprehension.

I remember mum wrapping me in a blanket and dad cuddling me closely, then running and walking along intermittently as fast as he could go down Oak Lane, his intention being to get the tram to the cottage hospital a mile and a half away. Luckily for us both another doctor in his car was just leaving a house in Oak Lane and asked dad the trouble, on hearing dad's story, told him to get me into the car quick, he then drove us to the hospital at the junction of Bow Lane and Granville Road, Finchley.

All I recall thereafter was laying on a table with a chloroformed mask being placed over my mouth and nose, and awaking in a ward of patients that was painted white everywhere. I'm more than thankful to the surgeon, (thought also to be the man who drove us there), a Doctor Grimstone.

Mum told me years later that it was a near thing for me and about to cause peritonitis. To pacify mum, after calling at the hospital, dad had told her that all was well and that I was doing fine! when actually I was in a bad way! We know that neither dad nor mum were allowed to visit me at my bedside, they came though and secretly looked at me through a narrow, vertical side window. Alas! I saw them (and recall the incident), I cried out to them to take me home, but they had to go alone. I've no idea though how I was ultimately pacified.

One who did get to visit me was my Sunday school teacher, she cheered me up and brought me some sponge finger cakes. Since then if thinking of sponge fingers or Sunday schools, my thoughts turn and I wonder after that very nice girl. She was quite an angel. (Ivy previously took me to her Sunday school each week, it was

attached to the Presbyterian church near our home). Mentioning an angel reminds me that as a child I was told that we all have a guardian angel to guide us throughout our lives. Well something does, in my case that's for sure.

Hospital food was dreadful. Boiled fish in parsley sauce, over and over again. God! how I loathe the stuff, but when I think of it, I certainly have cause to thank them all at that hospital.

## Chapter 7

### More of the twenties.

Not long after this (in 1928), mum took me along to start school, the Alder school near the end of Long Lane, on the way we happened to meet my Sunday school teacher again, her kind reassurance must have allayed my fears of going, looking back I think she reminded me of William Brown's sister (illustrated in the Richmal Crompton "William" books).

Anyway, I needn't have worried, I liked it and fell in love for the first time in my life!----with my first teacher, Miss Sturrock. Well do I recall her, very beautiful with flaming red hair and gorgeous legs that I had the very best view of, (are all little boys sexually awakened as early as five years old?) after all they had put me on the floor at the front of the class to do my raffia work! A disc of cardboard notched around its edge and with a sizeable hole in the middle, so that the raffia could be threaded through and over the outside repeatedly, to make a table mat of about coaster size. Yes that lady was some distraction! She taught us to recite quite educational poems. A few I recall fascinated mum and dad. One was 'The old Lamp-lighter' another 'Sweep, Sweep' included the Sweep's call as he travelled the streets of London. A third who's title escapes me ended with 'His old grey noddle, his old grey noddle, his old grey noddle kept shaking'.

I suppose I must have gone to that school for about two and a half years but forget all the pupils, the lessons and other teachers, except a Miss Stuart the head-mistress. Ivy went there too, of course, and was fond of a Miss Weiss (coming second in her class) she was a jewish lady. Ivy was less fortunate in a class with another teacher, coming forty-eighth!

She was a Miss Denman who for some reason chose to refer to Ivy as "Rose" instead of "Huskisson" (having some knowledge of the child's origins apparently), she seemed to have some obsession and would keep Ivy in, often at going home times. Mum wasn't having any of that and went up there one day to sort her out, and by all accounts successfully! I don't remember Miss Weiss or Miss Denman but I do recall the incidents. Ivy has a strong recollection of a music class singing or learning 'The Londonderry Air' particularly because at that time one of the girls in her class suffered Tuberculosis and sadly died from it.

The playground had in its corner, a shelter open to the elements on two sides, a large structure with a wooden seat throughout the length of its two remaining inner walls. The children congregated there in bad weather of course, and I liked to get to the inner corner where its closed sides met, it always seemed to be warmest there.

My only other memory of that school is of some dreadful child telling me that there isn't any Father Christmas! what an awful thing to say! I do believe it was the first time I had ever been affronted. So I went home and told mum what he'd said, fancy telling fibs like that!----well of course, she very gently corrected me saying the laddie was right, not quite realising that she had just knocked the bottom right out of my world.

But not out of my Christmas. One of my presents that year was a Ludo game with brightly coloured cardboard counters. That Christmas aunt Edie and uncle Billy brought baby Jean along to stay with us and we suddenly noticed the baby was dribbling, her saliva being of bright blue, yellow, red and green rivulets running down her chin. Dad had the job of raking all the Ludo counters out of her mouth with his little finger!

I'm especially grateful to him and mum for taking us about to all the places within easy reach for them, a part of our character development and an opening up of the world to us. I suppose, being on the trams enabled him to get cheaper fares? However, "London Transport" did not exist as we know it today, the whole Metropolis being served by what was called "pirate" companies.

For example, dad worked for the Metropolitan Tramway Co. This competed with the London County Council's services. The bus companies were very numerous, the General Omnibus Co being the oldest and most prolific, but the Finchley area also boasted those of the "Overground", the "Birch" and the "Green Line" services.

I must have been getting quite interested in transport generally at this time, many buses then still having solid tyres, and I remember a fire engine having a great brass chimney on the back showing that it was steam driven and I was thrilled to have a replica of it as a clockwork tinplate toy, it was complete with at least ten tin firemen sitting aboard and having a fire escape ladder. I was also fascinated by a real steam roller chuffing back and forth along our road. These were huge trundling monsters with a full length curved awning for a roof, lots of gleaming brass fittings etc. and with belching but pleasant smelling smoke and steam hissing about and having a whizzing fly-wheel and two clanking chains to control the steering of the great front roller.

Someone used to come along there too with a Renault car, a huge thing with a great closed-in bulbous front bonnet, and I recall the dust cart being brand new, with tiny solid tyred wheels and silver doored compartments for the rubbish along both sides.

I was telling you of our trips out with mum and dad. Another of the places they took us to was Waterlow Park, a quite pretty place near Highgate, where we'd have picnics with lemonade and sandwiches. Mum and dad liked to take snapshots, they used one of those Box-Brownie cameras so popular at that time using 120(2-1/4" x 3-1/4") size film. Ivy liked to watch the moorhens and I, the ducks and peacocks. Another one was Golders Hill park which is much larger, with deer, fauns, goats, etc. and squirrels. All in all, a nice place for children, and down the hill a way is the "Bull and Bush" pub, famous due to the song, (incidentally mum and dad's and other's snaps of these times have been most useful as reminders to me in compiling many of the incidents described in this work.

We would sometimes be taken to Alexandra park where the famous palace, mentioned in chapter two, is situated. There they have a lake that a passenger boat plies around and the palace had numerous slot machines that happily ate any pennies dad could find in his pocket for us kids.

On bank holidays we might go to the famous Barnet Fair. On the way towards Barnet was a garage selling cars and petrol. There I was

enthralled by their advertising stunt of having a very old car fixed very high up onto a great wooden hoarding. We more often visited the fair on Hampstead Heath though, and nearby was the Jack Straws Castle pub and the "Leg of Mutton" pond to float toy boats on----marvellous!

Or we might be taken to the London Zoo! To do that we had to get the No.19 tram to Camden Town, via Junction Road at Highgate.

At Camden Town we had to walk to the Zoo via a road called Parkway which fascinated us children for its kerbside was a continuous display of stall-holders selling budgies, canaries, guinea pigs, rabbits and the like, all calculated to soften the hearts and open the purses of the passers by,--er--not mum or dad though! The zoo as always was a delight, but I distinctly recall being really offended when they charged dad extra for us to go into the aquarium.

To some places, dad took us by Tube! what a thrill to me that was! "Mind the doors!" mmmmmmm-n-n---n-n---n-n, then 'whoosh' into the tunnel, then the dark! and I'd be kneeling on the seat, just to watch all those dozen or so electric cables rushing by and apparently wobbling up and down, (the effect caused by the sagging between their fixed points).

Then, in no time at all comes that noise again as we enter the next station n-n---n-n---n-n---n-nnn and we stop! then the doors open with a pssss-zonk! and then a different sound while the train waits, zzzzz-tse, tse, tse, tse, tse, tse, until the man says "Mind the doors" again. (As you can tell, I loved it, and still do). The trains were bright red in those days.

Once they took us to High Beach, I think, and the Epping Forest but I don't really remember it, another trip was to the Welsh Harp lake at Hendon, there was a small beach there, and we sat and watched the water sports with speed boats zipping about.

Ivy and I were not quite the goody goodies my writings may seem to suggest, indeed we were not averse to just a little mischief. Once when mum was down the shops, I found a hammer and nails and with scissors, cut out pictures from some magazine, seriously thinking they would look nice as a decoration, so I nailed them to the inside edge of our dining room window sill! I was most put out when dad pulled the nails out and tidied up, I was reprimanded of course but not punished, bless him.

Then one day when mum went down to the shop, she asked us to pay the insurance man if he should knock in her absence. She left a half-crown in the insurance book on the table for that purpose. Also on the table was a plate supporting a sizable lump of cake. I believe both had been placed on a spread sheet of newspaper. We both took a fancy to the cake, so Ivy cut us a sliver each and after wolfing it we had to dispose of the crumbs.

So, gingerly, Ivy and I tipped the newspaper toward the fire's eager flames, the crumbs rolled down, rapidly overtaken by the half-crown! Straight into the fire it went! I felt this was the end of the world! Well Ivy had told me that dad got nearly three pounds a week wages but I had thought it was only the half-crown! Luckily I hadn't reckoned with Ivy's prowess with a poker!

On raking it out, we were horrified at the sight of it! Its original silver hue was now a sort of sepia and black mixture! When it had cooled sufficiently, Ivy tried to clean it up a bit but with limited success. Suddenly! a rat-tat-tat came at the door and almost petrified we descended the stairs and Ivy proffered the book and the pathetic half-crown (nowadays worth twelve and a half pence by the way) to the insurance man.

Thankfully it was Mr. Ranstead a kindly jolly man who mum had known for years when he used to call on the Rendell girls. He seemed to like us children and once before, he asked me if I could say "Fannackapan Nobby" so I said it and he gave me a bright new sixpence! This time at the door he looked quizzically at the half-crown, first one side, then the other, would he take the coin? wouldn't he? hearts a pounding---he wrote the transacted details in the book, pocketed the coin, smiled at us and was gone! so we got away with it unscathed.

## Chapter 8

### Some local adventures

Growing up a bit, with my parent's and Ivy's guidance (for considerable adventures on my own), I was now learning to find my way about the district. To the barber's is an example, "Give the man this sixpence and tell him, 'short back and sides please, and not too short in the front'" mum would say, and off I'd go, the barber's shop was in Church Lane.

Ivy and I would have to get the fish and chips,--"A tuppenny and a pennyworth twice" (Or "three times", "four times" or as required), and have you any cracklings please?", the fish-monger had some deformation of one arm, sort of withered, his shop I think was in Long Lane nearly opposite our school, so it was close to Gran's place in Church Lane.

A sweet shop near the Great North Road there, had a machine I liked, that on receipt of a half-penny, delivered a numbered disc which indicated to the man how many sweets he would give me. Opposite, we loved the smell of a delicatessen shop called Clutterbuck's which sold lovely foods and meats, -and suppers too of pease pudding and faggots or savaloys----scrumptious!

Just a few shops away was a small one selling haberdashery mainly, but also toys. The lady there sold us a box of tiny beads of all colours, it had a glass panel as part of its lid so that you could see the contents. Threading beads for bracelets and necklaces was a great pastime for us children. That shop also sold what I've never seen since, for twopence came an eight inch square blue envelope containing a picture printed in black on white paper, another one the same but in full colours and a packet of gummed paper shapes that matched outlined shapes provided on the white sheet to which you had to stick them. A 'Butterfly' brand product that I feel would sell well even today.

Fondly we remember our visits to the "Merry Miller" bakery, a factory where we queued with other children on I think Friday evening each week. Coo! what a treat! "three pennyworth of stale cakes please" and we'd come home laden with cream or jam filled cakes and tarts! Squashed or broken, yes, but never really stale. The number of children queueing determined how much you got for your threepence, so some weeks were better than others.

Our journey there was on foot for about a mile. Here's the way we'd go:- At the eastern end of our road was an alley way descending a short hill down which was a dear little general shop shop called 'Oliver's' wherein Mrs Oliver, a rather tubby little lady sold veg, fruit, groceries and 'tuck'. In season I might get a rosy pomegranate there, if you bought sweets they were served in rolled up newspaper cones! and so was her lemonade powder, always an appetising sight on a dipped in wet finger! and when done with, carefully unwrapping the cone revealed quite a residue lodged between its coils---Yummee! but your well licked finger remained a ghastly yellow colour for a day or two.

The path by her shop soon opened out onto Red Lion Hill, where on the right was a row of Dickensian style cottages, in one of which lived a family named Ansell, the children were remote school chums. Then came a road junction cornered by the Red Lion Pub, and

a pathway beside our church leading into King street, this followed the back wall of our school. On the left hand side was a slaughter house and a wood yard cum saw-mill.

Next we would cross Church Lane and follow a path called 'The Walk'. A little way along on its right, mum had once taken us to a wedding party for a girl named Blanche, connected somehow with the Marshall's. Here I first heard the songs 'This old man, he played one, he played nick nack on his thumb' etc. and 'One man went to mow' plus some risque others. I didn't like it there. Passing by another pub (The Windsor), the pathway called 'The Walk' leads into 'Market Place' and the 'Merry Miller' bakery on its right. It was quite a charming, and varied vista all the way.

Near there though, in Finchley High Road, mum would send us every couple of weeks or so to pay subs to a Christmas Club, I hated the time we took queueing. The thin wizened ageing little man at the table always had an unlit but hand-rolled cigarette in his mouth like a permanent fixture, an occasional dribble had stained it a brownish yellow and at our every visit it was always there. He must have known I was always staring at it.

Out alone once, I sauntered up the 'Red Lion Hill' just mentioned and met a little girl in Elmfield Road to the right who seemed very poor indeed and we had a little chat, her dolls pram was terribly battered about and its long leaf-spring on one side was broken so the pram tilted sideways at a precarious angle such that her bedraggled but well loved doll looked decidedly unsafe in it. She was a frail little soul who we got to know much better later on. Her name was Joan Gentle, (Joany, to us).

Our church nearby had a childrens club which I joined to play Draughts or Ludo but no one seemed to welcome me, so I left, though once they put on a concert where some men sung to the children the old song 'Chick, Chick, Chick, Chick, Chicken, Lay another egg for me'. I liked that, remembering now how the men swayed in time to the music.

Back in Elmfield Road lived another little girl called Molly Mayne of whom I was very fond and would wait outside her house for long periods in the hope that she would come out to play---but she never did. Her house intersected the corner of Long Lane, and on the opposite corner a sweet shop sold sherbet dabs and fountains, long strips of liquorice (black and coloured) and it was the only shop around there that sold 'Packer's' chocolate bricks, just a solid lump of milk chocolate about 3/4 inch wide by 1 1/4 long and 3/8 thick, so quite small but super! and cost only a farthing. I liked to buy 'Gob-stoppers' too these were large ball shaped boiled sweets changing colour frequently as they were sucked smaller and smaller. Mum stopped me buying them for fear they'd get stuck in my throat.

Opposite there, in Long Lane was an electrical shop where some years later I was to get spares for my bike, but at the period being described I had to get dad some crystals and 'cat's whiskers' for our new acquisition, a Crystal Set! I believe as a family we were way behind as far as the phenomena of 'wireless' was concerned.

Uncle Albert had made a hobby of wood craft and this Crystal Set was of his make and a present to us, having two sets of aluminium

head-phones fed by twisted bright green wires and a polished brass pivot bar and cup for the cat's whisker and crystal respectively. It had two varnished mahogany hand knobs for selecting the wave length, but we had great difficulty 'tuning' stations and holding them for any length of time, even after dad had fitted an efficient 'earth' being an iron stake thrust into the ground, and he'd erected a fine high aerial of wire running down the whole length of the garden.

If one turned left at the Red Lion pub instead of right as just described, a fairly broad pathway went through to the Great North Road and the tram stop for journeys to North Finchley, Barnet etc. Why I was there one day I know not now, (the Oak Lane stop was our usual one, and nearer, but Ivy and I were scared of some wolf-hounds normally kept behind a high wall there, having frightened her when let out once), but there I was at the other stop with the tram just approaching.

The tram lines were well out into the road on that route, so there was normally room for other vehicles to travel between the trams and the kerb. This day though the road made of wooden blocks was up, creating a huge heap blocking the gap. A distant car was approaching and I wondered if the driver would notice the blocks. This must have been a premonition for he didn't, and ploughed straight into them! His car climbed up the pile shooting the bricks all around. I did not stay to see the outcome, but the driver survived unscathed.

Returning to Red Lion Hill, one would pass yet another sweet shop, its then on your right, known and loved by Ivy and I as Hutton's, selling all the usual children's favourites and a few toys too. I remember buying a huge hoop there, this a common toy for a child then, being of thin wooden laminated strip, they were only tuppence and came with a wooden stick to control it with, a super invention indeed. Of things to eat they sold Tiger nuts for example, and locust beans, I can recall getting 'Sun-Pat' raisins there in a small red carton, but best of all were many coloured jelly babies of the genuine, old fashioned soft variety, lightly dusted all over with icing sugar and displayed in a large tray of long paper channels..... Marvellous! let's get some!

Up Squires Lane, Finchley, they were building a new road of council houses. 'Dickens Avenue' they called it, a cul de sac. Mum and dad had long since applied to the council for larger accommodation. Now that I was getting bigger, Ivy had been moved from the back room to the front, so mum and dad had to swap the beds over, with me still with my little bed in the corner of the back room.

They were to be lucky! and a semi-detached, three bed-roomed house for rent was reserved for them, a new one, No.4. Dickens Avenue.

Ivy and I had been going there frequently to gather bits of wood that the builders had discarded into buckets for our winter fires etc. I remember a bucket kept banging onto Ivy's leg as she walked, causing a large blood-blister. She always took on more than she should, and would always let me get away with the absolute minimum of hard work. (I've been blessed with that good fortune for most of my life, but don't know why).

Our journey was via Oak Lane, passing the Sims Motor Units Ltd factory on our left, thence down 'Muddy Lane' (unmade but never very muddy), then along by a huge and smelly compost heap and a meadow on our right. On one trip a horse ambled over to us and I felt so sorry for the poor old thing constantly swishing its tail in a hopeless attempt to dispose of innumerable blue-bottle type flies that plagued him, but he could not cope with those around his face. Allotments came next and a foot-path to be negotiated that was crossed by the North Circular Road, at that time colloquially called 'the Arterial', the path led into Clifford Road which soon meets Squires Lane, we'd turn left there and Dickens Avenue is then first on the left down the gentle hill.

## Chapter 9

### Paradise at Canvey (and Finchley).

Uncle Albert, though having left the building trade, had a builder friend and between them decided to build two holiday bungalows side by side on Canvey Island, by working at every available week-end opportunity.

The venture was very successful. Each bungalow, although of merely wood and asbestos sheet, had a large lounge having doors to each of three bed-rooms and French doors accessing a veranda at the back that ran the full length of the structure with a mini-kitchen built on it at one end. The veranda overlooked a large garden area and the front of the bungalow had its door opening directly into the lounge.

As Canvey had very little development, there was no sanitation, so uncle had dug a cess-pit with toilet seat over, it was situated in the garden area and kept loaded with chemicals for hygiene purposes. With no water available, it had to be bought at a halfpenny a bucket from the nearby Clement's dairy.

I think we and all the Binks' families stayed there for short holidays from time to time. If the tide was in, one had to get onto the island by ferry-boat rowed across from Benfleet having journeyed there by train. The area was surrounded by house boats that had long since stuck fast in the mud. With the tide out, there were stepping stones across the mud to the island. Alternatively and at shallow tide a bus slithered and bumped its way across the mud, ploughing through the low water along a stoney causeway that crossed the creek there.

We would alight at 'The Haystack' public house and walk the rest of the way to 'Recherche' (the name of the bungalow meaning I think 'exquisite'). Uncle kept a lot of stores tools and junk underneath the bungalow, accessible due to a gap provided at the bottom all round. Ivy and I found two buckets and spades there pencilled 'Pat' and 'John', presumably left by other children earlier. We would have to get the buckets of water and on the way played a silly game, with me calling Ivy 'Pat' and she calling me 'John'..!

It never ever rained there! Butterflies flitted everywhere and I saw a skylark for the first time, a surprisingly loud twittering led us to search for the source of the sound and eventually saw a tiny dot in the sky, way up and barely moving until it suddenly swooped down into the long grass and was gone.

Then one day there, I thought we could see a bright red parrot in the far distance, westerly, but it was an illusion, eventually exposing to our gaze only a Red Hot Poker plant in somebody's garden. In the other direction was a distant farm and its huge golden haystack in which we tumbled about and slid from its top to the bottom, and leaving it in a shocking mess. To the north could be seen Hadleigh Castle ruins, and I was able to enjoy a wonderful view of the air-ship (R.101. I think), above the castle one day, it was possibly on its ill-fated flight to India in 1930. Sadly it crashed in France.

Between the bungalow and the castle was a sea wall and Leigh creek. When the tide was out, it was nice to stand on the wall there to watch the tide slowly come in towards us, you had to

cross a dyke full of bulrushes and slippery mud to get onto the sea wall but a little duck-board bridge was provided. Panic reigned one day though when Fred and Ada Robertson's son fell into the dyke head first! (he, and his sister were slightly simple). Luckily he was rescued in time and was O.K.

The sea wall is man made and extends around the island, having been built by the Dutch in ancient times when they owned it. Uncle Albert took us all for a long walk along it to point out certain land marks. There's a peculiar pagoda type building which then had an air of mystery. It's called 'Kynock's' and is a hotel cum dance hall now I believe. Another there was called 'Hotel Monico' Still there also are the 'Admiral Jellico' and 'Lobster-smack' pubs, another, then called the 'Red Cow' is these days the 'King Canute' because the great flood of 1953 stopped there.

I liked the shopping area around the 'Haystack' pub, (also still there), but now only remember a shop called 'The Bazaar', Venables the chemist, (and Clement's Dairies of course). Clement's sold lovely bread as well as dairy produce. Opposite, Ivy or I dropped a half crown and it fell through a grating never to be recovered, it was no doubt our own spending money or we would remember now some disciplinary parental outcome! Well, a half crown was a coin of considerable value at that time.

Near at hand was a beautiful huge bungalow elaborately decorated in blue and white, with features resembling the Chinese willow pattern. The owner, a Mr Thompson even wore somewhat matching garments when introduced to our family and became a close friend of uncle Albert there.

There was no lawn-mower under our bungalow but there was a large scythe that had to be sharpened with the provided long round carborundum stone, poor dad un-familiar with the tool severely cut his thumb in the attempt to use it and was bandaged for quite a long time thereafter.

We all liked to walk down May Avenue to Shell Beach, no doubt the best spot on the island, there were no pavements but wooden duck-boards had been provided. (there were no proper roads you see, just grassy tracks). I recall dad swimming off Shell Beach one year but the water was too cold and he came out of it blue and shivering badly.

They had a small fair ground there and a slot machine I enjoyed, having a pistol mounted for you to attempt to shoot down a half dozen metal cats. I watched a man at a shooting gallery too, he was aiming at printed targets, and even at that age I found myself wondering why it is that many folk got a thrill if they could just have something to shoot at. Like most children I was pleased to get pea shooters and catapults (for only tuppence) when at home. Perhaps the desire to shoot is inborn?

On a meadow close by the sea wall was a man selling aeroplane trips at five shillings a time, it was an old bi-plane and I loved the roar of its engine and its distinctive smell of aircraft spirit.

There was a piano in the bungalow and cousin Clara was there on one occasion and played some jazz, though uncle Albert called it 'syncopation', she was a first class player and interested me

immensely. Uncle Albert had a gramophone there too and liked to play a record of Greta Keller singing 'Auf Wiedesehen', (not the later composition that Vera Lynn sang), another had a tune called 'There's something in your eyes, I see' I don't know the singer though. Other records I think were 'Oh Donna Clara', 'Chloe' and 'Tell me tonight' of which uncle was especially fond and could sing well himself.

We had a shocking experience going home from Benfleet station once when the station platform was packed solid with trippers going home. The train came in from Leigh-on-sea and some fool swung the door open long before it had stopped. The door could be heard knocking down people on the platform like nine pins, one after the other with a sickening thud, thud, thud, until the train came to rest among the screaming crowds! Luckily for us, we were nowhere near the front of the platform.

Moving to our new house was becoming imminent and I recall before the big day that we went to a party downstairs at the Marshall's, they had a black monstrosity of a piano that Jack banged upon appallingly, their front parlour was glaringly painted in a royal blue and white, hideous in the extreme! and a most boring time was had by all, (in spite of us all doing our party pieces!).

I suppose we had too much on our minds about moving and it seemed strange that we were actually going to live in the brand new road. We finally moved there in March of 1931. Our first delight was the realisation that this was our first experience of electric light! Like all mothers at moving time, mum slogged away getting everything straight and ship-shape for the general well being and comfort of the family. Ivy and I at last each had a room of our own, both at the back of the house, mine was small and square but adequate, mum and dad of course had the largest bed-room, it being at the front of the house. The street door and stairs were at the left of the one large living room (about 16feet by 11).

It was heated by a 'Kitchener' stove. i.e:-a 9 inch square grate at the right hand side of an iron doored oven, the entire unit let into a huge recess in the parting wall and had to be cleaned regularly with Blacklead, (wonderful for ironwork) sold in a yellow packet with the maker's name of 'ZEBO' printed on it. The hearth on which it stood had to be cleaned with Hearth-stone which created a pure white very attractive appearance (also used for the front door step). Both these processes however were terribly hard work, (mum wouldn't let me sit on the step foretelling that I would get 'piles' on growing up, so I never did but like my dad I got 'em just the same!) There was a wooden over-mantel for the fireplace, but no tiled surround. Mum never used the oven part due to smoke blowing into the room but it served well as a plate warmer. The fire itself was excellent with the metal glowing red hot when the air was admitted at the bottom. It was a great treat for us all when dad roasted chestnuts on its pull down flap.

In the corner of the room a larder was built in, under the stairs. Opposite the front window, (double-casement style in wood) was a central door to an 8 feet 'L' shaped kitchen with its window on the back wall with sink under. There was a cupboard from floor to ceiling in one corner which mum used for general storage, our toys being put there in the bottom on the floor.

A door in the 'L' corner gave access to the (6 feet by 5) bathroom. A further door, on the left centred the wall to expose a short passage having a coal cupboard on its left opposing the toilet on the right and straight ahead was our side door. The path from our front gate continued around the left side of the house leading then to a concreted fore-court some 6 feet wide extending along the entire back of the house.

The front garden was about 25 feet deep and the back at least 60, but raised about 5feet by means of a steep slope ascended by about six steps centrally provided. Interwoven wire fences separated each residence and continued along the front to separate the gardens from the outer pavement.

Our front and back gardens put dad in his element and he set about putting a concrete path down the centre of the back garden and digging flower beds both front and back, but the soil was very poor, bogged down with clay, mum helped him a lot and Ivy and I were sent down to the local field with shovels and our barrow to dig out mould for use as a top-soil.

Dozens of times we must have made that trip with poor Ivy doing the heavy stuff of course, but we never minded any of the jobs we were asked to do, so I ask you not to imagine that such duties were in any way cruel or over prescribed. Indeed Ivy agrees with me that we actually enjoyed helping our parents out in this way, probably due to understanding the problems they seemed to frequently encounter.

Remember too that our way of life was by no means unique for the time. I'm sure all able bodied children had innumerable jobs to do for their parents, mainly washing-up, odd bits of cleaning, tidying up (especially of their own things) and shopping of course, presumably to give them a grounding in economic purchasing.

So saving too, became an important aspect to any pocket monies we acquired, for example I was given a red letter-box shaped tin one Christmas, it was slotted to take coins, so was ideal for the purpose. Both lending and borrowing were also strictly taboo. "If you acquire any money son" dad would say "try to save half and spend half if you possibly can" Thus I've ever since been a bit frugal (to keep the wolf from the door) so have never quite lost my parent's flair for economical living. Mum held the purse strings though, dad presenting her with his unopened wage packet that she would divide up in amounts for house-keeping, family clothes etc. giving dad back some for his fags etc. making sure that some, however small must go to their Post Office savings account.

Now settled in our new home, mum positioned the old stool in front of the fireplace, and sat on it saying "I could be happy here for the rest of my days". She hadn't bargained though for the forthcoming events that were to test her powers of endurance yet again, mainly due to the depression years now beginning to take toll of every one's lives of course.

## **PART THREE**

## Chapter 10

Into the bitter sweet years.

The most vivid of my life's memories are perhaps centred on the period about to be described in this and the next few chapters. I must remind you however that even with Ivy's generous help the precise chronology cannot be recalled. It cannot be far adrift however and in most respects hardly matters. Where a date comes to mind though I'll try to indicate it.

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Dickens Avenue was a shortish road of maybe two dozen houses each built in semi detached style and pebble-dashed in typical thirties council-house fashion. The road itself was of concreted surface, its blind end in 'banjo' form to aid turning vehicles. Two thirds down, a quite beautiful sycamore tree graced the pavement on the right hand side of the road. Avenues are streets with trees, so I was told, but that was the only one down our road.

In No.1 were Mr and Mrs Day. That poor lady suffered from cancer and in fact died quite soon after moving there. No.5 housed the Ramage family having three children, a daughter and two sons, Jack, and Jim of my age soon to become a class-mate but my main memory of him was his fervent desire to grow up and become a farmer-he had a mammoth set of toy farm animals to prove it! Woolworths sold them at only (an old) penny each at a scale to match the OO gauge model railways of the time. They were made of lead and painted appropriately, Cows, Sheep, Horses, Ducks, Geese, Chickens, Turkeys, Pigs, fences etc. I recall that the cows and horses legs broke off rather too easily and stood precariously when match-sticks were thrust into the resultant holes to serve as replacements.

At No.7 were I think the Summers family who were all fiery red-heads and could be heard shouting (the man and the children that is) from anywhere in the street! Mrs Summers was stone deaf you see, their son was also a class-mate, (we saw him molested by a horrible old man who enticed a few of us children into a clump of bushes in Victoria park nearby, most of us ran away). Another contemporary was the boy at No.11, That family, the Smiths, were quiet and rather unfriendly, in fact the man became almost violent once following dad's confiscation of the boy's ball that came into our garden too often! but they changed, becoming kind to me by giving me the lad's Meccano set to play with when once I was ill.

The Charington family lived in No.13 (by the design of the road this was directly opposite our house). They were a very kind family of five, the children being Dick, Mary (also in my class) and Jack, in that order. They too were blessed with flaming red hair and were extremely pale faced. In No.19 lived the Toms family who by comparison were almost olive-skinned but did not come from the middle east. Daniel the son being another school chum, his dad an enormous bulbous figure of a man, a postman I think.

On our (Western) side of the road were the Gentles in No.2, a family of five of whom 'Joany' mentioned earlier, (being the little girl with the wonky pram) was the youngest. They were our neighbours (we being in No.4). Our neighbours in No.6 were the

Catons, also a family of five, the children being Roy, Cyril (to become my closest pal at school) and Phyllis. I'll be writing more of the Caton and Gentle families in later chapters.

In No.8 lived the Samways with two sons, Alec and Georgie, the latter being another of my contemporaries, a little bruiser always fighting others but a good pal to me. At No 10 were the Coppings whose only child Kitty was 'fancied' by all us boys. Then came the Drackets at No.12 with two teen-aged sons, the younger of which put a girl in trouble, married her and adored his baby so much that he could frequently be seen thoughtlessly cycling along our road with the baby under one arm! By the Sycamore tree at No.14 lived the Parmenters whose boy Peter rightly punched me on the nose in the school play-ground when I pinched a stick of liquorice from the top of his desk in one class-room where we sat together. There were several other homes whose occupants I've completely forgotton. I suppose it's not surprising that those mentioned nearly all relate to those who were my friends at school.

To my constant annoyance mum always tried to make me look posh and clean for school and because of my fair to ginger wavy hair she delighted in arranging waves in it by crimping it with open fingers tightly squeezed together and me yelling "DON'T MUM!" as she advanced upon me every morning.

The school was the 'Manorside Schools' in Squires Lane. At first (1931) Ivy was in the Seniors and me the Juniors, my Head Mistress was a Miss Stuart with raven hair, she was an almost exact replica of her (white-haired) namesake at our previous school, perhaps they were sisters or mother and daughter. Quite a nice lady but in my early days by far the best was Miss Page, a somewhat rotund very kindly soul who remarked to me her fond regard for Ivy who she taught for more senior English. For me it was Arithmetic and Literature. She read to us the Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn stories of Mark Twain which even to this day I turn to on occasion for an entertaining read. Mrs Reynolds (of an earlier chapter) got to hear of my love of those stories and gave me the money to get a copy of each and this I did from the W.H.Smith branch at Church End Finchley. They were 1/6d each! a small fortune. Miss Page also read us 'Treasure Island'---a super tale though it contained an expression 'fifteen men on a dead man's chest' that I never understood.

Mr Bailey taught us Science, performing fascinating experiments that thrilled me immensely, like heating a brass ball until it would no longer pass through the hole in its accompanying washer. He demonstrated implosion too, to illustrate ordinary atmospheric pressure by boiling a little quantity of water in a large corkable can which thereby filled with steam, he then thrust home the cork and trickled cold water onto the can causing the steam to condense so that neither steam nor air occupied the can which thus completely collapsed inward by the outside air pressure. You can bet I quite liked science and wish now I'd pursued the subject a great deal further.

For Music and History we had Miss Making a most unpopular teacher, elderly, miserable and appallingly strict. For History we had to learn so many dates and even early lessons soon showed me how propaganda is worked into the history books to convince children that the British conquests of India, Australia, New Zealand and all the other countries that made up our 'Glorious Empire' made us

appear to be the best nation in the world. Indeed our countryside is beautiful but why can't we admit that most other countries might at least be our equal and be our friends instead of the eternal suspicion prevailing.

I suppose we are no worse than other nations of course, as for examples Dutch or Spanish histories reveal, but in our case all such hype being supplemented by the 'Land of Hope and Glory' type songs we had to learn for her music class. We did get to learn a lively song of the period called 'The Fleet's In' (well it WAS about war ships!) How the 'Establishment' are always full of peace-talk while relishing their war-like past I've never quite understood. There were other songs of course though many I found rather dreary e.g:- 'Men of Harlech', 'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls', 'Drink to me only with thine eyes', 'Jerusalem', 'To be a Pilgrim' etc. To be fair there were a few lively ones like 'Bobby Shafto' and 'Cherry Ripe' and I must have liked the 'Modulator', a chart Miss Making hung over the black-board that showed us what Tonic-Sol-Fa was all about.

Mr Hacket was a cheery man, plump, balding and wearing glasses. He took us for Mathematics in later years I think and Literature, we acted extracts from Shakespeare then. I read the part of Sir Lancelot, a foolish character, and he told me my voice badly lacked clarity. He read us 'The Broad Highway', 'Don Quixote' (that I could not understand) and 'John Halifax, Gentleman', but early on he had us in fits laughing at the 'Jeeves and Wooster' stories of P.G.Wodehouse, (why do literary boids call him Woodhouse?). Mr Hacket said that if they ever made a film with Arthur Treacher playing the part of Jeeves it would be a huge success, (they did, it was and David Niven played Bertie Wooster). Mr Hacket's ploy was to teach us the difference between the humourous styles of various writers, actors, etc. and so we also had 'Three Men in a Boat' by Jerome.K.Jerome and he indicated how, say, the antics of Laurel and Hardy although ridiculous were in fact bordering on the just possible compared say with the Walt Disney impossible creations where for example Donald Duck falling from an aeroplane stays in mid-air until he ventures to look down, i.e:- it's only then that he actually shows alarm and starts to fall!

We were outside the window of that class room talking, not disrespectfully about Mr Hacket when he heard us. He later jokingly exploded saying "If you're going to talk about me in future, call me 'Chopper' like everyone else does, 'Mr Hacket' indeed!" As you can tell, he was a jolly nice man. I enjoyed 'Composition'. In fact I loved writing and was once able to write the Lord's prayer on the back of a postage stamp.

I recall in my last year there that for composition we had to write about our most memorable visit to the cinema. In my case it had been to see 'Living Dangerously' with Leonora Corbett opposite Otto Kruger. The film had moved me greatly, a thriller where crooks were intent on stealing a record cylinder from Leonora's flat without success, the ploy being to actually have the thing on show but holding a spray of flowers as though it was the vase for them.

Car ownership was slowly increasing in the thirties so in my later years there everybody marvelled at his acquisition in about 1936

of a brand new Morris Eight Saloon, sparkling it was and the only car at the school.

I turn now to Mr Woolley, a tall slim dark haired fellow of handsome countenance in his early twenties. He took us for Sports, Physical Training and Geography. I utterly loathed sport as indeed I have ever since and on the football field his voice could be heard distantly shouting "Mark your man, Huskisson. mark your man!!" but I never did know what he meant! At P.T. we had to leap onto a 'Vaulting horse' then somersault over and onto a huge coconut mat or clamber about on the parallel bars. He was not a disciplinarian, in fact he was quite a softie and all the more likeable, actually commanding his well deserved respect.

Gross misbehaviour at that school demanded that the offender had to collect the stick and book from Mr Ward the head master, a dear kind gentleman whose face was disfigured by a multiplicity of scars from wounds presumably sustained during the war. On receipt of the book the teacher rendered the caning and recorded the recipient and the misdemeanour in it. Such was to happen to me once in an early year and I got as far as raising my hand to receive the downward swish of the cane when he confessed "I can't hit you Huskisson, I can't do it because of your size" True, I didn't like gymnastics or sport but I'll revere Mr Woolley's kind nature always. (Miss Page never caned anyone either but she was not averse to giving us up to five hundred lines such as 'I must pay more attention' &c.)

Although Sport was not my forte I remember liking playground games, for example 'Releaso' where players were hemmed into a corner by members of the opposing side who then had to be overcome by colleagues of those that were trapped. This was a rather boisterous game as was one that I actually did well at, where opposing boys each carried on his back a colleague whose job it was to upset his adversary, (I wonder if Georgie Samways remembers today, as I do, how successful a team we were with me riding upon his back?). Our playground like the girls' was very large and square but we did have a great number of pupils, it had a hard, almost granite like surface, a high wall of yellowish brickwork on three sides, one interrupted by the toilets block, the fourth (school) wall had an often welcome drinking fountain.

A popular marbles game I also enjoyed there entailed sitting against the wall with legs splayed each side of a large 'Glarney' while the players endeavoured to roll their (smaller) marbles in the hope of striking it to claim it as their own. The owner of the glarney meanwhile keeping all the marbles that get past it. Like me Ivy was not really one for sports but it should be told that she was a dab-hand at playing net-ball. I saw her play once when us boys had been taken to the girls play-ground to watch some important match.

I liked playing at 'Conkers', that is throwing sticks into the trees to bring down the horse-chestnuts! We then peeled them, pierced the nut with mum's meat skewer, then cheated a little by getting her to bake them in the oven to make them quite hard. You see the object of the game (when they were singly hung on a string) was to in turns strike the opponent's 'Conker' attempting to shatter it! Yours thus becoming a 'Oncer', 'Two-er', 'Sixer' or whatever.

Mr Breally I must mention. Unlike Mr Woolley, he didn't think twice about using the cane (though not unkindly), and in winter a spot where the cane once fell still hurts on my left hand to this day. He taught us Arts and Crafts and I remember Book-Binding in particular. Card board was cut for the covers and spine of the book, fine leatherette was stuck to these to become a continuous assembly. We then had to sew a series of booklets together at their folds. The book's end papers were then 'Marbled' (psychedelically coloured by squirting paints in blobs onto a tray of glutinous liquid), gently floating the papers on it and slowly withdrawing them to create the right effect. The sewn booklets were then glued down the spine to secure a strip of linen (Scrim). The end papers were now glued to the Scrim and the covers. Finally we added the title in real gold leaf impressed into the leatherette spine by lettered punches previously heated in a flame and hammered into the surface. If you know me you can bet I liked all the craft work as taught by Mr Breally.

## Chapter 11

### Our shops, more visits, music, etc.

Mum gave me a halfpenny almost every day to get sweets before going into school. The school is close to the junction of Squires Lane and Long Lane. These are cross roads with a shop on each corner. Kilmers on the south-west corner sold all the usual childrens' sweets, Sherbet dabs, Jelly Babies, Love Hearts, Sweet Tobacco (strings of coconut coated in cocoa) etc. (lovely), but also they had saw-dust in a barrel and called it "Lucky Dip" or you could get a surprise packet containing toffees, a locust bean and a (useless) toy.

On the south-east corner was Thurlby's shop for more 'up-market' sweets, newspapers and toys. There you could get a good kite for tuppence, your fireworks for November the fifth, your Oxford or Cambridge blue favours for boat-race day (they were beautifully made, often in blown glass, or small celluloid dolls embellished with the appropriate colour blue feathers), and outside the shop hung a little machine that would deliver a thin slab of milk chocolate in a bright red wrapper called a 'Penny Nestle's' but whole pennies were hard to come by! Our papers came from Thurlby's shop. We had no daily paper but on Sundays we had 'Reynolds News' published by the Co-op Society (a Labour Party sympathiser) for dad and 'The News of the World' for mum. She liked to do the crossword but cursed her luck when the answers were different to hers! "I don't like all the alternatives" she would exclaim almost every Sunday. They had a fashion competition also where about ten pictures of well dressed women had to be put in order of preference---but she never got it right! Where she scored though was by cutting out the free copy of a popular song of the day that was printed inside the back page, I think. She also took 'The Red Letter', and later 'The Woman's World'. For a time they switched from Reynold's News to 'The Empire News' and later 'The People' I had 'Jingles' at only a penny and printed in two colours, mum liked the serial in it called "In search of their father" (children's adventures up the Amazon jungle). I also had 'Film Fun' in black and white being principally comic strip stories featuring film comedians and also a detective story series called 'Colwyn Dane' I think. Later on I had 'The Modern Wonder' a boy's science paper. Ivy had 'Picturegoer' (she was a film buff before I got the bug). I don't recall dad reading anything in particular except an occasional 'Evening News' or 'Star' newspaper.

Opposite Thurlby's was a haberdashery shop that we had no occasion to use but on the remaining (north-west) corner the brewers, Charrington, had a small Off-Licence shop that sold us our Christmas wines, Australian sherry, Port and White wine come to mind as does Peppermint and Stone's Ginger wine. Stones issued a jolly good free book one year showing innumerable party games and conjuring tricks. This fascinated dad and me, but the drink? Ivy and I were never allowed near the stuff though of course we were free to enjoy Cream Soda and the like. The Off-licence also sold chocolate bars and sent Ivy home to me with some such sweets as a gift when once I was ill. He knew us well for we used to go there to get dad some Light Ale or mum's Guinness from time to time. It was here I first saw Milky Way introduced.

On one such errand Ivy and I had the misfortune to lose mum's ten shilling note! We were frantic journeying back and forth searching this way and that. Our normal route was through an alley-way which ran up the side of the Gentle's garden before entering Queens Road for Squires Lane and it was by retracing our steps in that vicinity that our luck changed when Ivy found it among long grass at the side of the alley-way, it was quite some time before we got over the trauma of that experience.

About that time we had little Jean (Vail) come to stay for a while because Aunt Edie was expecting her second baby. Mum and Dad promptly took her and us around to several local places for the kiddie to enjoy. I especially recall her riding on my back (with me as a horse) in Golders Hill Park. Soon mum began to worry about the child though because, as she put it "She fretted so". It was therefore a bit of a blessing when it was eventually convenient to let her go home.

I think it was early in our Dickens Avenue days (Ivy thinks it was actually before, but no matter) that dad took us up to the Barnet tram terminus and back on his tram, driven by his close work-mate, Mr. George Tavener. A red-faced jolly rotund character with a big twirly moustache (and resembling 'Old Bill' the first world war character of cartoonist Bruce Bairnsfather) and wearing huge gauntlet gloves. These were a trademark for tram drivers whose cab was in those days open to the elements and in cold weather they would be seen slapping their arms across their waist to ease their numbing fingers as the tram trundled on its way---but not on our trip which was in fine weather.

Perhaps it was a Sunday for the tram was empty both ways. We sat inside, up the front going, there I could watch Mr Tavener, how he turned the handles for acceleration and slowing of the vehicle. One of brass had a vertical rod terminating at the floor where attached to it was a pawl engaging a ratchet which he seemed to kick prior to the tram groaning to a stop. I explained all this in detail to Ivy as we next sped on our way, whereupon he kicked it again and nothing happened! His laughing face turned to beam at me to show that I was heard and becoming a know-all no doubt. Coming home we sat upstairs where we saw dad flip all the seat backs over for the reversed journey as trams don't turn round. The seat at each end of the tram was quite long and extended around the curved end so it was a delight to sit on the straight part of the highly polished seat and slide all the way round the curve when George braked the tram for it to stop. It was a smashing ride for us indeed.

Mum and dad's fairly frequent visits next took us on one to Yonge Park (at Finsbury Park) where now lived Uncle Billy and Aunty Edie, (I think they had their flat on an upper floor). The purpose was to see their second child, Yvonne Charlotte, soon to be nicknamed 'Babe'. Ivy and I were pleased to be able to take her in her pram with young Jean to the Finsbury Park proper, nearby. I remember Jean enjoying the swings as we gave her the necessary pushes to and fro. Uncle Billy was keen to play his newly bought gramophone record of Rose Marie with the Indian Love Call on its other side, a 12 inch dark blue Columbia record sung by Edith Day I think (and maybe Heddle Nash) who at the time were performing it in the West End I believe. They had a marble-top wash-stand that fascinated me, it having an array of brass rods meant for hanging

towels upon but which I preferred to keep swinging back and forth! (to hear them clang, I suspect!)

We liked a trip to Leytonstone too, where we would be taken to see dad's sister Lil and her hubby Uncle Fred (Butler). To get there we'd take the No.9 tram to Upper Holloway Station and board the steam train stopping at Crouch Hill, Harringay, South Tottenham, Black Horse Road, Walthamstow, Leyton and then we would get ready for the next stop where we knew the porter would scream out with pride "LeytonSTO--ONE!!!!" the only place in London I knew where you could get a ride on a tram for only a halfpenny! Strange, isn't it, how quite insignificant events stick in the mind? For another example, Ivy recalls seeing a dog fall from high above Leytonstone's fire-station but knows not whether it died as a result.

The Butlers lived in Napier Road and always seemed to be a happy crowd including daughters, Ivy, Grace, Molly and Joan. They had a son, Jack, too. We took to Joan and Jack rather as we did to Peggy and Gordon and were similar contemporaries age-wise. They had a glass lean-to kitchen extension which to me seemed to be always full of steam and condensation probably because Aunty Lil was engrossed in cooking, no doubt for us visitors! she certainly knew how to cook. Uncle Fred was a jolly moustachioed red-faced man not unlike the afore mentioned George Tavener but looking just like the engine driver he in fact was! He smoked a pipe which seemed to be a permanent feature of his countenance, protruding it seemed more from his cheek than his mouth. He was a nice uncle to us anyway.

About this time (1931?) the Tramway Co. put on a show in the hall of their North Finchley depot and here both mum and dad got a chance to show off their talents. It was nice for them because neither had performed publicly for many years. Mum sang her favourites, "My little grey home in the west", "When you come home", "Where my caravan has rested", "Beneath thy window" and "Alice where art thou", and she accompanied on the piano for dad's comic songs which may sink into oblivion if I don't write snatches of them here:-

#### THE WIGGER WAGGER

Not long ago on a winter's night  
I knocked the candle and the house caught light.  
The firemen came and the stairs gave way.  
I was in the attic when the hose began to play.  
Water oughter put the fire out,  
But it didn't put it out just as it ought,  
So I yelled for help and a fireman brought a ladder, but the ladder was a lot too short.  
So with me little wigger-wagger in my hand  
I hopped out of the window,  
O upon my soul! up a telegraph pole,  
O lor lum mee with my face as black as coal.  
I was quivering, I was shivering,  
Like a tight-rope walker understand?  
With my shirt on fire, I was dangling on the wire  
With my little wigger-wagger in my hand!

-----  
Here's his other favourite:-

## THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

(A string of patter on boarding house land-lords, etc) then:-

On Monday I had bread and dripping,  
On Tuesday it was dripping on bread.  
On Wednesday and Thursday it was dripping on toast,  
Well that's only dripping on bread.  
On Friday I complained to the landlord.  
"Oh, hain't hit a pity he said.  
So on Saturday morning, by way of a change, (pause)  
I got dripping without any bread!

(A string of patter about a new car) then:

On Monday I pushed out my motor.  
On Tuesday I gave it a clean.  
On Wednesday and Thursday the neighbours came round,  
Saying "Oo what a lovely machine?"  
On Friday I filled it with petrol,  
And polished it up very hard.  
But on Saturday morning it started to rain (pause)  
So I pushed the thing back in the yard!

The above were also regular favourites among the relatives when we had our family parties, not forgetting Uncle Billy's rendering of 'My Blue Heaven' and 'Mighty Like a Rose' which were always a 'must', and for most of the songs Ivy was now fully adept at the piano. She also played for even me to sing in my squeaky soprano tones of that time the sentimental 'Little Mother', 'In the Valley of Roses with You', 'Rose Dreams', etc.

Dad made me a comedian's outfit consisting of a comic bowler hat lined with a wig that hung down over my ears while mum made me a saucy waistcoat, the ensemble to aid my singing of comic songs such as Harry Champion's 'Any old iron' at our family do's.

Ivy had been originally taught the piano by Miss Thorpe in Manor Park Road, but had now advanced to come under the wing of Miss Douglas, a lady composer living in East Finchley. Ivy was now ably playing all the usual piano students' classic, "Fire! Fire!", "Blumenleid", "Melody D'Amour", "Idyll", "Robin's Return", etc., but her party piece was Sinding's "Rustle of Spring". Popular songs of the day were now high on her list however. "Any broken hearts to mend" and "Says my heart" come to mind.

Mum got me interested in the piano also and I was now learning with Miss Thorpe but she would be in her kitchen shouting instructions to me and on occasion rushing in to whack my knuckles with a ruler if I made a mistake! If I got something right mum noticed that I just played it with no attempt to look at the music! All in all the music lessons proved to be a dead loss though I did manage to play "Wonderland", and "Puss in Boots" etc from the 'Ezra Read' tutor book. Mum herself played by ear with her forefinger and third finger crossed peculiarly to emphasize a melody note and only knew three chords and those only in the 'C' key but could accompany dad or herself if the tonic sol fa appeared on the song copy. She showed me her three chords and thus I started playing in my own queer way and so my lifelong interest in music began.

A very old blind man would come occasionally to tune the piano and once when he'd finished work on it mum ventured to ask him "Could you play 'The Maiden's Prayer' for us?" This he did, and listening I was quite enthralled by his skill and memory and rather fascinated by the clacking of his long un-cut finger-nails upon the piano keys!

It's strange that dad, once when alone in that room was actually heard to play a quite beautiful arpeggio up and down the piano keys but was never heard playing at all before or after that one occasion, showing no special interest in the piano or other instruments at all. Quite puzzling really. One can only assume he had some training when he was young but never took up the subject. Anyway, gardening was now his true love (apart from mum, or course).

This was the period when Aunty Clara would come and admire all the blooms in dad's garden in which mum, too, had a keen interest, sowing packets of seeds, reading all the gardening catalogues, etc. I would be sent with a shovel and a bucket to travel the local streets collecting up all the horse manure. Ivy and I would walk to Cherry Tree Woods in East Finchley to gather up leaf mould because the soil at home was of a heavy clay type and as mum would say "Full of twitch!"

I liked those woods, to see the squirrels scampering about up and down the trees. Just along the entrance path too there was an electricity sub-station and if you peered through its letter-box ultra-violet and other coloured lights could be seen, some flashing from time to time---all a bit eerie and science fiction like! but our job entailing several visits was to get dad's leaf mould. Without it there'd be no flowers for Aunty Clara and if dad forgot to give her a bouquet to go home with she was not backward in reminding him with the query "Where's my bloody flowers, Harry". She was a lovely, cheery, cockney type lady who dad was for ever pleased to oblige.

## Chapter 12

### Settling down.

Down at the wood yard on Red Lion Hill they were selling packing cases originally intended for very large glass panels, so they were a bargain at only one shilling and sixpence each. Dad got more than excited about them and we went down there with our little barrow he had long since made and bought quite a few, necessitating several journeys.

His idea paid off well for he built probably the best shed we've ever seen, like a small bungalow in appearance and positioned in our back garden so that it encroached partly within the raised sloping region and with windows extending fully along its back to give a full view over the garden. A full length bench he placed directly beneath them and provided a complete wooden floor and shelves for his tools. Mum's huge iron mangle was put in there too. The shed's door was on the side in the portion that projected onto our forecourt (I suppose now called a patio). At the forecourt's end was a wooden fence that locally divided our territory from the Gentle's and here dad stacked all his ladders and surplus wood etc.

Dickens Avenue was now well established with all kinds of street vendors trying to make a living. We had the Muffin Man, a man selling winkles and shrimps, another with his rag and bone cart who, like the Muffin Man, could be heard from a great distance clanging his bell. There was the 'Wallsy' man i.e. he sold Wall's ice creams from his navy-blue tricycle emblazoned with black on white printing stating "Stop me and buy one", 'Snow-fruits' (and later 'Snow-creams') were one inch triangular in section by about five inches long, they were a penny each but if you had as much as tuppence you could buy what they called a 'Brick' some 4 x 2 x 3/4, smashing and what a joy when you chewed the wrapping paper to savour the remaining oozing drops! But a competitor had a similar tricycle, but painted in Old-English script the words "Daily Ice Cream" in bright green on cream paint. He sold his very nice ice cream in tubs (with a fraudulent deep recessed bottom) or as an alternative, in tub size but ornamental small plastic bowls in various pastel shades. Another vendor was the 'Eldorado' ice cream man, not a patch on the others but having the same kind of trike though painted very pale blue lettering on a white ground.

There was also a man who thrilled the children with what was known as the 'Joey in the bottle', a little pink glass figure of a man suspended in a bottle of water and he would rise or fall at will, merely by pressure on the cork. I was lucky one day when a man came down the street selling goldfish and mum let me go and buy one. Then we had a charming little man come around, we knew him as the 'Friday Man' as that was the day he called with all manner of merchandise, haberdashery, groceries, oils and polishes all bedecked throughout his little Austin Seven saloon car. Mum bought many of her wants from him, and quite a lot from the 'Betterwear' (or was it 'Kleeneeze'?) brush man, another frequent hawker.

Since all these vendors arrived but occasionally and never together, our road was not at all the busy thoroughfare my notes above may suggest. Thus it was more a playground for all the

children. On the ice of winter we made a super slide in the road under and along by the sycamore tree. In summer we played the marbles game of 'See ya roll' in the gutter where each rolled their marble in turn endeavouring to strike the opponent's ball to keep it if successful.

We played 'Hop-Scotch' by chalking the squared numbers on the pavement where 'Five-Stones' was also popular, the girls would be skipping 'higher and higher' maybe, or skipping fast to the rhythmic 'One a penny, two a penny' rhyme down by the sycamore tree. Once, alone on a very hot day I sat down by the lamp-post outside our house and while day-dreaming deeply in thought I hadn't noticed that I had dug away the accumulated dirt normally nestling between the surrounding paving stones. However a quick scuffling of the feet put the dirt back in order.

Dad made us a pair of stilts too from his surplus wood supply, they were great fun and soon other neighbours children could be seen walking about on them or wanting to borrow ours.

Night-fall was a warning that bed-time was imminent and when playing down the bottom end of the road a distant sound could be heard from a lady standing at her gate shouting "WI--LF!" in mum's penetrating unmistakable contralto voice. Woe betide us if we didn't respond at once! Playing in the road on Sundays was of course taboo. We could go to the park but "Don't get those Sunday clothes dirty!"

Children never like bed-times do they? I remember resisting the idea of bed once, storming up the stairs when my plausible arguments had definitely failed. When reaching the top of the 'wooden hill' (as dad called the stairs) Dad shouted "Wilfred! come back down here!" When dad called me 'Wilfred' it meant trouble, he otherwise always called me "Bill" or "Captain". On returning to the sitting room he kindly said "Always kiss your mother good-night when you go to bed, it doesn't matter about me, but she's the most important person in your life and you can never be certain that you will see each other again". So I didn't get a wallop and I kissed her---AND him, and remembered to do so for the rest of my childhood and beyond.

Ivy was the same and feels that my foregoing anecdote also related to her. Although we are at variance on this it doesn't matter. What does is that our mum and dad were full of affection for each other, and to us, so its natural that their love we reciprocated.

They continued to take us on trips here and there, to London for the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace and to Whitehall to see the Household Cavalry and somewhere near the Mansion House to see the Lord Mayor's Show. I had been under the impression that we were to see a show of the theatrical kind but we waited and waited on the pavement edge until along came the Lord Mayor's Coach and a load of flunkies in a sort of carnival procession. For once I was really bored.

Southend-on-sea! now that was the place for me! We were day trippers there on several occasions, a magical place for children and once we arrived during their carnival festivities. Quite a different and much more lively procession down the High Street there, and we followed them down to the sea front and dad got us

our dinner at a restaurant called 'Blacks' (but decorated in green on white) where we had to form a long queue outside to get a table. Nearby was an amusement arcade with a new fangled photograph booth that supplied your photograph and showed thereon your weight and the date it was taken. Opposite were the individual motor boat rides in a rectangular pool on the eastern side of the pier. Close at hand were two large pleasure boats, single funnelled steam boats (like ocean liners to me), one was 'Brittania', the other 'The Prince of Wales'. They took passengers out to sea for a shilling trip of an hour or so, playing records all the way. One I remember being the 'Blaze Away' march and another 'The Stein Song'. There was a narrow open flight of steep stairs down which I was able to enjoy the thrill of watching the engine parts, in steel and brass all moving vibrantly as we ploughed through the waves, a marvellous ride indeed.

On some visits we would enter the Kursaal and ride on the Ghost Train or watch the people on the Water Chute get splashed as they screamed when their plunging boat hit the water at the ride's end. I liked to see the 'Wall of Death' where the motor cycles careered around a tubular vertical tunnel, (one with a Lion in the side-car!). The customers stood at the top and the bikes hurtled past at only inches away.

Ivy's favourite was much more peaceful, a boat ride through numerous florally decorated and softly lit canals with mini waterfalls and models of gnomes and fairies on the way, they more latterly called it 'The Tunnel of Love', ideal for courting couples of course but a pleasant enough ride for anybody, certainly for us.

Wending homeward mum and dad would buy us on the approach road to Southend L.M.S. Station a packet containing 'Tit-Bits' and 'Answers' or 'Pearson's' weeklies which also had a bag of sweets and a toy inside all packaged for the family's journey home, a nice idea and a treat we looked forward to and all for sixpence! (two and a half 'p'!).

Dad had a tram-conductor pal named Wye and one of our trips was to Southgate to meet him and his lady wife. They were both tall and of slim build, quietly spoken and very kind. Mr Wye took us children into his garden where he showed us how to play 'Clock Golf' having the clock numbers of metal firmly fixed into his lawn as a permanent feature. This was a very enjoyable visit.

I can't say the same for our trip to mum and dad's old friends, Mr and Mrs Hight, they now lived nearby in Summers Lane where cricket was the garden game. As part of my innings I swung the bat and it slipped from my hand and crashed through their lounge window! a huge pane of glass too, I'll never forget the sight of the glass splinters all over their radio-gram and sideboard.--- Nor of course the looks on mum and dad's faces! It was an accident though, so I didn't get a thrashing.

Ivy liked to visit that family from time to time, and it was her practise to always don a hat on trips out, but she underwent a spell of regularly wearing a beret (or 'Tammy' as we called it). This began to irritate Mr Hight who jokingly told her, "If you come around here wearing that again, we wont let you in !"

Have you heard of the Caledonian Market? It's now an antiques fair down in Bermondsey but originated at Caledonian Road and sold junk of little value that was laid out not on market stalls but directly on the cobble stones. Rather like present day car-boot sales it covered a vast area which explains how I got lost there once and panicked until mum found me again! I was really frightened. She and dad took us there a few times, a most fascinating place, I enjoyed it immensely---especially the apple fritters and fruit drinks they bought there for me!

Come Christmas we all went on Boxing day to Great Aunt Edie's 'Bink's family' get-together. Her home was almost Dickensian, the sitting/living room having a large black-leaded cast-iron grate within a huge fire surround, its mantelpiece having a suspended canopy with little knotted balls around. A great black and green marble clock graced the centre of the mantelpiece. There were a couple of sofas and a side-board, several pictures (mostly photographs) on the walls, a very long rectangular mahogany table seemingly held down by its maroon cloth of very heavy chenille. A similar drape of material covered the door, trailing a little to serve as a draught excluder. Similar heavy curtains festooned the window and the centre of the ceiling bore the weight of the most ornate gas-lit device I ever saw, having a couple of mantles almost enclosed in frosted glass globular shades, the metal work was in gleaming brass with a pull lever for brightness control at each end. Offer it a lighted match and 'pf-bom' the whole room would be bathed in the yellow-green soft glow of its bright but somewhat eerie light. I could not take my eyes off it for some time after it was lit, and when I did, two black spots remained before my gaze where the mantles transfixed my stare.

The lavatory was along the passage way on the right and through a door made of tongued and grooved match-boarding, the toilet pan was round within a box arrangement that extended for the whole width, wall to wall, a full length mahogany highly polished seat graced its top and a long chain with ornate ceramic handle operated the cistern fixed high on the wall above. The walls were of white distemper, add to this the strong scent of San Izal and I'm sure you have the picture.

There was a back bed-room having two beds that all the visiting children had to share. I think some were placed end to end uncomfortably, but the smell of the newly washed and starched cotton sheets remains a strong memory today for we were among those who stayed overnight. I can't recollect the others in those beds--probably Gordon, Peggy, Jean and Yvonne at least. I can't recall much else about that room except that the mantle piece had for ornament a first world war aerial bomb cannister at each end. Strange isn't it how people (even today) like weaponry for items of decoration? There were rooms upstairs too. A teen-age girl called 'Biddy' lived there under Great aunt's wing it seemed, but we don't know the ins and outs of that association. Could she have been Uncle Jack and Aunt Edie's off-spring? One could not deny a certain likeness but the idea has never been mooted elsewhere to my knowledge. Ahem! except here of course! but she was seldom seen about the place and therefore didn't 'fit' in as a daughter would.

The stairway by comparison with the rest of the place was in a sorry state of decoration with its beige distempered walls disintegrating, its flakes barely holding on and the plaster

developing numerous cracks. There was a flickering gas jet but no mantle for it. I hasten to add there was no dirt either, the whole house was absolutely spotless in every way.

In the evening, was it Boxing-day or maybe the day after? we were taken for a ride in pouring rain by one of aunt and uncle's guests called 'Chick'. He had a little Austin Seven car and I was delighted with the ride (which took us along the Thames Embankment) and especially with the smell of the leather. Why we went or where we finished up I've no idea unless due to the rain he was saving us part of a wet journey home.

Before leaving the subject I should tell you a bit about Great Aunt Ede, her elegance, her charm, her absolute grace. A really stately lady. In all my life I've never encountered a more lovely person, always impeccably dressed. I'm thinking of her just now, remembering her in a long black satin dress with black lace for the upper bodice. She suffered from a goitre (an enlarged thyroid gland), not that it was really noticeable but it induced her to wear around her throat a black velvet band some 3/4 inches wide and on occasion fronted with a cameo brooch, she would also wear a shawl of the same black lace on her dress.

Her speech was eloquent with some words ever so slightly clipped if ending with a consonant, thus she would tend to call me 'Wilfret' and certainly never abbreviate it to 'Wilf'. Her every manner was as if she sought to be perfect and she very nearly was. A magnificent conversationalist at any level, an excellent cook (the dinners were marvellous), she was uncannily houseproud and a devoted wife to dear uncle Jack. Her early life had been spent as a house-maid to one of the Queen Victoria's 'Ladies in waiting' as they are called. I'm sure she must have been very well educated.

Uncle Jack was a huge man with a curly moustache, a permanent jolly smile and had a Somerset accent to his musically booming voice. He and dad could talk shop for Uncle Jack was a tram driver for the L.C.C. Personality is somewhat indefinable but he certainly had it and was loved by all and fondly respected as soon as he entered the room. Their home was indeed a joy to be in. It and they providing sweet memories for me to this day.

## Chapter 13

### On friends, fishing, etc.

I was making close friends by now, apart from the boys in my class who hailed from our road, Jimmy Ramage, Daniel Toms, Cyril Caton, Jimmy Samways and the Smith boy living opposite. There was a tubby lad called John Morris, a bit of a tearaway named Baldwin, a slim lad Sidney Tofield and another called Bob Priestley, all friends but another's memory has stayed with me more securely, he was Charlie Francis a quiet kindly boy with glasses living just off Long Lane in Manor Cottages by the North Circular Road.

I spent much time at his home, there he had a game called 'Escalado' a horse race game where, by each furiously turning individual handles, the horses were caused to move along the simulated track until one got to the winning post.

Of much more interest to me was his Magic Lantern, a large Victorian metal monster illuminated by a paraffin oil lamp projecting its beam through a complex lens system to throw beautiful coloured images onto a pinned up white sheet, he had dozens of slides, mostly hand painted of a wealth of subjects informative and comical.

My interest in magic lanterns increased when a slide show was advertised to be given by a religious group at a hall in Church End, a district of N.W.Finchley. There was a charge of only a penny for the admission of children but mum wouldn't let me go because she worried for me being out late at night. However at the last moment, after much cajoling, she relented and time was so short I had to run all the way, a 1 1/2 mile journey. I met Charlie there and the slides were beautiful but we couldn't understand what they were all about, the lecture accompanying them being too complicated.

He came to our house once bringing a jig-saw puzzle a good 4 1/2 feet long x 1 1/2 feet wide taking us several hours to complete, it was a fine picture of an ocean liner.

In the Huckleberry Finn story Huck and Tom sail down the Mississippi river on a raft. Charlie and I were quite hooked on the story and Charlie or I suggested that we build one of our own. This we attempted on a small field close by his home, we found oil drums and odd planks of wood all to be lashed together but it was never finished, probably because no water existed locally to float it on!

There was some water in the form of a large rectangular pond about three miles away, it was known by Charlie as the Sheep-Dip in Totteridge Lane, Whetstone. Each armed with a jam jar, net and bent pin for a hook on a string, we went there to catch tiddlers or Sticklebacks, they were easy to catch and we took them home proudly and I stood my jar on the kitchen window sill. We had the gold-fish on the piano its food being ant's eggs so we thought they'd do for the tiddlers too, but no such luck! for during the days following mum had to watch them slowly die rolling over onto their backs one after the other.

Our fishing efforts continued at Parliament Hill fields. There we saw a man catch a huge Pike which thrashed about snapping at his

ankles as he tried to hold it down with his foot in order to extricate the hook, quite frightening really. We caught a few Perch, Roach and Carp and this time mum temporarily let me put them in the bath! but this was also a disaster for they could not really live well in tap water and the Perch being a predator killed off the others in no time at all.

Near our road was a sizeable piece of scrub land where a concrete tunnel had an out-flow to a fairly stagnant brook close by the spot where Ivy and I used to get the top-soil. The brook had overhanging trees that would have made a pretty scene were it not for the rubbish thrown into the widest part, a sort of pond area. I liked it down there though because according to season tadpoles, newts and frogs were easy to catch. Dad would make me boxes for the newts and frogs, but the tadpoles found their way into a jam jar and placed upon mum's kitchen window sill! Of course after watching them die like the sticklebacks she made sure my enthusiasm for fishing had to come to an abrupt stop!

Some of my mates were going about on skates, the cheap ones had no ball-bearings ('ball-bairians' the kids called them). The best ones were of 'Union' make but were ever so dear. 12/6d I think. However, I discovered some in Marks and Spencers with bearings, shoe-clamps and self-guiders--the lot! and still too pricey to scrounge off mum ( 5/-) and my birthday was getting close! Anyway, mum must have given Aunty Edie the wink for she brought them with her on her next visit to us with Uncle Billy at birthday time!

I was soon to be seen whizzing down the road, rapidly twirling, skating backwards and stopping suddenly as desired. Nevertheless I stopped unexpectedly when I saved myself falling by grabbing hold of the chain-link fence along the side of our road, the end of a piece of its wire cut my right middle finger rather badly. Just by the Arterial Road, fronting the Clanfield Lawrence Car Showrooms, was a large expanse of paving the boys could skate upon with no inconvenience to other people. I really enjoyed skating and was fairly adept at it. I hoped to try ice skating too, there was a Rink up at Church-End but somehow I never got around to it.

About that time on the Arterial Road near our skating area, a little girl was killed crossing that busy road. I never saw the accident but saw the poor child laying there on the pavement with people tending her, her deathly white appearance I will never forget. She was one of the Ansell children I mentioned earlier in these writings. I hope she survived but I don't know.

Another super play area was just over the Great North Road and called 'The Rough Lots', a mixture of meadow-land and bushes of hawthorn etc. It encompassed quite a large area and until one acquired the 'feel' of the place one could quite easily get lost. It extended a good mile down the northern side of the Arterial (North Circular) Road, but we had to be wary of an oldish lady tramp we called 'Rough Lot Liz' who lived among the bushes there, for if playing near her encampment she was apt to descend upon you brandishing her large carving knife! I remember dad having great sympathy for such people and calling them 'Knights of the road'. A foot-path was provided crossing the Rough Lots diagonally from an entrance opposite Squires Lane to a distant exit into Summers Lane where Uncle Billy had a close friend, and he walked Ivy and I there once with Jean and Yvonne during their stay. I vaguely remember his friend's family and wife giving us children a glass

of lemonade. It was quite a long walk back but Uncle Billy was always nice to be with.

Uncle Charley, by now a close buddy of dad's, came to see us with his family once. Dad's cockney nick-name for him was 'Oats and Barley'!

By the way, I ought to explain that dad's vocabulary apart from his marvellously expressive arms and hands included a vast 'dictionary' of 'Oats and Barley' type rhyming slang. Here's just a 'taste' of his expressions:-

One on sending us to bed would be "Pass through the 'Rory! O' More!"(door) then, up the 'apples and pears'(stairs), lay yer 'Uncle Ned'(head) on the 'Weepin- Willer'(pillow) and go to 'Bo-peep'(sleep) until the 'day's a dawnin'(morning) and wake up to see the old 'Currant bun' (Sun), shining through the 'burnt-cinder' 'window" . Other examples were 'Frog and Toad' for 'road', 'Cain and Abel'(table), 'Barnet Fair'(hair), 'Bushel and Peck' (neck), 'Chalk Farms'(arms), 'German Bands'(hands), 'Plates of meat'(feet), 'Rubadub dub'(pub), 'Pigs ear'(beer), 'Taters in the mould' (cold), 'Tom-Tit'(shit), 'Jimmy Riddle'(piddle), 'Pony and trap'(crap), yes all his words, not mine, though some prevail in my own vocabulary, I do admit! Do note though that the actual swear word is not used!

He had a strange pronunciation of 'envelope' as 'onvelote' and of 'very' as 'vethy'! otherwise his general vocabulary was quite lucid but all, like his voice, was pleasant to hear. From his army days in India he also used Hindustani phrases e.g. 'Bancurra da wozzey' for 'Shut the door' (I've not researched the spellings) but mum would have said "Put the wood in the 'ole", another was 'Surra pe-edge doe nut muckin budgee' (Even mum frequently used one learned from dad for 'It's the truth!' it being 'Pukka Rookum'! but just as often she would yell 'Strewth!' .

They both used proverbs a lot. Dad comes to mind saying "Beggars can't be choosers", "It's better to be lucky than rich" or "there's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip" and "everything comes to those who wait", and "All things are sent to try us" or after any trouble "As one door closes another opens".

Mum liked "a bird in the hand's worth two in the bush" etc. She had sayings she'd use frequently, these come to mind:- 'I call that indecent! for anything risque, 'Don't get your rag out' if losing your temper, 'Might have caused a bad accident' for any near miss and if you were going out, 'lets be sure you've got clean underwear on' (in case you have an accident). If you had a cold she'd say 'it will be three days coming, three days on you and three days going'. She called a toilet a 'Privvy' or a 'Dunnakin' (whatever that might have been) and if there was ice on the road she always said 'I think about the poor horses!' .

I don't remember dad swearing (well rarely indeed) though he got near to it saying once "You're so lucky, if you fell down the pan you'd come up eating a bar of chocolate!" and he referred to any public toilet as 'The three P's' meaning 'a Piddle and Poop a Penny' or if there was an obnoxious smell he'd maybe say 'two sniffs of that and I'm bloody hungry!' Mum could be moved to naughty words or swearing just a bit more frequently e.g. if anyone wore a short garment she'd call it a bum freezer, or if you

were a long time in the toilet 'Have you got a bit cross-ways?' and if any lass was going out with a boy friend she'd say 'Keep your hand on your halfpenny!' She would be more raucous if she saw an unpleasant countenance, saying 'He had a face like a Dutchman's arse!' or if one was troubled with the runs 'He could shit through the eye of a needle!' I should emphasise that all these were rarely heard of course but could sound quite funny on appropriate occasions.

Now what was I saying? oh yes, I recall 'Oats and Barley' and dad together at our table, with Uncle, seemingly not having a clue, asking dad innumerable questions about the recently introduced 'Littlewood's' and 'Vernon's' Football pools, such as:- "What do you have to do?", "How does it work?", "Does it cost much to do it?", "Can you send 'em a postal order?", "What do you mean by 'The Penny Points'?" (The treble chance had not then been devised), "How do you get your winnings?" etc. etc.

Dad responded as though having 'great knowledge' of the subject, laying out 'The News of the World' showing its page of results and next week's forecast, then a lengthy explanation of the actual coupon with both men engrossed over it and its copy.

With the 'lesson' finished to 'Oats and Barley's' grateful satisfaction (well, I think so, he always had a jolly countenance and a mischievous glint in his eyes), there came something of a surprise---"Is this what you mean?" he said producing from his pocket a fully completed coupon and envelope all filled out and ready for posting!

It was our great joy to visit them at Bromley. Aunty Alice was a superb cook, not even mum could equal her Yorkshire (or Batter) puddings. I was noted for always leaving the best part of any meal until last, and that pudding was definitely it! Cousin Gordon being my idol in all things I would only have something on my plate if he would have it too, luckily he must have liked his mum's Yorkshire pudding just as much as me!

I marvelled at his toys, he had a wonderful 'Hornby' train set the engine having a reversing lever and a stopping device. He had a toy cine-projector too and all us four kids sat out in their kitchen while he projected real moving cine pictures on aunty's white painted door, no sound of course, but wonder of wonders, a real treat.

Whilst there they told us of a tram accident nearby, it went down the hill too fast to turn the corner at the bottom by Grove Park station, apparently it careered across the road having jumped its tracks and then turned over on its side! About that time there was a strange one at East Finchley too, the tram was climbing an incline towards the Archway Road when the road disappeared, having subsided under the weight of the tram-car! The tram fell through the hole to a depth of six to eight feet!

Then we had a disaster of our own, we got news that mum's sister (our Aunty Clara) had been taken to hospital suffering from an abscess under one of her lungs. Mum went to visit her and was utterly stunned at having heard her screaming in agony and shrieking "Kill me!", "Kill me!". They were unable to do anything to effect a cure (probably due to anti-biotics not then being available), and mercifully, after a short while she died. One

wonders why a lovely natured lady like her can be so prematurely taken from us, delivering unwarranted grief far and wide to all the acquaintances who had known and loved her. Her death was hard to believe.

## Chapter 14

### Some gladness and sadness.

I remember going to a funeral when a boy, it could have been our Aunty Liz's or Aunty Clara's who had died in 1932. We rode in carriages all black and polished and drawn by graceful jet-black shiny horses wearing splayed out purple plumes fitted on their foreheads. The journey was from London to the huge St.Pancras cemetery on the Great North Road at Finchley. If, as I think, that funeral was more likely for Aunty Clara she would certainly have had no cause to repeat her oft used request of "Where's my bloody flowers?" for the grave became bedecked with them.

The St. Pancras cemetery is a vast place. As its name indicates its origins were at St Pancras, London where the railway station was built, developments there in Victorian times necessitated the careful exhumation of all the graves and their re-burial at Finchley.

It was not from any ghoulish motive that we would visit the cemetery on occasion, for quite a few relatives were interred there (not least Francis Huskisson, my grandfather, also dad's sister Edie and husband), but its avenue leading from the entrance displayed numerous tombs of the rich and famous. Along the right-hand (southern) side were mausoleums built of marble and stone and roofed like little houses and each having an open-work iron gate that was normally kept locked, but through which could be viewed the coffins of great military personages that were enshrouded with flags, such as the Union Jack, etc. In several cases their families coffins could also be seen in position on adjacent shelves.

On the left side were the graves of others with vast sculptured monuments over to depict some incident in the life of the occupant, or maybe there'd be a group of angels and/or another religious connotation, but the most unusual surely, and rather macabre but exquisitely carved, was that of a very beautiful young lady under the hooves of a galloping horse and wheels of the Hansom Cab it was pulling, thus depicting how the poor lass had died, the whole scene sculptured in a brilliant white marble.

Not so long after Aunty Clara's death, her daughter (our cousin Clara, called 'Poppy') was married to a Mr. John Delaney, and their reception was held at our place, mum and dad giving them the best 'do' they could muster. The house was crowded with all sorts of folk we didn't know and it's regrettable that poor old dad had to go out to our back garden at night at mum's behest, to break up some hanky-panky and 'goings-on', in the summer-house in particular. However, 'all's well that ends well' and the evening did end with all having had a good time.

I'm reminded here that I built that summer-house entirely myself, but under dad's guidance and watchful eye, of course. It was really just a little shed about 5 feet square by 7 feet high. The lower half and roof were of boards left over from dad's packing cases described earlier. Except for the back (and front doorway) the upper half was of trellis and I put a seat inside extending its full width. Mum enjoyed many a peaceful hour sitting in there on warm summer days. It was 'set off' rather by a

somewhat majestic and prolificly fruitful deep-red cherry tree just beyond its north east corner.

Clara's dad, (uncle Albert) was now of course a lonely man and due to being at work by day, could not care for what had been Aunty Clara's pride and joy---`Billy' her parrot! so he gave it to us! He was really an Australian Cockatoo, having a rose pink body, silver/grey wings and a snow white comb that rose stiffly on his head when he was in a happy mood. This was most of the time but the comb would fold down and he could sulk for hours staying perched in his ring if ever strangers appeared, and woe betide anyone approaching him while wearing gloves! That, he just could not tolerate and would shriek his resentment for all the street to hear!

He lived in a cage nearly two feet diameter by about two feet three inches high, his ring in the top and his perch below it, then the usual water and seed dishes clipped to the cage wires on its opposite sides, the whole let into a deep octagonal sanded tray base.

When he rarely lost his temper he would shake his head violently in his seed bowl throwing the seed all over the cage floor and a generous amount on the floor outside! When- ever he was naughty mum would approach him menacingly with a coat hanger, poking it between the bars of his cage. Once he was hit with it! because he had bit me in a way that split my upper lip right through, my face must have been too close to the bars for his liking. He retired to his ring, sulked for hours, finally atoning for his misdemeanour by quietly saying "Billy's been a good boy".

Could he talk then? ----Could he TALK?, At least as clearly as you or I! His vocabulary developed from the days when Aunty Clara would bend her head to the side of his cage each morning, make a kissing sound with her lips and say "Come on then! kiss mother" After several such mornings he eventually greeted her with "Kiss mother, kiss mother!" Rather nice of course but a bit embarrassing to say the least for our mum when on answering the door to the 'Friday' man's knock (or anyone else's) Billy would yell out "Kiss mother, kiss mother"! and if the conversation at the door was in any way protracted he'd let her know with an annoyed shriek of "Come in here, come in here"!

He could not be made to swear though, he just wouldn't. Our neighbours the Gentle's family kindly cared for him once when we were on holiday and on our return, we saw their son 'Chum' had Billy in his cage on their back lawn. Billy had probably used one of his favourite expressions such as "What d'yer want?, what d'yer want?" (most of his utterings were duplicated), Chum was on his knees to the parrot and we heard him asking with exasperation "Say 'Shit' yer bugger, say 'Shit'"! but Billy wouldn't oblige!

We would have him out of his cage quite frequently, his wings having been clipped he could not fly, he liked to sit on ones shoulder and purr away with utter contentment just as a cat does, or he might flap his way down onto the table and if asked to dance would actually do so, dancing from one foot to the other in, if not a graceful, indeed a uniform manner. Or he would discover a tasty morsel such as a slice of apple held out to him that he would carefully hold in one claw to eat from while standing in perfect balance on his other.

Our first experience of the moulting process of birds came when mum observed that while he was undertaking his daily ablutions ritual his beautiful feathers were coming out as he preened them. She became very concerned for him, thinking he may have picked up some disease. She decided to put him into the kitchen sink full of suds, scrubbing him so as to rid him of the 'infection'. No! he didn't go for that at all and dried off sulking and soaking up in his ring! Anyway it seemed to do the trick for he was quite O.K. thereafter. He was a most lovable creature with almost human traits and weaknesses.

Uncle Albert also gave dad a wireless set, the first we ever had that produced its sound through a loud-speaker, in this case in the form of a horn! It had two dials operating variable condensers for station selection and there were other knobs that either turned for tone or volume, or pushed and pulled for switching the 'set' on or off. The power supply came from three batteries, the main one, huge (about 12inches x 9 x 3 delivering 120 volts. Then came the 'Accumulator', made of glass and filled with acid like one's car battery today, but smaller, say 4"x 4" x 7" tall and giving only 2 volts rather than the motorist's 12. Even so it was heavy and had a handle of leather or bent steel to carry it to a wireless shop every two weeks to be re-charged. The third battery was of 9volts and known as 'The grid bias' a conventional looking battery some 7"x 4" x 1" This and the large battery would have to be renewed about every six months, each was provided with holes along the top for you to push plugs into, these were called 'Wander-Plugs' connected with wires from the 'Set' as an aid to good reception and power economy.

Uncle Albert had made the set himself, a very popular hobby at the time, plans of easy to read circuits appearing weekly in 'The Wireless World', 'Popular Wireless', 'Practical Mechanics' etc. However you had to be pretty adept at wood-work to make a presentable cabinet and uncle had made a fine job of it all. Fret-work being his real forte.

Nevertheless as with our crystal set at New Trinity Road it was left to dad to erect a high and long aerial, and plunge a steel loaded earth lead into the ground outside, (all wireless sets needed these to work). The 'Set' itself was quite attractive but with the horn stuck on the top of it mum and dad realised it had gone out of fashion! Dad therefore decided to build the whole lot, 'Set', Horn and all three batteries into one large 'cabinet'. I have to say that dad, although an exellent 'do-it-yourselfer' was no cabinet maker and although a good painter and decorator (the craft learned from his father) he was no French Polisher, so all in all the finished (painted) product now looked rather hideous--- but surprise, surprise, it worked!

We had never listened to sound-radio before and dad was deservedly pleased and so were us children, but mum? She may have inwardly liked it but her disappointing remark was "Turn it orf duck, turn it orf! it's not natural having other peoples voices in your 'ouse"--- but she soon came around of course. Before long we were enjoying the great english bands, I fondly remember The Coventry Hippodrome Orchestra and that of Jack Payne and Jack Hylton, Lew Stone, Harry Roy etc. Also the music hall greats Ronald Frankau, Stainless Stephen, Harry Hemsley, Ethel Revnell and Gracie West, Stanelli, Arthur Askey with Richard 'Stinker' Murdoch, Elsie and

Doris Waters, Gracie Fields, 'Bennett and Williams with their phono fiddles' etc. The latter always sang, indeed made popular the song 'You made me care'. Aside from entertainment of course came the mandatory 'News' which also gave out incomprehensible (to us) weather reports from obscure areas e.g. 'Dogger', 'Biscay' etc. and 'The Fat Stock prices! We knew of only two stations at that time and called 'The Home Service' and 'The Regional Programme'.

Mentioning the above 'phono fiddles' reminds me that they were one-stringed unfretted 'violin' sounding instruments amplified by a horn protruding from the sound board. Amateurs liked to make them without the horn feature and they were quite loud enough for home use. Uncle Albert made one for us using a cigar box for the sound chamber, a fine piece of work but we couldn't play it well enough. He also gave mum two pictures he had made with his Fret-work machine, I don't recall their subject matter but his wood-work was beautifully done, the frames were rounded oblongs like today's television screens but hung vertically, both occupying as much Fret-work on all four sides of the central picture area as the picture itself. They were finished in polished mahogany for the fret-worked wood superimposed upon an oiled white ply-wood backing board.

To my eternal gratitude he gave me a huge object covered by an old mackintosh saying "Here y'are, 'Blood-nut'" (his nick-name for me) "----a present for yer, see what you can do with this"----It was his Fret-work machine!-- what's more he had made us a first class One-stringed fiddle from a cigar box! (a fad among hobbyists probably after the success of Bennett and Williams of wireless fame at the time) Yes, Uncle Albert was so kind to us all, really a 'Good old stick' as such folk were called then, after all he was not from either side of the family.

Uncle Charley, mum's brother (and dad's pal 'Oats and Barley') of Bromley in Kent was also a Fret-work fanatic, covering much of his family's furniture with his efforts, but it was all finished in black Chinese Lacquer. Like Uncle Albert he was quite a hobbyist, radio and photography also commanding his interest. If the Fret-work fashion ever returns however here's a note of caution;-- Even with a modern vacuum cleaner things made of it are the devil to clean! ("bloody dust 'olders" as our mum would say.)

As described before in these pages, any trip to Uncle Charley's family meant an enormous treat for Ivy and I for we could go out and about with Peggy and Gordon. One such ramble took us to Elmstead Woods where a brook flowed and straddling it was a large brick structure surmounted by a large round man-hole cover around which we played about for a while. Near to this we encountered a road, on one side of which was a high wooden advertisement hoarding and right at its top there seemed to be lodged, or so we thought, a football. I became eager to climb up the wood work to get it in spite of the other children's pleas for me to ignore it.

Well, up and up I went and for the first time in my life I experienced vertigo! Until I reached the top and turned to look down I did not realise that I would be afraid of heights and it's true that there is some strange power that actually draws you downward, indeed something unknown made me just jump off the top! I did not trip nor lose my balance or footing etc. I just jumped

and fell like a stone! On landing, my legs folded under me and my buttocks struck the ground with a thump.

I could not walk the journey back to Peg and Gord's house properly, the others virtually having to carry me as I limped painfully along. 'Gosh! there'll be hell to pay' we thought. 'Whatever will we tell our mums and dads?' We couldn't possibly tell them the truth, for climbing about anywhere would have been strictly taboo and wallops would abound! So we had to concoct an outrageous fib.

We told them that we were playing on the man-hole structure and I tripped and fell onto the concreted base of it! Uncle Charley and dad decided to take me to the local doctor who stood me up on his table and removed my trousers. On examining my bottom now turning to a blue/black bruised expanse all over, we all felt happier when he declared that no bones were broken. ---- I'm not sure that anyone fell for the man-hole story though!

Do I hear you ask "What happened to the football?" well there was no football it was just a blown-up brown paper bag!

## Chapter 15

### Our relationships problem (1933 Contd.)

Ivy and I were very close as children through these years as mentioned before, playing inside and out together, having this adventure and that. We had played with dolls, using mum's treasured old stool upside down for the doll's cot. Then there was a craze of buying tiny coloured beads and lengths of fuse-wire to threadle them on, the resulting strings were then folded back and forth, then rethreaded to lock the strings together. By this means we made quite presentable ladies brooches.

We had occasion to visit Granny Huskissons' once where Aunty Grace and Uncle Harry lived down-stairs. It's a happy memory of mine that we were able to play with their quite large, but oh so docile, old English sheep-dog called 'Daney', one could hardly ever get a glimpse of his eyes so generally shrouded by his hair, he was a lovely old thing.

They had another visitor at the time who wore a peaked cap such as worn by milk-men, gas-men etc. He played with me by repeatedly putting it on my head, with me whisking it off again and plonking it over the upper knee of his crossed legs. I became puzzled by a centrally raised hillock on the hat (when over his knee) that was nowhere to be seen when I was holding the hat this way and that! To every-one's amusement it took several minutes for my poor brain to realise that his knee was the cause of my dilemma! It was here on a much earlier occasion I'd been similarly fooled by the old game of 'Fly away Peter, fly away Paul' a dumbfounding trick played on most little children.

One day we went to our local park, quite a pretty one with its myriads of flowers, ducks and swans on an oval pond, a drinking fountain (it made a popping noise like a two-stroke motor-bike engine when you pressed its button for a drink of water), tennis courts, a shelter etc. but no doubt we were there for the swings and see-saws. However there were no children about at all on this occasion, but just laying on the ground was a high quality scooter which of course took our fancy---so much so in fact that we took it (or more likely scooted it) home to show mum. "Where did you get it from?" she asked. "We found it in Victoria Park" we explained. "Well you can bloody well scoot it back there again"! she said. So still not appreciating that we'd done anything wrong, we took (or scooted) it back to the park and with great reluctance left it exactly where and how we had found it.

Not long after the incident I met up with Teddy Reynolds and told him about the scooter and the fountain's motor-bike noise but I could not have told the tale very clearly, for on a later encounter he expressed most crossly to me that there was no motor-bike there to play with at all!

As you know I loved our family parties but I soon learned that other peoples parties were not for me. School chum Daniel Toms' mum invited me to his birthday party where their front room was crowded with children. The 'Tea' was O.K. but we had to play silly blind-fold games like putting a paper tail on a pinned up paper donkey in the right place. We also played Postman's Knock (an embarrassment to me and some other children). Then the one

that put me off parties for life:-- A little girl had to stand against the wall, a little boy was blind-folded, swung around a few times and told to walk towards where he thought the girl was standing, and with his arm and forefinger outstretched, endeavour to poke the finger into the girl's eye! On the way of course the girl was substituted by a half orange, its position adjusted carefully as the finger approached and which squelched when the finger struck home, to shrieks of hysterical laughter (mainly from the grown-ups) and quite a shock to the little boy, ME! We did 'Oranges and Lemons/ too I recall, I was jolly glad to get home.

I think Ivy would agree that she too is the same, i.e:- feeling out of place in strange company. Was it in any way an effect of our up-bringing? I can't think why though. Mum and dad seemed not to be similarly afflicted, at that period anyway they would sometimes go up to the 'Torrington' pub at North Finchley for a drink with friends new and to watch the turns.

I too found no difficulty if I was to visit an individual friend or relative however, as my earlier remarks regarding Charley Francis indicate and I used to go into the Gentle's house on occasion to play with Joany. Mind you I was probably more fascinated with the scientific instruments that they displayed as though they were ornaments. One I truly coveted was a barometer of the kind that had a rotating graduated paper-covered cylinder with an inked pen in contact and rising or falling along the interchangeable paper to indicate the barometric pressure at any time on any day. The instruments were collected either by her brother Doug, a Territorial soldier I think, or by her dad a 'tool-maker'. (It was many years later that I became one myself and discovered for the first time that hammers, chisels and pincers etc, are not the kind of tools that 'tool-makers' actually make). I also have a strange memory of the Gentles having an unusual small wooden cabinet on their living room wall being a home machine supplied by a tobacco company which enabled one to buy cigarettes from. (I'm reminded here that dad once tried a tin hand-rolling cigarette machine but he couldn't take to that kind of tobacco and such fags would not easily stay alight).

The Gentle's were the only ones in our road that owned a car, it was an old three wheeled 'Morgan'. The single wheel was at the rear end and on its near side there was a hole in which to insert the starting handle. Another peculiarity was that its (two I think) cylinders protruded through an opening in the front of its bonnet between the two front wheels. Once started it was a bucket of noise, smell and vibration!

Joany came into our house one evening when our mum and dad wanted to go to the music-hall (The Finsbury Park Empire) to see the American singer Sophie Tucker. Ivy, Joany and me had a great time in their absence singing to Ivy's piano playing of the Layton and Johnstone hit "Me and Jane in a Plane". It sticks in my mind because we learned it so well by singing it over and over again. Even so, I wish I could have seen Sophie Tucker myself at some time before she died, she had a raucous voice and a terrific personality, though mum and dad were not very keen at that time on American style entertainment and so were disappointed with her performance.

They took Ivy and I to the Finsbury Park Empire quite a few times and I'm therefore grateful to them indeed for their foresight in

letting us see some of the great entertainers from their early days there:- Gus Elin the serio comic, Wee Georgie Wood (Child Impersonator with Dolly Harmer as his mother), Randolph Sutton the light comedian and famous originator of the song 'On mother Kelly's door-step' and a weepy called 'What's your poor old daddy going to do?', Billy Danvers the comedian, the great Teddy Brown an extremely fat and famous xylophonist (when we saw him they had squeezed him into a baby's pram and wheeled it onto the stage), 'Afrique' the impersonator who's technique was to quick change and with the aid of make-up and coloured light variations create visual as well as vocal likenesses, Layton and Johnstone the American duettists and famous recording stars, 'Hutch' Lesley Hutchinson who dusted his brow (and the piano!) between songs, the Two Leslies, (comic harmonists), the Western Brothers likewise but in la de da! fashion, Arthur Prince the fantastic ventriloquist making voices come apparently from great distances, and top of the bill everywhere the incomparable risque Max Miller, or Charley Kunz, who's intro music was 'Clap Hands Here Comes Charley' and the audience would sing it for him as he entered the stage.

We also saw one of those comic jugglers with flaming torches trying in vain to do all manner of tricks with them, finally sitting on one and rushing off the stage screaming with his trousers ablaze! At the sight of this, dad rose from his seat shouting "Look! Look! the silly bugger's caught his arse alight!" One show there they called a 'Revue' featuring the Houston sisters Billie and Rene--a good act but we all preferred conventional variety.

Before leaving this subject I must tell you of another act. They were called 'The Jerry Builders' comprising about twenty little 'Jack Russell' type dogs, the stage setting was a partly built two storey house next door to a pub. There was no human on the stage, the dogs rush on and run up and down the erected ladders carrying hods of bricks, laying bricks, using a block and tackle, etc.

One comes rolling drunk from the pub, another comes onto the stage in a little car 'parping' its horn, but too late it knocks the wee drunkard over, some others howl over the 'injured' one until another comes careering onto the stage driving an ambulance. The 'patient' is put onto a stretcher by others and then into the ambulance and driven away! and so on.

The whole act was extremely fast moving, although by today's standards such rigorous training is probably taboo. I have to say it was the most incredible animal act I have ever seen and I am glad I saw it and wonder at the patience of the trainer.

Waiting to go in, mum would buy us each a bag of peanuts for tuppence sold by a man near the queue of us patrons, and if we were really lucky we might see other entertainers and buskers standing at the kerbside, singing and or playing instruments, juggling, etc. Once settled in our upper-circle seats, the orchestra would be tuning up and eventually the great chandelier lights would slowly dim and a little frame at each side of the proscenium would illuminate to reveal a 'No 1' and the band would strike up a lively brassy tune. Cor! What a thrill that moment was! and come the interval, the safety curtain slowly lowered exposing a central screen area on which was displayed lantern slides in the form of advertisements. When the show was over, we would reluctantly leave our seats and descend a multiplicity of

stairs and enter the street. Sure enough it would be raining! Why does that always happen? However while waiting for our tram we were compensated somewhat by the general hub-bub of the night life around us and the reflections of all the theatre and town's lights in the wet roads and pavements.

In 1932 Ivy was 13 years old, the age then that youngsters were expected to get themselves a job for after school time or a Saturday morning and I must say mum and dad were adamant that that policy applied to us like everybody else!

Up at Church End was a branch of W. H. Smith and Son Ltd and Ivy got herself a paper-round there. Some paper-round that was! I went with her at least once and behind the shop was a short roadway leading to a room having a long table at which the news-boys and girls had to collect their papers, mark them up and put them in delivery order.

Poor Ivy! there must have been about a hundred paper's per day for her to deliver, the weight of them was terribly heavy, I tried to lift them but it was too much for me! However, I was able to deliver a few here and there I remember, to some snooty type houses in a place called Harvey Close. If my memory serves me well I think she had to start the round at about 7 a.m. on Mondays to Saturdays, for six shillings per week I think, (that's 30p in today's coinage).

Mum and dad began to notice that Ivy was slowly developing odd psychological traumas. Though apparently happy by day we became aware of noises in the night while she was sleeping, the sound was rhythmic, remarkably like that of someone sawing wood. Mum quietly investigated and discovered that while sleeping, Ivy rocked her head back and forth on her pillow for very long periods.

Then she suffered a bout of sleep-walking and one night came downstairs, cleared yesterday's ashes from the grate, re-laid the coming day's fire with correctly placed paper, wood-sticks and coal and would have lit it had she not been discovered in time.

Perhaps these problems were something to do with her maturing to puberty which seems possible. Maybe though, she had a subconscious fear of having to leave school to start full time employment during the coming year.

Or could it be the result of us all getting a bit of sudden, shocking and unexpected news?-----i.e:-

DAD GOT THE SACK!

## Chapter 16

### The recession bites

The thirties depression was now worsening but any possibility of dad being unemployed had never been considered, things had been pretty stable for years, so dad getting the sack rapidly changed our life-style.

It seems a passenger on dad's tram had asked for two tuppenny tickets, dad punched them accordingly but the man then apologised saying "Sorry! I'm so used to having two tuppennies I really want just a fourpenny ticket today". Dad retrieved the two tickets and punched a fourpenny one. Later a couple boarded the tram and asked for two tuppennies. Dad gave them the tickets he'd recovered, at which point an inspector checking tickets discovered that the tickets had been punched at an earlier now incorrect fare stage, hence the instant dismissal with no appeal allowed. It's quite amazing really that this simple incident caused a complete change to our family fortunes and subsequent history. You see the depression slowly rubbed off on mum as her hopeless attempts to manage on so little income did not abate for several years. There was no redundancy pay in those days and unemployment benefit was outrageously low.

On hearing the news of dad's job loss I cannot honestly recall mum's reaction but I sure can guess it, for any unfortunate event would lead her to exclaim one of her two profanities: either "Aw my Gawd duck" or "Sworp my Gawd duck".

Dad must have felt the injustice he'd endured very deeply and I recall him going a couple of times to see some chap called a 'Poor man's lawyer' residing up in Hertford Rd or Bedford Road in Finchley High Road, but nothing transpired legally. Strangely he had always seemed to me a bit of a poor man's lawyer himself, for many's the time colleagues (or more likely our relatives) would seek his advice on all manner of their personal problems. For now though he was defeated and soon attempted to set up in business on his own.

For a start he got some cards and bill-heads printed calling himself a 'general handyman', as indeed he was, able to draw on much home experience and his early years helping his father. However, I don't remember him getting any private work at all but he did manage to get just occasional jobs of painting and decorating for the local Council.

Ivy walking up Squires Lane one day and impressed by the sight of a man very high up a ladder and painting a tall stench pipe was suddenly horrified when she realised it was dad on one of his Council jobs.

At such times he worked with our next door neighbour, Mr. Arthur Caton, who's predicament was similar. They became firm friends and developed a high pitched whistled morning call sign (musically a high C, G, A, C) made by who was on the step and ready for work first each morning. The muffled identical reply could then be heard from within the neighbours house.

It was natural therefore that Arthur's son, Cyril and I adopted the same musical phrase on leaving daily for school. Cyril and I

thereafter remained very close pals until the end of our school-days.

Still my very best pal through those years was always Ivy. Nowadays its hard to believe that in those days she had a mischievous 'bent'. Being four years my senior I can't say whether through sheer bravado, a sense of adventure or a desire to maintain mum's food supply we chose to go scrumping which I suppose is hardly listed as petty crime. Children however were indeed wary and in fear of the approach of policemen as you could bet one was within only a few streets away. Cyril and I thought they had miniature wirelesses inside their helmets to hear whatever we were saying!

On both sides of the North Circular Road was an array of allotments which Ivy and I ventured to plunder! "Coo look, I've", I yelled, "There's a lot of carrots here!". An unexpected reply came from a man out of view shouting "And that's where they're bloody well stopping". Understandably we made a hurried retreat.

We had more luck at Strawberry Vale, the gate to it is at the south-east corner of the Finchley High Road junction with the North Circular Road. A sort of coppice cum unkempt scrub land is to the right. Here were some abnormally high pear trees interspersed with horse chestnut trees from which our school boys acquired our conker supply when they were in season.

Ivy and I though took the gravelled track through the vale. It started just inside the gate after descending some steps. The wide-ish track had a tall brick wall to its right, both extending some quarter of a mile, they terminated at a large farm-house where one could buy fruit and other produce. However, we were more interested in a preceding iron gate giving access through the wall, once through we gathered a sizeable quantity of Victoria plums and pears I think, all growing espalier fashion against the aforesaid wall. Strawberry Vale was a strangely quiet peaceful place yet so near to the traffic going past. At the farmhouse the track widened to embrace a huge walnut tree centering the house front, shortly thereafter the track petered out at a large meadow where geese, turkeys, chickens and a goat freely roamed and occupied one or more of several rotting first world war "Old Bill" type buses still in their fading camouflage green livery. There was never a soul about and quite apart from the scrumping pleasure, we were very fond of the place, just as somewhere to go.

Before leaving the subject of petty crime, another misdeemeanor included my joint effort with Cyril and other schoolboys to break into a garden shed down an alley a couple of streets away, but what we were after I really don't know and anyway we couldn't get past its heavy padlock. I did once, quite alone, steal a miniature smokers pipe (intended as a cigarette holder) from the counter of North Finchley's Woolworth's store. Well, I coveted it for such a long time but didn't have the necessary threepence to buy it, you see.

As boys, Cyril and I had an adventure involving a walk through a culvert tunnel flowing with water about six inches deep. We took off our shoes and socks to do it but the further in we got the darker it became, all rather frightening really. It traversed under Lyttelton Road diagonally near its playing field. To get there a footpath led from East End Road nearly opposite the Five

Bells pub, scene of the (many years earlier) murder of Lord George Sanger of circus fame. Ivy and I walked that path once and by surprise came upon Uncle Billy playing tennis at the courts along there. I hadn't known he was so very proficient at the game having won several cups and other trophies for his skill.

Quite late in my life I've become convinced that serious worries provoke illness or at least a run-down state of health. In my case the onset of rheumatoid arthritis and the occasional boil or carbuncle.

Such must have been the case with dad, forever cheerful, but during his long spells of unemployment he developed the most appalling carbuncles entailing the deployment of scalding hot poultices of bread and later kaolin, and that most horribly smelly drawing ointment, yellow basilicon. Strangely, as time went on, if he got a boil I quickly followed with one - probably due to the resulting staphylococcus germs in the air so difficult to control.

In the early days of this problem I became aware of a small inflamed lump on my neck's right side. Its effect tended to pull my head over towards it as it grew ever larger and larger. We thought it was a boil and mum gave it the old poultice treatment but when it reached, headless, the size of a hen's egg (no exaggeration) dad had to take me down to see Dr Grimson on the corner of Squires and Bow Lanes. He called it a sebaceous cyst and was busy preparing a hypodermic syringe to withdraw it with a large diameter needle when in fear I asked him "Can we get rid of it with some medicine?". But he laughed and dad had to hold me down as he applied the needle.

I was not only crying afterwards but he made me up a bottle of a bright yellow horrible iron tonic into the bargain - I must say in reality he was as kind as could be and I was able to straighten up my head again, but I noticed as we departed that dear dad was weeping. Only a small circular scar resulted but to this day that neck area remains sensitive and I cannot bear to have anyone touch it, (such is the same regarding my appendix scar as is the scar on my fingers from my skating mishap described elsewhere and my lathe accident mentioned in a later chapter. The doctor also prescribed ultra-violet light treatment.

I think I visited the Royal Northern Hospital for it in Holloway Road twice a week for the next two years and initially I had months rather than weeks away from school. The treatment entailed a lengthy No 9 tram ride to and from that place, a long wait for attention sitting on long wooden forms there, an hour's ultra-violet light exposure sitting in a circle of other children, and of course vital hours lost from school. Mum and dad took me the first time and the 'Specialist' declared that it was all caused by my having such an old father! What rubbish! (Dad's silver grey hair from shell-shock in the war made him look much older than his early forties years). The 'school board man' came from time to time as was customary, to check on why I was not at school.

Uncle Charley heard about the boils we were having and posted a 'John Bull Boil Plaster' to me with a sympathetic note. The plaster duly donned gave me the most excruciating pain imaginable and I wrote back telling him so. I've felt remorseful ever since for he meant well for me. Before the advent of antibiotics I found Kaolin followed by an ordinary Elastoplast as good a

treatment as any, but I had to take Blaud's pills for years thereafter plus cod liver oil and malt, a glutinous cocoction sold in huge jars by Boots Chemists. Both Ivy and I ate gallons of the stuff in twice a day desert-spoons full! I quite liked it though.

I used to wonder if mum had got all our dieting wrong for all this boil trouble to afflict dad and I, but our family had tasty things like stews with dumplings. We were all fond of rabbit or neck of mutton, the stews usually loaded with barley or lentils. We had roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, boiled onions in Oxo gravy with mash. I think mum imagined a leg of beef in her shopping bag if she'd got an Oxo cube there! We ate lashings of her home made apricot, plum (mostly), or blackcurrant jam, though she swore by "Hartley's" if she on occasion bought some, or I would have to get a huge jar of cheap jam, very popular from Victor Value's store up in Long Lane. They also sold quite large bottles of brown sauce cheaply. We were always made to eat our greens and she liked to give us butter beans or haricot beans quite often or a huge chunk of marrow if in season. I liked sausage and mash topped with fried onions. Dad liked his apples (but his false teeth would not allow him to take bites from them). It was interesting to see him delicately wielding a pen knife to cut pieces off them (likewise the 'William' pears that he loved), and I liked to watch his face screw up as he bit into a thick slice of bread and jam!

Mum would send Ivy to the butchers saying "Ask him for liver cut thin", and I made regular visits to Sainsbury's at Church End for "three pennyworth of pieces, please" or down Squires Lane to Everett's the grocers for broken biscuits and I recall getting 'Echo' margarine there and mentioned it among foods we ate and had to list for our teacher. Mum was cross with me because I forgot to mention the real butter she bought also. (Margarine though was what we had to have if we wanted jam on the bread). All in all, mum did her best to feed us well. I liked the small treats like currant loaf, brown bread, bread and dripping, bread and sugar, bread and milk etc. For afters we'd have macaroni, semolina, baked rice or tapioca and if rice was boiled she'd put sultanas in it. I might get a cup of Bovril with her on a shopping trip and I could be lucky to get perhaps a toffee apple on the way home. Incidentally, we had milk at school then, about a third of a pint, one welcome treat they don't provide today. No, indeed, I can't say we went about undernourished.

Before going out anywhere and especially to school she made sure we were tidy and never slovenly, with her firm orders like "Take your hands out of your pockets!" and "Take your elbows off the table". We did have to learn good manners at the table "Sit properly" mum would say, and when finished we'd have to ask "Can I get down now please?". She was always especially worried about our cleanliness. In that connection it was now my job to clean all the shoes for the family by taking the brushes and the 'Cherry Blossom' black and brown 'Tonette' polishes out onto the dustbin in the corner of the back fore court, an old knife to remove any mud, one brush to apply the polish, a second one to buff them up and then they had to be finished off by polishing them with a soft cloth. As mentioned earlier we never minded helping out in any way for the compensations by way of the love and affection we received were if anything somewhat overdone. Ivy and I shared the chore of washing up but that was not so harmonious, for it was arguments from start to finish as to who would wash and who would wipe, at this job we were almost enemies yet in every other aspect

of our lives we were inseparable. Strange that, I've never understood it. Anyway washing up invariably ended with mum or dad yelling out "come in here one of you!"

Dad's ageing appearance hindered his efforts to regain full employment so between spells of council work he found solace in his garden. He built three interconnecting arches between our front gate and street door and grew roses over them, believe it or not these included a blue rose but it was a single variety and not really a pretty blue. He also built a fence-like trellis with a central arch, it straddled the full width of the back garden. Both mum and dad tried all manner of plants there (well seeds were only a penny a packet then). However, he also had an allotment near the bottom of Squires Lane but I don't think he kept it for long.

To help the coffers mum made loads of jams. I think she bottled beetroots and pickles as well (I recall lots of Kilner jars). She pulled heaps of lettuces from the garden. Ivy and I then loaded up the old barrow and proceeded to sell all the produce door to door in the up-market side of town and were doing quite well until a kindly bobby stopped us in Clifton Road saying it was illegal and sent us home again. A bobby was always around in those relatively peaceful days.

I don't recall whether it was dad or one of his colleagues in an attempt to get some money tried to sell matches from a tray in the Caledonian Market, but sold none and in a fit of rage set fire to the lot in his back garden.

Mum and dad belonged to a Christmas-cum-Loan Club mentioned in an earlier chapter. An occasional loan could be useful in such hard times because no interest was added when gradual repayments were made. Mum would also take on a Provident Cheque for special purchases. Her arithmetic was not too good though and it was not until much later that she realised how much she had ultimately paid in interest for the service.

Appalling isn't it that those who can't afford an item have to pay more for it than those who can? but that's our western 'Democracy' for you and nobody does a thing about it!.

## Chapter 17

### More pains and games.

Dad was a smoker so Ivy and I thought we were helping when we set off to collect all the cigarette ends we could find around the streets and were quite put out when they were rejected at home and thrown away, we felt better though after he and mum had explained why.

He was not a heavy smoker. He bought packets of ten of the small kind and because I wanted the cigarette cards it was often my job to go and get them. The small ones were ten for fourpence and included Woodbines, De Reszke Minor, Park Drive, and Piccadilly Juniors. The big ones were ten for sixpence and were Player's Navy Cut, Wills' Gold Flake, Kensitas and Craven 'A'. Dad's favourites were Park Drive because the packets also contained coupons that he religiously saved to exchange for goods.

Fags we all know now are a menace, but I have to say the cigarette cards were marvellous, collected by most children and were so educational. Over a few years I collected those of Aircraft, Motorcars, Dogs, Fowls, Wildlife, Scientific Facts, Household Hints, etc. Kensitas did Silk Flags. Some makes issued transfers. I swapped cards for some of these that were of old English alphabet characters. so my initials W.D.C.H were put on a hinged wooden tool box that dad gave me. Swapping cards was common of course, as duplicates were rather too numerous, ie:- the unscrupulous manufacturers made sure it would be difficult to acquire the last of a complete set without you making repeated purchases.

We children played a game with unwanted cards by seeing who could flick them the farthest and he who did kept the cards. To acquire more cards we obtained a shoe-box, cut around the pictures from our swaps to stick on its 'floor', painted a nice background, put a hole in the lid for daylight to enter and another at the end to look through. One then toured the streets or playground calling "Fag card a look", "Fag card a look". Albums were sold to stick your cards in, of course, but they began to supply the cards ready gummed. I didn't like them because in storage they stuck together.

It would have been during this period that dad spent a great deal of time making me a boat of galleon style including three masts rigged with sails. The hull he formed from three or four boards glued together and carved to a proper boat shape. He had few tools - a plane, a couple of cheap chisels, but no vice, so how he held the assembly with one hand and do all the curvature of the hull with the other without lacerating himself I can't imagine. He had no means to hollow it for buoyancy and that I'm afraid is why it failed, for when I proudly lowered it into the Friary Park lake it almost submerged - a sad disaster.

Nevertheless, watching the other boys and dads sailing their boats got me very interested in the pastime. The Hornby firm were marketing model clockwork speedboats that I took a fancy to. Several were skimming about the lake, so I got quite keen. My birthday must have been imminent for mum and dad bought me a boat far superior - well it cost 16s.6d and was a model of the Windsor Castle ocean liner - clockwork, a real beauty.

Then there was the soap-box car. Dad made me a real whizzer that all the other dads down our road tried to emulate for their sons. By comparison he also made me a simple little toy that gave me much pleasure, it consisted of a hand-held stick with a carved propeller free to turn on a pin stuck in the end. By rubbing a second stick on the first the vibration made the propeller spin mysteriously. He also made a pair of men from wooden clothes pegs joining them together and suspending them on a string in such a way that the men boxed each other when the string was jerked.

For his cigarette coupons he acquired a mini-billiards table about two feet by four, and taught us to play billiards, but on some evenings it would be card games. Sevens (or 'Spoof' as he called it), another was 'Beat your neighbours out of doors' - 'Beechernaypers' I called it, having not understood its name correctly! Cribbage he liked too, but I never really got into it. He knew all the gambling games, of course, but would not let us children play them. Nor ever would he play others for money, but at Christmas or Easter when cousin Lil Servant came with her friend, Minnie, gambling games of great skill were played with them but only matches were staked.

Mum taught us a game called 'Birds, beasts, flowers, fish, fruit and vegetables' - a nice spelling game for children where one thinks of a 'bird', writing down its first and last letter, but its other letters substituted by crosses. Then he or she who thinks of the bird intended thinks then of a 'beast' and does likewise, and so on through the list. She played Lotto, Dominoes, Ludo, and Snakes and Ladders with us. She also liked the childrens games of boxes, noughts and crosses, etc. Dad won at most games, especially Draughts and Fox & Geese, I recall.

It gives me pleasure to have been able to mention Lil and Minnie. Lil was the older sister of Edie, May and young Harry (Sonny) Servant, our cousins. Lil was one of those indescribable personalities who's very entrance lights up a room. She had, and as I write still has, a great chatty sense of humour and is a pleasure to be with. She and Minnie were always impeccably dressed (they were skilled tailoresses for the C & A Co.) and exuded a pleasant breath of posh perfume. Lil's hair was done in a neat Eton crop style. We seldom saw 'Sonny' but May would come and like Lil had a gay personality and was then working at the 'Black Cat' factory near Mornington Crescent tube station, which could explain why she and Lil smoked 'Craven A' filter tipped cigarettes (generally in a longish cigarette holder). Lil never married, but Minnie, a jewess, married a quietish chap called Izzy who we met, I think, only once. Minnie was not strict about her religion because she let slip how she liked egg and bacon for breakfast.

We had occasional visits from Fred Robertson too, a kindly man who worked for the GPO at Mount Pleasant. He came one time with his wife, Ada, and their two children in their late teens who, as mentioned in Chapter 9, were a trifle simple. During a conversation, presumably about clothing materials, the girl suddenly lifted her skirts to reveal her undergarments at which point dad was so shocked he left the room shouting "Well, I don't want to see!"

We were still making occasional visits as a family. I have a happy memory of a visit to Aunt Alma and Uncle George once when young Georgie was home from the sea. He was a chef sailing for the Orient Line to and from Australia, the journeys made by boats called the 'Orontese' (inward) and 'Cormorant' (outward). I remember his drum set was elegantly displayed in their bay window at Lascotts Road in Wood Green, but I don't know if it was there or at our place that he gave me a clockwork replica of the "Golden Arrow" car that Major Seagrave drove in his attempt on the land speed record. It was about fourteen inches long - a super toy.

We had another trip to Islington. Aunt Edie and Uncle Billy had moved there to Union Square. Gordon and Peggy also went. Uncle Bill had just started renting a wireless set from the Radio Rentalls Co. and was enthusiastically telling dad all the details about it, it was high on a neat little shelf and cost him, I think, 1s.6d. per week.

In the evening, we six children, Gordon, Ivy, Peggy, Me. Jean and Yvonne, had a grand time at the Bertram Mills circus established in the World's Fair at the Royal Horticultural Hall nearby. Going there and walking down the side of the building we could hear the lions and tigers roaring. Cor! what a thrill! and once inside the show was magnificent.

I remember a motorcyclist very high up driving it with a roar round and round a narrow track like a duck-board, then he'd swing about and even stand on the saddle. Then trapeze artists did all the usual swinging and leaping and catching one another - then one fell! The audience screamed and he was falling head first and stopped with a jerk and his head only two feet from the ground. It was part of the act! he having an elasticated Bungie rope tied around him. We and the crowd roared our applause; a vivid memory for me indeed.

One visit dad made on his own. He had found a lady's purse containing a lot of money, a name and address, and some pawn tickets. It was the latter that accelerated his desire to return it to its owner at Manor House, I think. He walked the entire journey, found the house, a huge place, and knocked only to be told to go around to the Tradesmen's entrance! and there the lady without any thanks took the purse and offered nothing for his trouble.

We had the news that Granny Binks had met a man called Mr. Sheldrake and married him. She had lived on her own for so many years that no-one dreamed she would re-marry.

We had occasion to visit them at Gran's old house and I think it fair to say he turned out to be the most miserable looking individual I had ever met, with a grim countenance suggesting an intense hatred of the world and all in it. So nobody in and on the family's outskirts could take to him and everyone's usually very happy visit to Charlotte Terrace just sort of stopped. Sad really, I expect Gran was inwardly badly hurt. We can't quite remember when but think she died a couple of years later.

In 1933 Ivy was fourteen and that was the age in those days that most children started work. She got a job at the 'Advance Laundry' at North Finchley working in the packing department. She was a bit of a tom-boy as you may have gleaned and was actually

suspended by a Mrs. Bussel her supervisor, who claimed Ivy was the ring-leader of the numerous pranks and troubles there. However, after a visit and appeal from mum she was reinstated. One of her colleagues asking Ivy her name was kept guessing by her reply of "It clings to the wall". After serious thought he replied "Oh - like shit then?"

Less comical is that dad also managed to get a job there - what luck? but after a short period of employment he suffered an accident when his feet were seriously scalded! thus ending that venture, and with no thought to appeal for compensation - he didn't know he could I suppose.

## Chapter 18

Recession - Yes, Depression - No!

From now on Ivy had quite a few different job changes. Answer "To better myself" was mum's advice if an interviewer asked for a reason for your application! Green's Grocery Store comes to mind. Ivy worked at two branches of the company, one at Colney Hatch Lane, the other at Ballard's Lane. She also did a stint with the Home & Colonial grocers in Muswell Hill. Another ambition was to get a job with Mac Fisheries Ltd, and got herself an interview in London where she was chastised a little for not ending any reply with a 'Sir' to the manager's questions! However, she was taken on and worked at their Crouch End branch.

Later she had quite a different change of scene by entering industry at the time of the up and coming of 'Plastics'. Messrs. Fraser and Glass Ltd were early moulders of thermosetting plastics and Ivy was based at their Whetstone factory where one item they made was a screw top handle and spout for jam or golden syrup glass jars of a faceted hexagonal shape.

She now had a bike, a huge black 'Humber', with 28" wheels that they made for ladies. It therefore had a curved frame to step across with dignity and an array of cords surrounding the rear mudguard, and a leatherette chain guard, both to protect long skirts from entanglement. I was fascinated too by its lamp, a large bright nickel affair with a bulbous lens, an oil reservoir and generous wick for the flame required for cycling at night.

Earning money meant, of course, that she was able to help mum out to some extent, the remainder being her own (I can tell you here) was largely spent on me. You see she was keen on the cinema and nearly always took me along with her and that meant she paid for the tram fares and sometimes sweets as well. We always went on Sunday evenings and often Saturdays too. We got to know all about the stars and just had to see our favourites whenever their new films arrived.

Within quite short journeys we were blessed with cinemas that were more than numerous. At East Finchley was the Colosseum (later called "The Rex"). North Finchley had their Grand Hall. Nearby they built a new Gaumont all very plush and offering a famous organist performing between programmes. Here we saw Quentin Maclean, Florence de Jong, Ena Baga and Reginald Foort I believe.

Half a mile northwards was a new Odeon rather similar, while down at Church End we'd go to their New Bohemia. Another modern type was a mile or two west being The Orpheum at Golders Green, and over at Muswell Hill two posh ones, the Odeon and the Ritz. Also there was an older cinema called The Athenaeum, and another (a flea pit) called The Summerland.

One old one we loved was down by The Nag's Head pub and called The Marlborough where you not only saw a full cinematic programme but a stage show by quite well-known professionals lasting a good three quarters of an hour. I distinctly recollect an ice show there and a cowboy act of shooting and rope twirling by Tex MacCleod I think, (anyway a film actor at the time). This was of course the time of rapid development of the film industry, so just across the way there they were building a huge Odeon which

eventually also included a stage show within its programmes and Ivy much later took me there to see "Band Wagon", then very popular with radio audiences with Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch.

Down Seven Sisters Road, though, was the most beautiful cinema I've ever seen, then called The Astoria, which had a large pool in the foyer where huge golden carp swam about and the auditorium was fashioned in 'Arabian Nights' style, you sat as though within a circle of golden minaretted buildings. The ceiling was designed as the night sky with a myriad of stars a-twinkling.

From all these cinema visits it's natural that I feel privileged to have been able to see, and can still see on television, all or most of the great films and most of the great stars. In those days I was too young to be allowed to see what were labelled 'A', 'H' or 'X' films, so children were in no way corrupted unless they could induce a grown-up to take them in but that would only apply in the case of 'A' films. Having seen so many such films since, it is evident that none of them showed any unwarranted sex scene nor any nudity, nor ever a word out of place. Strangely, though, scenes of violence were quite common, even in the cartoons, but it was sacrosanct that the bad guys always got caught.

Thinking of cartoons, Woolworths were selling a little toy cine projector for sixpence! Quite a precision job in bright green, its films (8mm) were in continuous loop form, all were cartoons and only sixpence each, my only one was a 'Betty Boop' tale (silent of course).

Aunt Alice, Uncle Charley, Peggy and Gordon were due to come one Easter. Snow about a foot deep covered Dickens Avenue. Ivy and I therefore had our noses glued to the front room window desperate to see them come round the corner but fearing they would not be able to make it, but the sun shone and they did! Come the Sunday evening we all went to Muswell Hill and Gordon kept chiding me because I was moaning that I wanted to go to the Summerland to see a Dr Fu Man Chu film that I had been looking forward to but neither he nor the girls were at all interested. I think we finished up at the Ritz and saw an Alice Faye musical, a lovely girl and lovely songs.

The lighting, acting, photography and music of such movies was nearly always superb, from the very first moment that the leading man or lady appeared you generally knew you were being entertained. The men handsome, Gable, Stewart, Boyer, Cooper, Powell, cowboys Tom Mix, Buck Jones, William Boyd, or menacing actors like Cagney, Bogart, E.G.Robinson, Peter Lorre, etc. The girls beautiful, Garbo, Dietrich, Harlow, Myrna Loy, Ginger Rogers, etc.

Ah! Ginger Rogers! For her I went completely overboard! I just had to see every film of hers that came our way. Gary Cooper was Ivy's heart-throb, but Ginger (with Fred Astaire) was to me the peak of thirties entertainment. Not just them but the sets, the orchestras, the tunes, the stories, the casting, the magnificent teamwork, of which we'll never see the like again.

Fred, sometimes with Hermes Pan, devised the dances. If you get the chance, just see how each dance builds up to a most beautiful ending, i.e. watch closely the last few bars of the melodies (most

written by the masters - George Gershwin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin.) Watch Fred as a pianist and drummer, as well as a choreographer and singer. His talent was amazing really. I doubt if he'll ever be equalled.

For a joke, Aunty Edie told me that Ginger Rogers had had a terrible accident with her face all badly scarred - I was absolutely crestfallen (but loved her just the same). I was nonetheless more than relieved to learn that it wasn't true!

You can tell that Musicals came high on my list but I also liked the thrillers. However, they resulted sometimes in my having nightmares. Do you know, one sticks in my memory even today that so scared me that I think I'd be scared again if it was ever reshown, yet all I recall is Lon Chaney (senior) as an engine driver involved in rivalry and crashing into other trains and causing the most awful carnage!

Before leaving this subject I should pay tribute to those hundreds of lovely supporting artists who gave us so much pleasure, for example Helen Broderick, Eric Rhodes, Lewis Stone, Una Merkel, Franklin Pangborn, Eric Blore, Glenda Farrell, H.B.Warner, Alan Jenkins, May Robson, Frank Mc Hugh, Arthur Treacher, Jack Carson, William Cargan, Wallace Ford, Norman Foster, Jack Haley etc.

I told you about the Rough Lots earlier. In the heat of summer it was prone to vandals who would by accident or purpose set the grass on fire by means of matches or the use of a burning glass, so fire engines were in attendance more than frequently with their hoses stretching for hundreds of yards and all the children rushing there to see the great jets of water dowsing the flames. So it was also at the scrubland of Strawberry Vale when the tall pear and horse chestnut trees were ablaze, one feared they may crash down upon the watching crowd.

Some builders altered our usual entrance to the Rough Lots in order to construct what I imagine was some kind of war memorial. They called the small enclosure 'The Glebeland'. At the start they dug channels for its very deep foundations. Cyril and I decided that if we could get down to the bottom we could try out smoking for the first time in our lives without getting caught.

Near the Green Man pub was a slot machine on a post that vended little packets of cigarettes called 'Penny Crayols'. They consisted of three cigarettes and about five red-topped matches all in a slender blue packet. So, for only a penny --- well, we couldn't go wrong could we? but read on!

Having got the fags, we descended the deep hole OK and puffed away enjoying every minute of it. Getting out again was by no means so easy but we managed it, but then came the walk home when we both began to feel absolutely terrible. I was not sick, but going indoors mum said 'What's the matter?' I just told her I didn't feel well and would like to go to bed. I was expecting her to give me a hiding or at least one of her unique 'flips' (ie if you were naughty she tended to flip her outstretched fingers sideways across your cheek resulting in a searing pain - it was very effective.) Not this time though! She saw me up to bed with no more questions asked.

Perhaps dad would wallop me then? An extremely rare event, thank heavens. If he did you deserved it, but when aroused his wallops bordered on the violent. I could hear mum telling him later of the incident saying "I think the little sod's been smoking! He was a green colour when he came in". Then the joy of hearing dad's reply:- "I reckon he's been punished enough already then."

The Glebeland was eventually finished and mum with Mrs. Caton went down there (it's opposite the end of Squire's Lane) and saw it officially opened by the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George the sixth and Queen Elizabeth). "Strewth" she said on her return, "I never seen nothing like it, they were BOTH wearing paint and powder!"

The builders had now moved further up the hill and pinched more of our Rough Lots to build the Finchley Swimming Pool, a mammoth project comprising a main pool some seventy-five yards long with a generous array of diving boards, slides and fountains, then another huge pool for children in the shape of an oval with it's long curves progressing in depth from zero on one side to three feet on the other, all fed from a large waterfall cascading over several widening steps. The changing room for males was open planned with long forms for seating and a metal locker provided for each participant. I've seen no better swimming complex before or since.

Sometimes when making a visit for my ultra-violet light treatment down in Holloway Road mum would join me and we'd wait for attention on the long forms straddling the out-patient's department. Why hospitals are such bad time-keepers I shall never understand. After my treatment we'd go shopping, often to one or other of two 'Walk around, or Long shops' as they're called. These sold cheap children's clothes and she would perhaps get me shirts there or even the occasional suit, (always too big for me, "He'll grow into it" she'd declare) but more often she would make short trousers for me from long ones that dad had discarded. Oh, she made quite a good job of the revised tailoring involved, but was once a bit tactless using dad's old tramway uniform trousers so that I had to go to school with the original red piping down each leg's outer seam! Strange though that she would have no truck with jumble sales.

I liked our Holloway trips though. There were (still are ?) so many different shops to browse at or in. They're mostly small, but at the Nag's Head end they're more up-market and bigger including Woolworths and Marks & Spencers, Jones Brothers, etc. Just into Seven Sisters Road was a music shop, Sansom's I think, whose window fascinated me for there was displayed all the Hohner range of harmonicas, one in particular I coveted. Having my 11th birthday coming up I was still surprised when Uncle Billy and family arrived with it for me and, of course, it made my day, and when they went home you always knew he would leave us children half-a crown each on mum's mantle-piece! Quite a hole in anyone's income in those times. He was such a kindly man.

Someone else bought me a metal model airship with a rear propeller that flew in a circle when suspended by a string. How mum and dad managed that year to buy me a new bike though I'll never understand. It was brand new! A 'Hercules' junior (18 inch wheels I think). It was maroon with pneumatic tyres and retailed at  $\text{£}2.19.9d$  (about a week's wages). They took me up to Tally-Ho

Corner to get it in a Ballards Lane shop and dad had to sign the hire purchase agreement, a new venture indeed. Cyril had got a new bike just previously, a Vindec, so perhaps mum and dad had been influenced by that event. They let me ride it home but became somewhat cross with me for I charged away on it with dad yelling after me "Come back here!" Most children had 'fairy cycles' that had solid tyres and one brake that thrust upon the front one to stop but mine was the next size up.

I loved that bike, but it became just another hobby for I was, as now, interested in rather too many pursuits. For example, Woolworths were selling a range of books (novels) at only threepence each! So I reasoned that on buying some I could lend them out to the local gang at a penny a week and make a small fortune, but the idea never actually became all the rage! I did notice then and many times since that rather filthy habit people seem to enjoy i.e. licking their finger or thumb in order to turn over each page! I've never understood why? as pages turn very easily without such assistance. One wonders what germs lurk, awaiting to pounce, amid the thousands of books in the average public library!

Foreign stamps were a different matter and I developed quite a varied collection. A firm called X.L.C.R. sold stamp collecting kits via all the children's magazines and other firms would send you perhaps 500 stamps FREE providing that you then bought individual ones from their sheets of approvals that arrived from time to time through the post. A lovely hobby really. It was most fascinating trying to translate the foreign sounding words so that you could establish from which country an unusual looking stamp had come - a considerable amount of geography was thereby learned in the process. Not a bad way to learn a subject eh? ie:- enjoy a subject that's of interest in order to learn (unwittingly) one that you don't like!

Down on the field above the brook Cyril and I gathered sheets of old plywood, cardboard, and corrugated iron, and built what we called 'our den', and constructed a camp-fire on which we baked potatoes to go with the sandwiches and lemonade that our mums packed for the numerous adventures we'd undertake. Great fun, of course. Along by the brook the water petered out, but its original path continued between two steeply angled banks, each about five feet high. The top of one met a concreted flat pathway running along the backs of a short row of garages. Bushes enclosed each end and neither the pathway nor the garages were ever used. Therefore the path being a good six foot wide made an excellent make-shift stage, and what's more the opposite side of the cut offered an ideal grassy sloped seating for an audience!

Miss Page at school had been reading to us the then popular Erich Kastner novel 'Emil and the Detectives' so with other children, and for other children, we put it on at the aforesaid home made theatre as a play without either props or script but with yours truly doing the intro on my mouth organ! All in all it worked but was a bit of a mess, and I've often thought since that we missed the real potential there for a more ambitious alfresco children's theatre.

## Chapter 19.

Mainly on swimming and biking.

We were now learning to swim at the closed-in baths up Squires Lane, going once or twice per week from school, who issued third, second and the coveted first class certificate. This I fairly soon achieved being for two lengths breast stroke and one backstroke I think. But to get it I spent lots of time in the newly opened out-door pool wearing a blown up rubber ring to help me negotiate the deep end. In so doing, I noticed to my horror while swimming there once that it had split while I was in the deep water! but like an act of God I was still swimming quite satisfactorily. Visits there became common and once Jean and Yvonne and our two families went there for a picnic and for the children to paddle and swim.

The closed-in baths by comparison were rather old and scruffy but had a good high diving board and a spring board, both of which added considerably to both Cyril's and my own enjoyment. The other boys seemed to get more fun by flicking their towel at each other's naked flesh in the changing room. This was a long arrangement of wooden cubicles that could not be locked in any way, so thefts of clothes and contents though not common were distressing at times.

With our bottle of lemonade and pack of sandwiches, Cyril and I would venture on our bikes as far as Parliament Hill Fields to pursue our swimming craze. Here was the largest swimming facility for miles around and here many galas were held. I understand that my one-armed cousin, Harry Servant, did much swimming there. It is a vast lake on the edge of which was a conglomerate of wooden changing rooms, rest huts, etc. The clientele were mixed indeed, fatties, skinnies, black, white, yellow, strapping, puny and many severely crippled.

About thirty yards out into the lake floated a large raft for the swimmers to rest upon and at the lake-side were spring and diving boards, the latter very high indeed but hereunder the water was very deep so safety was pretty well assured. Diving for me was something of a passion but here I had not enough nerve, boys on the top platform always chiding each other to dive or jump off - one needed to keep away from their skylarking! Right up there I liked it but just couldn't be induced to dive off. So I jumped! screwed up my eyes, took the deepest breath imaginable and waited for the sting I would get when I hit the water. If you've not done it anywhere it's just like an explosion---BANG! whoosh! then a slight pain from the initial sting, then open your eyes as you go down, down, and down yet further, working your legs furiously to get you up again, but it's just a waiting game as you gradually slow up and gently stop, and with joy feel your body forced to rise again faster and faster 'til you nearly shoot out at the top gasping for breath! What a thrill! I did it often thereafter and as a result had no nerves trouble when actually diving from the not quite so high boards of the pool at Finchley.

Mum on hearing of it I expect used her favourite exclamation:- "Ooo my Gawd duck!" As given elsewhere she, and dad had some frequently used sayings and proverbs. Some of mum's vociferations included 'Open arse'(if you left a door open), 'Fits like a pea on a drum' (if a hat looked too small), 'Where's your snot rag'(if you

appeared to have no handkerchief), "A fart arse----" described anything small. If in disbelief she'd retort "Talks as his belly guides him!". When having completely lost patience in an argument she'd say " Oh go to buggery!" or "You've only had a cat's lick!" if you had not washed properly. Her proverbs although well known were probably the best e.g. "Don't put off 'til tomorrow what you can do today". Dad's more usual ones were "Many a true word spoken in jest", "He's got more money than sense!", "Small profits, quick returns!", "Better to be lucky than rich!", "It took a month of Sundays" for any lengthy job. Anyone a bit silly he'd call a "Duffer". He rarely bordered on the vulgar but I do recall his outburst once relating to a lucky person "If he fell down the lavatory, he'd come up eating a bar of chocolate!". He frequently hailed me with "Hello matey, cocky, chummy!" and on telling us that the sparrow was his favourite little bird because "where ever you may be in the world, there you will find the sparrow as a fond reminder of home!" and "Dear little old cocks!" he would say on seeing them near at hand.

I'm sorry to have digressed! I was describing my swimming exploits though, I certainly loved swimming but never for long periods (though I once achieved eleven lengths of the new out-door Finchley pool!) Funny though, try as hard as I could I never achieved my big ambition, to do the crawl! Breast, back or side stroke---easy, but never the crawl!

Cyril's and my own joint adventures came to a sudden stop when he caught scarlet fever and we had to get him to the local Fever Hospital which was quite a long walk away. Luckily we still had our lovely old wooden push chair described in an earlier chapter so it came in very handy for our mums and me to trundle him there.

Later on when Cyril had recovered, he and I were down the field one day where the Arterial Road passes by the Fire Station when a car drew up with the man asking us "Is this the Southend road?" We didn't know, but a man scything the grass said "For Southend-on-Sea just keep going, its a straight road all the way!"

Gosh! What a thought? and us with new bikes too! That day we asked our mums to pack us up some sandwiches and the usual bottle of lemonade for the morrow as we lied "We're going to spend the whole day swimming over at Parliament Hill Fields!"

Setting off early (eight o'clock) we did as the man had said and just followed the road. I had my lunch and bottle of lemonade in a shopping bag swinging from my left handlebar. On and on we went and the roads got busier as we went through Wood Green and on through Edmonton. If there was a Southend road sign we obeyed it, if not we just followed the road. There were many junctions so the road was not nearly as straight as we'd understood.

Somewhere near Walthamstow a little old three-wheeler Morgan phut-phut-phutted past us with the driver waving to us cheerily--- it was Mr. and Mrs. Gentle from next door in their jalopy! On we plied our way - Woodford, Ilford. Romford and now my bottom was really sore.

The road's traffic lessened and from now it climbed gentle hills and then would fall away again, then up, then down, and when climbing the sunny sky ahead seemed to convince us that the sea was only just over the hill, but no! it would be down the other

side to go again, then suddenly CRUNCH! and I came to an abrupt stop almost tumbling over the handlebars. I had put the bottle in the bag with its neck towards the front of the bike and lo! it had decided to jam itself between the front wheel and its fork! The lemonade was trickling down the gutter and all lost due to the bottle having broken (as were a few spokes from my front wheel).

From now the journey seemed absolutely endless, every hill being followed by another and the summer sun becoming unbearably hot. At the top of a hill near Laindon was a bungalow where we knocked and asked a kind lady for a drink of water. Refreshed after a short break there we journeyed onward. This road was the newish A127 and we had to negotiate the Rayleigh cut in course of construction. The huge road-making machinery fascinated us so a short stop enabled us to watch it.

Soon though came the welcoming 'feel' of the seaside as we saw Southend-on-Sea directions and heart lifting words like "Leigh-on-Sea" and "Westcliff". Soon came Victoria Avenue and the High Street, which was then a through road. Near the bottom we at last saw the Pier! Oh what joy? We practically fell from our bikes and asked a curious policeman "Could you tell us the time please?" We were non-plussed by his reply as he pointed up the High Street saying "Have a look at the famous clock!" It was Jones's Clock suspended outside the jewellers and the time by it was two o'clock so we had taken six hours. We were so sore we just wandered down Pier Hill to the large oval boating pool where at its eastern end there was a shelter. Here we left our bags, removed our shoes and socks, dropped our short trousers and stepped into the cooling, bottom-soothing water!

We reasoned that we could stay for an hour, and food eaten we left on time. Signs for London indicated thirty-five miles! though Finchley I think is forty two! Could we do it? Well the road back is straightforward for the first half of the journey, but the junctions thereafter never indicated the way to Finchley but did to many of London's outer towns, of which we'd never heard. Even were we home by 9 o'clock our families would be on the verge of panic, but at nine we were in the thick of town traffic with our bottoms very sore again and the inside of our legs badly chafed, and now my legs were beginning to feel like jelly for they had been pedalling much faster than Cyril's whose bike was larger than mine.

At home meanwhile, mum, dad, Ivy and the Catons were getting really apprehensive, especially when the Gentles told them they'd passed us in Walthamstow on the Southend road! My legs were now aching terribly and horribly weak. I've learned since its a cyclists' fatigue problem known as "The Bonk". A brightly lit clock showed us the time was half past ten! but then I suddenly realised where we were! for a huge flashing theatre sign seemed to shout at me "Holborn Empire"! From here I roughly knew the way home and seemed to recover much lost energy.

As we eventually trundled up Squires Lane and turned left into Dickens Avenue I was defeated and crying profusely. Dad was standing on the triangle at the end of the road in his usual shirt and braces, his uncollared stud glinting under the street lamp there. "Sorry dad" I cried as we cycled past. "Sorry be buggered, son" he replied, "thank Christ you're home". It was half-past

eleven, we had been cycling for eight and a half hours, fourteen and a half in total, so I agreed with him entirely!

I recall no punishment nor any inquest, but mum employing her well-tried remedy by rubbing my buttocks and legs in with warmed olive oil, putting me into my pyjamas and then tucking me into bed with our usual "night-night" hug and kiss that always made you better.

This was the year of my eleven plus exam which Ivy thinks I passed but I never got to grammar school as a result, nor would I then have wanted to go. Ivy didn't go either and nor did many of our contemporaries. Parents being so poor were subconsciously more anxious to have their kids leave school at fourteen to start earning a living. I think the eleven plus exam then was just a general test of all subjects, I don't recall such things as 'O' or 'A' levels in those days. The big achievement for the posher well heeled students was to become matriculated which I think gained you admission to a University (quite unheard of around our way). In fact ex-university folk of my generation, are today a rare breed indeed.

## Chapter 20

Jubilee times.

Ivy was at this time (1935) an avid reader such that mum found it difficult to have any kind of conversation with her. "I thought you'd grow up to be someone I could talk to!" I recall her saying. Ivy was sixteen on the tenth of January so now came a big chance to give Ivy a surprising talk. Until now she had had no knowledge of her origins and so mum was a bit scared that Ivy might not be at all pleased with what was about to be expounded. Mum told her the full story (that I wrote in Part 1 of this narrative), essentially explaining that she was not really the girl's mother! Ivy tells me that although shocked in the extreme, contrary to mum's fears she realised what she owed her and felt an even stronger devotion as a result. Thereafter mum felt it O.K. to advise relatives that Ivy now knew of her originS. Until then they had all kept it from Ivy. Only Aunty Lily felt it wrong for Ivy to have been told. Nowadays they tell 'em young but Ivy was sixteen!

It's strange how a very small incident can spark off a vast expanse of interest. Woolworths were selling a bright red toy clockwork engine for sixpence, I soon became a proud possessor of one but had no track to run it on. Fortunately dad had covered our floor with linoleum laid as two long pieces side by side leaving a narrow gap between them, so I was able to run the engine from one end of the room to the other by engaging the side wheels in the gap.

Soon, someone kindly gave or bought me a box full of 'OO' gauge lines and later I acquired some miniature gauge track and clockwork (pseudo-steam) rolling stock but the track had a central rail intended for electric trains which irritated my desire for perfection, but before long Cyril and I could not get model railways out of our minds, especially as an enthusiast (in Deansway just off the Bishop's Avenue) had sheds full, and also a wandering lay-out in his back garden! Whole families would go (admission free) to view it all working. Bishop's Avenue by the way is worth a visit just to see the fabulous houses of the rich and famous, but we went that way not just for Deansway but as a short cut through for our frequent visits to Ken Wood or Parliament Hill Fields.

About then, international politics were changing rapidly and drastically. A rather nasty piece of work called Adolf Hitler had become the Chancellor of Germany and initially started doing some quite useful things for the country, organising the construction of the Autobahns for example, but his ambitions were expansionist, obsessed by a feeling rightly that Germany was sort of compressed from all sides, hence his incessant demands for Liebensraum (living-space) and the rapid development of his National Socialist movement, the infamous Nazi Party.

He was probably influenced greatly by and envious of his contemporary dictator in Italy who had established Fascism several years earlier (Benito Mussolini whose aims were broadly similar) and of course the contemporary General Franco in Spain.

Unfortunately satellite sympathetic movements sprang up in most other countries. In Britain for example we had the Brown Shirts

(National Socialists, an appalling misnomer) and the Black Shirts (British Union of Fascists). East London especially was the scene of their respective rallies and violent confrontations with the Labour and Communist parties in particular, and dreadful atrocities against the Jewish and ethnic communities.

All this worried mum terribly, such that she became averse to any gatherings in uniform, distrusting quite innocent groups, even juvenile ones such as even the 'Brownies' or the 'Church Lads Brigade', 'Scouts' or 'Guides' etc. So early on she would not even let me join the 'Cubs!'

However she was quite chuffed when I decided I'd like to be a choir boy! I hadn't exactly become steeped in religion but had heard that choir boys were in receipt of pay from time to time! My voice was a boyish soprano at the time so after a short audition at our St. Paul's Church in Long Lane I was in!

We would go once or twice a week and have to dress in a cassock and surplice, then line up with our backs to the organ and be taught to sing the coming Sunday's hymns properly and some extra stuff for the forthcoming Easter specialities. All this went very well and after Easter we were at last paid. Me? I got fourpence!! I don't know what I expected but all that work for such a paltry sum put me off for good! I didn't go again but wish I'd stayed long enough to have been allowed to have a go on that organ, it had three manuals I believe and masses of stops and couplers!

George V and Queen Mary's Silver Jubilee celebrations were approaching. At school we had to make several visits to the Avenue House grounds to practise tedious marching manoeuvres and run numerous relay races, all to be in competition with the district's other schools on the big day.

Avenue House had been the home of the Stephens family, the ink people, in fact the place was popularly known as 'Inky-Stephens'. It is situated on the eastern side of East End Road near Church End. It has delightful park-like grounds, a pretty pond displaying beautiful water lilies and surrounded with exotic trees amid which flitted gorgeous blue coloured dragon flies.

A huge wooden dais had been erected on the green for the town's dignitaries to overlook our performances. Thus before the day we rehearsed marching past the empty structure and looking sharply right to our teachers command of "Eyes---RIGHT!" On the big day though, paying dutiful homage to the mayor in his stupid regalia. We did get a booklet of free tickets for the coming festivities there, mine were pink I remember with a Kiwi bird printed on the back and advertising Kiwi boot polish. We were allowed to use them as entrance tickets to many festivities. I used all mine at the new Finchley pool earlier described.

Around the streets people arranged their front walls and windows with all manner of red white and blue decorations, quite a competition between neighbours vying with each other for both magnitude and effect, incorporating where possible placards, pictures or posters of King George V and Queen Mary.

Up at Summers Lane and adjacent to its football ground a huge fair was being erected that eventually stayed for a week or two. Ivy

and I went several times and I became engrossed in those tables surfaced in numbered squares representing the amount of pennies you could win after rolling yours down a channelled slope where it then continued eventually coming to rest---usually across the line dividing two of the squares.

My first experience of 'Dodgems' was at that fair as was riding a roundabout called 'The Caterpillar'. This was a circle of two-seaters whizzing round and up and down as a curved curtain of green slowly swung over the occupants to cover them in and re-expose them before it slowed to a stop. Ivy though took sheer delight at riding with me on a roundabout that we nicknamed 'The Seats'. It too whizzed us round and round, it too took us up and down in the process but it was much faster than the Catapillar. Its seats were quite low and could occupy four, protection was afforded by a long cross-bar to hold on to. She always sat at the innermost position, with me trying to hold us both inward against the centrifugal force trying to throw us outward! 'Chairoplanes' were another new experience for me being just single iron chairs suspended on chains so that as the roundabout gathered great speed the chairs were compelled to swing out at a precarious angle I found them just a bit too scary.

It was a real old fashioned style fair with many side-shows, bearded ladies, Siamese twins, boxing matches and a Flea Circus that I went to see....fascinating! Fraudulent stalls where rings were to be thrown to lay flat after looping over a desired present, this was easy enough but the ring would never freely clear the present's wooden support! However disappointments were relieved somewhat by the lively fair organ tunes playing all the time (here I first heard 'Canadian Capers' a super arrangement) and the lovable but indescribably tangy smell of the steam traction engines running to provide electricity to fuel the myriad of lights and drive the roundabouts.

On the evening of the big day mum and dad came too, for a mammoth fireworks display had been organised, I think we all sat in the adjacent football stadium and I must say the set pieces were remarkable. I particularly recall one of the King and Queen whose likenesses in fireworks were really marvellous.

Another great event in celebration of that Jubilee was the launch of 'The Queen Mary' being the world's largest passenger ship at the time.

Uncle Albert had now found himself a new lady to share his life, so very different from Aunty Clara, her name was Ivy Aitken I think, and connected somehow with great aunt Edie. She was rather stout, heavily perfumed and literally plastered with make-up including red painted finger-nails. Except on the cinema screen, make-up was rarely seen, (around where we lived at any rate). "Who put her head in a flour bag"? was mum's reaction after the lady's first visit. In truth though she made Uncle happy and it was a very happy marriage we believe. I developed a soft spot for her anyway because she took an interest in my toys and took me on a walk to Church End where I pointed out an elastic driven speed-boat for ninepence displayed in the window of a shop called 'Bon Marche' there.---She promptly bought it for me of course!

Cyril and I took our boats to the Friary Park pond several times and they had a good array of swings for us to play upon too. We

met a contemporary school-girl there once who turned out to be the daughter of the then famous Arsenal Football Club player Alex Bastin so we felt 'important' for a while!

Boats were important but soon aircraft became more so, for Dick Charington who lived opposite came over to show me his model aircraft kit and how easy it was to cut out Balsa wood according to the plane's design drawing, and construct the thing knowing that with the aid of strong twisted up elastic it would actually fly! I became very fascinated with the principles of flight and read all I could lay my hands on about the subject.

Cyril and I went on to make several flying models. I used mum's ply-wood bread board as a base for cutting out the Balsa wood. We would buy our materials from a very popular model shop in nearby Hornsey, but we had to drag our bikes up a great number of steps in order to cross the Waterlow bridge in Archway Road to get there. We made one in particular called 'The Cruiser Pup', a duration model of high wing design very popular with modellers.

Cyril, although as keen as I, had another absorbing interest that I never got to enjoy. Motor cycle speedway was all the rage as they say, well it was for him and he would journey weekly to Wembley Speedway to see his idols of the sport, Eric Chitty and Ginger Reeves.

Dick Charington was a good deal older than us and contributed much modelling advice. He seemed to know all there was to know about all the real aircraft of the day and kindly took me to Croydon Aerodrome, (then London's major airport) and there from the viewing platform we saw V.I.P.'s arriving and taking off. We saw huge German Junkers and Handley Page 'Hercules' air liners in close proximity. Dick was 'mad' to see the American Lockheed 'Electra', his favourite (according to our set of aircraft cigarette cards). His ambition was to become a pilot. I do hope he made it, though without suffering the traumas of the unforeseen but forthcoming war.

Enthusiasts were becoming interested in model gliders of various designs endeavouring to get flights of long duration without the use of wound elastic. Many kits were sold but I wanted to design my own and did so with mixed success, though one in particular was quite good having a very slender fuselage for minimum weight and a steep dihedral angle which when watched seemed to aid its hovering rather akin to a sea-gull. I began to have dreams of becoming an aircraft designer but eventually drifted into other design work as is to be revealed later. For now I was suddenly brought up sharp by another matter!

I got another boil! On the inside of my right knee this time, it forced my leg to bend at the knee and it could not be straightened. The boil did not swell up in the usual way but remained flush apparently swelling inwardly and causing a great deal of surrounding inflammation and all the usual pain. So school was abandoned for a time. We had a large but unused tray at home and mum bought me some plasticine, so onto the tray I modelled plasticine houses, roads and wind-mills to create a Dutch scene, thus alleviating the boredom and of course to a large extent the pain also. I tend to wonder how much 'Cod-liver oil and Malt' and how many 'Blaud's Pills' I consumed at mum's behest in those days (and whether they did me one iota of good, and how

much mum contributed to the profit of 'Boots' the chemist's!?) Other remedies always on hand were Mentholatum for our chilblains, Ex-Lax chocolate or Beecham's pills for opening one's bowels, Paragoric tablets, Casterets, Zinc Ointment, Wintergreen Ointment, Friars Balsam, Linctus etc.

It would have been about this time, (before or after my incapacity, for I was quite well) that mum rediscovered her old school friend Lizzie Meager still of cockney voice but now carrying a modicum of class. She brought her husband Len to visit us, their daughter May and also their little boy of four years old. Roy was his name, a dear little lad who was not really mischievous but full of fun. Ivy and I found him a welcome though short relief from life's normal hum-drug and enjoyed immensely joining in his spontaneous imaginative pursuits.

For example he decided that dad's shed was a tram and mum's mangle inside was the machinery to drive it! He became the driver by turning the mangle's large handle as fast as he could, and the conductor (he called him the 'underductor') as well by acting the part fairly accurately. Their family home was beside a little coppice at Chase Side in Southgate, not far from us so we were able to exchange visits from time to time.

Summer was hot indeed and cousin Peggy and I were invited to spend a week at Great Aunt Edie's Greenwich home, there's lots to do at Greenwich and we loved that lady so I looked forward to it very much but having got there I had a strange feeling of loneliness for this was the first time I'd ever stayed away from mum, dad and Ivy. (except for stay in hospital when five years old). Aunty made me a dear little bed but on the first night I cried in it and ached for my going home time to come!

I should not have worried. Peg and I had a lovely time. In Greenwich park (or was it up on Black Heath) there was a boating lake with two-seater canoes. Of course I insisted on being in the front with Peggy dutifully perched behind, but I was not used to using canoe paddles and it seemed that however I tried I could not help shovelling paddlesfull of the lake's water into Peg's lap, thus saturating her summer frock! Instead of showing annoyance she just laughed with me, dear Peg had such a kind and placid personality then as now.

To get there I recall that we had to walk the length of Ashburnham Grove from Aunt's house, then climb a long winding hill to a main road, cross it and take a foot path under a railway line. We went several times. Aunt Ede (as we generally called her) took us that way to catch a tram to Deptford, or was it Lewisham once? I know it was very busy and she had a friend there who gave us tea and cake; I remember the room was all white except for curtains suspended from the largest wooden curtain rings I've ever seen (I suppose that's why they come to my mind so vividly).

She also took us to Aunty Emmies place (a bungalow) at Plumstead. We didn't see Uncle Alf who I suppose was at his workplace at the Woolwich Arsenal but here we met their two sons, I think for my first and only time. She took us on a hot day to Greenwich Pier. It's just a short projection into the Thames but quite a lengthy promontory and crowded with deck chairs from which we all watched the boats--and licked our ice cream cornets. To get there one had to walk under the Thames via a short tunnel. Another visit Peg

and I made was to the local cinema where we saw George Raft and Carole Lombard in a dance musical film called 'Rumba' being a sequel to his previous success called 'Bolero'.

Between trips out Aunt Ede gave us glasses of her marvellous home made lemonade---delightful stuff! She had a huge jug of it on her homely old sideboard and I wonder how, with no fridge, like magic it was always kept ice cold and full up! It looked (and was) so inviting with its discs of lemon floating on it, I've sampled none like it before nor since.

I have oft pondered why neither Ivy nor Gordon holidayed with us at Great Aunt Ede's then, for we always did every thing as a foursome. No doubt the reason was that they were by that time both going out to work. Even so, that was indeed some holiday!

This was an eventful time for Ivy, she was of course maturing and had been attracting the interest of boys over the past year or two. Poor old mum was scared stiff thinking that Ivy 'might go off the rails', 'was much too young', 'boys were of evil intent' etc. I don't think the prospect of Ivy getting a boy friend had hitherto ever entered her head! It seems that mum had not really noticed that Ivy was growing up! Yet paradoxically mum would advise Ivy to collect things for her 'bottom drawer'.

One wonders whether Ivy was also a bit scared though, for believe it or not, if she got herself a date, sure enough she would take me along with her! One lad was called Bill I remember, he seemed a nice enough lad to me. Another was called Ted whose mum discussing with Ivy her adoption etc, thought it unwise for her to investigate her original family and parentage and to date she never has. Mum, foolishly being much too over protective, enlisted dad's help to try to stop these boy friend scenarios by sending him out on missions, maybe hoping to catch Ivy and a boy together? I don't know if the ruse worked but dad did encounter Bill once, swung the chap around by the shoulder and was taken aback to find he was such a nice boy!

I don't think dad was as over enthusiastic as mum to restrict Ivy's meanderings even though he backed mum up as always during the vehement arguments about it at home. (When troubles loomed, keeping a united front was sacrosanct in our house and dad confided to Ivy once something like 'Mum owns the gun but I have to fire the bullets'). On one of these unhappy evenings I think, he was induced to give us each a wallop, (probably for back-answering mum, which he could not abide). I know well how he regretted it immediately, for just afterwards I encountered him upstairs crying profusely.

I think about mum a lot and it's very hard indeed to fault that lady in any way, to me she (as wife and mother) was perfection personified, but it's strange isn't it that the intensity of love and care for one's children can carry protectionism too far, sometimes (as at this awkward time for mum) almost to the point of cruelty? Ivy's inner thoughts about that period even now must torment her greatly I feel.

Some years later Ivy developed a relationship with a chap called Steve, a chef I think on railway trains. This may have been more successful had we not been obliged to move away to Southend as described later, whereafter the affair sadly petered out.

## Chapter 21

The King is dead. God save the King.

When Christmas approached our annual festive happiness returned again. The school's Christmas concert rehearsals were in full swing, I was to be one of the 'turns' playing the harmonica. I rehearsed for the show in the play-ground but Mr Ward the head master politely told me off saying that musical instruments were not allowed there. At the concert after my 'act' the school caretaker having heard me play said "If you can play a tune on this, you can have it"! He handed me a Mini-Hohner mouth-organ (one inch long) on which I played 'Oh Suzanna', so he let me keep it and I treasured it for more than twenty years! Cowboy songs were popular at the time, 'Empty Saddles', 'Wagon Wheels', 'Old Faithful' etc. I had a bit of a success there with 'I'm an old cow-hand' popularised on the wireless at the time by Henry Hall and the B.B.C. Dance Orchestra. Larry Adler was a famous harmonica player and interested players like me strove to emulate his style.

Cyril and I were out one late evening at that time when a thick 'pea-souper' fog swelled up and we feared that we would not find our way home. Luckily for us a Salvation Army band was carolling beneath a lamp-post and invited us to join in with their singing and knock on a few doors. It was very cold and damp but we enjoyed the venture and were sent homeward safely. .

With Christmas nigh, up went the decorations at home. Mum and dad made some jolly good sweets, chocolates, coconut ice etc. but their attempt at toffees was a failure, all sugary they were. Boards were put across the bath and covered in grease-proof paper, then laid with the sweets, striped jellies, custards, pineapple, peaches etc. Mum was in her element at such times and that year we were to have a goose and she was indeed a master cook. Well! the usual crowd of relatives were coming! I suppose another short spell of employment for dad enabled them to buy a large doll each for Jean and Yvonne and mum dressed them in long satin gowns and a complete set of undies (she was a dab hand with her old treadle sewing machine). Dad began buying me a shilling packet of 'Trix' (a kind of Meccano) every week as he knew I liked construction sets.

They bought a new (one shilling) Rex record of Gracie Fields singing 'When I grow too old to dream' and 'Turn Herbert's face to the wall, mother'. She had others of Gracie singing 'This is heaven' and 'For you'. Dad had Charlie Higgins singing 'Down in the fields where the buttercups all grow', 'A daddy at sixty three', 'That navvy jazz' and 'With my gloves in my hand and my hat on one side'. Another they bought, I think with me in mind, was George van Dueson singing and playing 'The yodelling mouth-organ player', its other side being 'It's holiday time again'.

Come Christmas day, music of course prevailed with every one doing their usual party pieces---Dad even did a creditable Russian Cossack dance and performed a staggering demonstration with a half pint beer glass, holding only its rim to bang its bottom edge heavily onto a penny previously placed on the hard floor. This process continued until the penny had nearly folded in half! (don't try it yourself though). He liked to set us puzzles too. Here's one I recall :- A man on looking at a photograph declared

"Brothers and sisters I have none, but that man's father is my father's son. Who was it a picture of ?" (Most think it is himself but not me, I think it's his son).

If you liked that, here's another he put to us :- A man buys 60 apples at 5 for tuppence (=24 pence), he sells 30 at 2 for a penny (=15 pence) and the other thirty at 3 for a penny (= 10 pence) Since that still totals 60 at 5 for tuppence how come he made a penny profit? i.e. 15 plus 10 = 25 pence not 24. This is a bit queer also :- Dad was in the garden sowing seeds, Mum was in the parlour sewing clothes. Were they both sowing or sewing?

Latterly his tricks and japes had been taken from that veritable old vade mecum 'Foulsham's Fun Book' an excellent six pennyworth from Woolworth's, a very thick red on pink paperback. Much was deleted however from their later edition, a brown on orange paperback but was also very good, covering jokes, riddles, tricks, monologues, puzzles, fortune telling etc. I've kept that copy ever since.

Not there though, was a really fascinating lay-out that dad did with playing cards and accompanying patter about four graves (the Aces) in which the four 'Queens' of kind 'hearts' were interred and their jewels (Diamonds) buried with them---and so it went on, much of it now escaping my memory but involving the whole pack of cards using the Jacks as the grave robbers, the Kings as policemen wielding 'Clubs' etc. This and his other tricks were quite professionally executed including one where an orange placed on the table could be made to roll towards him or stop at his command. He liked and did all manner of fancy japes, for example tapping his teeth with his finger nail tips to play a tune. Similarly he played tunes by slapping both his cheeks, determining the actual notes by the extent he opened his mouth!

Recalling poor old George V's Jubilee, no doubt the King enjoyed his celebrations, but for him they were short lived, for early into 1936 he died and was succeeded by his very popular son as King Edward VIII, hitherto the Prince of Wales, champion of the under-dog (well he always seemed to sympathise with Left Wing causes) though nowadays (the nineties) they try to align his activities with leanings toward Hitler's Nazis which to my mind is quite incongruous. Why isn't the media ever compelled to tell the real truth? To my mind 'freedom of the press' goes too far, the newspapers are worse liars today than even in his time, to which I now return.

In short, he met and fell in love with a divorcee lady called Mrs Simpson, this turn of events upset the country for months and the heirarchy hardly knew what to do. In spite of them issuing stamps having his image and on coins too I believe, they could not break his resolve to marry the girl but he was virtually forced to abdicate in 1936 thus rescinding his crown in favour of his brother Albert (the Duke of York) who probably with some reluctance became our new King and was called 'George VI'.

1936 was quite a year for me too for I became thirteen years old and earned my own pocket money doing an evening paper round for a shop at North Finchley. For that I got 1/6d per week but they gave me another whole shilling for delivering one special paper to a far more distant house. Later I got a Saturday morning job at a butchers shop in Church End, for that I earned 2/6d per week and

mum did alright too as they always gave me a parcel of pieces to take home to her afterwards.

In those days customers could have their meat delivered, so they provided me with a very heavy trades-bike, loading up a huge basket into its front carrier with addressed meat parcels for me to deliver all around Finchley. Trades-bikes are peculiar when turning corners for you get the illusion that the front carrier (being solid with the main frame) wants to go straight on! Such was the case once when fully loaded I turned at the bottom of the hill in Clifford Road for there I lost control, fell heavily, as did the bike, and the parcels scattered all around, some unwrapping themselves and others losing their addresses in the process! I remember bits of meat lying here and there in the road, I returned them to the bits of paper as well as I could but really I can't recall either the customers' or my management's reaction.

Each week there was a second journey where I had to load up the carrier's basket with all sorts of horrible entrails, poultry feathers etc, and take it down to East Finchley's slaughter house. Other jobs were to sweep the floor and sprinkle it with saw-dust, clean the shop-window and near Christmas time I was shown how to hang the turkeys in such a way that I could sit on a chair and load up a sack over my knees with the feathers that I had to pluck from the bird's torso until it was clear of them and presumed ready for delivery. I can hardly forget how sore one's fingers became.

That was the year that Ivy changed her job. She went to work at the North Finchley Woolworth's store and had to declare at her interview the numerous other jobs she'd held hitherto, this induced the manager, a Mr Bennett to refer to her as 'Quite a rolling stone aren't you?' She liked working there, her friendly supervisor being a Miss Annie Logan. before long though Ivy did become very ill for a time with pleurisy.

My school now included woodwork as a subject for the thirteen year old boys so we were sent to the Martin School opposite Church Lane in Finchley High Road. Ivy had gone there in an earlier year to learn cookery. Strangely she particularly remembers a crab-apple tree at the entrance of the school by the main road. However I went there in the latter half of 1936. The teacher, a Mr Dowty was a balding man about fifty five with a huge cyst on the elbow of his right arm and a beetroot red face. He was a northerner with a voice that spoke in one tone only, (all words pronounced as though containing a letter 'I') Hence he might say "Hive yie dine iney widewike befire, Wilefride?" for 'Have you done any woodwork before, Wilfred?'

He was a good teacher though. The class room had three rows of benches and most tools carefully displayed on supports or hooks around the walls. We made several useful items there in satin walnut and yellow deal, including a wall mirror with shelf below, a dust-pan and a letter rack, the latter still in use. All contained an element of carving too and very well finished. He taught us how to hold and use all conventional tools properly, rejecting any work done poorly. After one term at only one day per week all the boys were really quite skilled in basic wood-crafts.

Straight after Christmas we encountered a new problem at home for mum became very ill, we think with pneumonia, and mum being ill was something we'd never been used to. Indeed the only things we'd ever heard of her suffering from was an extremely painful whitlow on her finger as a child, --and warts! For the latter she was adamant that they had been removed from her hand by a 'Wart-Charmer' to whom she'd been recommended. She said that all he did was wipe his own hand over hers and in a day or two the warts had disappeared! She did get a touch of rheumatism on occasion and ply the spot with Thermogen wool, Sloans Linament or Horse Oils, the latter two stunk the place out! Dad and mum also suffered the occasional lumbago for which they swore by a large black rectangle of sticky material called a Belladonna Plaster.

For now though she must have become quite delirious recounting later that a priest had been at the foot of her bed "--and I'd know his face anywhere if I saw him again"! she said. I'd always wondered what some ugly circular scars were on her left upper arm, it seems they were the early type of vaccination marks against small-pox, I had thought they were birth marks! Of birth marks dad told us of a man down at Highgate who had a fur-like one resembling a rat who's body was across the poor man's forehead and its tail was down the side of his face and curled along and under his chin! They all thought his mother was frightened by a rat whilst she was pregnant with him, but these days such superstitions are discounted.

While mum was very poorly we had the shocking news that on January 3rd dear uncle Charley had died! He had been at work in Brighton de-scaling huge boilers by working inside them and became very ill, but returned to work well before he'd sufficiently recovered. This was awful indeed and caused a rift between mum and Aunty Edie who had expected mum to go to the funeral but hadn't realised how ill mum had been over the period.

1937 saw us schoolboys going over to metal work. Also with Mr Dowty to teach us and he was just as good. He taught me lathe work. It convinced me that this was the life for me! I made a heavy brass poker there and a steel stand to stow it in. At lunch times we all went with him into the play-ground where he taught us to play cricket. The playground had a hard surface so the stumps were thrust into wooden blocks having the three requisite holes, the arrangement tipping over if struck, to indicate 'out!' Being him, I quite enjoyed it! though I've never shown any interest in the game since. except maybe to see it played on a village green.

The official Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth was during this time, the fair at Summers Lane returned which Ivy and I utilised as at Jubilee time. So did the fireworks display and all the school sports and marching displays. The school children got a commemorative beaker and a book of tickets that could be used for any of the celebrative facilities. I used all mine for admission to the swimming pool. The town's homes were again externally decorated with bunting and as many Union Jacks as could be afforded.

Mentioning the firework display reminds me now of our annual garden treat with a wopping bonfire and burning guy who had been previously trundled round the streets in our old barrow on the usual "penny for the guy" mission prior to November 5th. Cyril

and I paid the collected pennies into Thurlby's shop where they ran a firework club for the children.

Our class were taken on a trip to Alexandra Palace Station to look over the brand new Steam Locomotive called 'The Mallard' viewing also the impressive controls from the foot-plate. I think this was the year too of the famous 'Coronation Scot' train. By comparison a tiny single decker tram used to ply back and forth between Wood Green and the Palace. There was also a sort of 'Ideal Home Exhibition' held there that year I think. Ivy went to it and brought home a mass of free and other samples of all kinds of household goods, tiny pots of jam etc. a thrill for us all.

This was the year that Cyril and I fancied the same girl who sat about four desks away from ours, she must have been fascinated to get the notes we each passed across to her at every opportunity, but we got none at all answered! We did encounter her in Victoria Park once having come across her climbing trees but she suddenly left the school and that saddened me for a while.

As the time for me to leave school approached (not being a grammar school, children left at fourteen years of age) actual schooling for me reduced somewhat, for much of the day I had to sit in the hall and clang the hand-bell vigorously at lesson changing times.

Being a monitor also, I with others would have to replenish class-room's stocks of paper, note-books, pens (they had 'Made by Rowney and Co' printed on the shafts), they could be split easily two ways (at the end) and then fitted with a cardboard flight to make into a reasonable 'dart'. We would be responsible for filling all the ink-wells from one-pint bottles made of brown stoneware. (everyone liked Royal Blue ink but we could only ever find Stephen's Blue-Black in the school's stock-room). The office paste was a super stuff, called 'Grip-Fix' it was pure white, with a lovely smell of almonds in an aluminium round tin printed in black with a central metal tube containing the small but efficient brush. A quality product, the like of which I've not since seen.

On my fourteenth birthday mum gave me her bible dating from the time of the Coronation of George V in 1910 and told me all about her previous marriages and the ultimate adoption of dear Ivy. (See Chaps 1, 2 and 3). I was absolutely staggered but somehow my love for Ivy seemed to increase and the whole family was from then on somewhat closer.

Also at fourteen dad took me into his confidence in a disasterous attempt to dutifully tell me all about the 'birds and the bees'! He was in a terrible sweat about it and just couldn't get down to the nitty-gritty. Oh! how I pray I could have helped him that day but I was absolutely green and knew nothing, but I did glean that babies were not after all brought by the stork, nor born under a gooseberry bush!

That summer, my school days were at an end and I'd lost a great deal of education through my health problems. In particular I never encountered 'French' nor (as it turned out), important to my career, 'Algebra' or 'Trigonometry'. Mum and dad took Ivy and I to Herne Bay in Kent for a summer holiday. Just prior they'd bought me a lovely chrome pocket watch with its back engraved with a steam locomotive and enamelled in black so I wore it proudly on the holiday. (I think it would have been a year or two earlier

that I'd been given a fine brass-cased watch by Aunty Edie but it had proved troublesome). Herne Bay itself was unexciting for a young lad, its beach being stony and its pier very short, and the sea front being devoid of amusements.

Compensation was effected though by our being taken on trips. Margate was super, having a lovely beach, donkey-rides and a marvellous fair-ground called 'The Dreamland'. We went to Whitstable too but its beach was all stones and the whole place stunk of fish. I suppose for grown-ups it had a certain old world charm not easily appreciated by youngsters.

If I remember rightly Herne Bay's little town consisted of just one straight road running parallel with its sea front, the latter being mainly guest houses and small hotels, but there was a pub at its western end and we all went there one evening. Ivy and I sat in a small room where I remember a picture-frame having within it a very many lettered word, (Welsh I think) describing a cure for lock-jaw !

In the main street was 'The Red Lantern', a cinema that in those days would be called a flea-pit. They were showing two features, 'I cover the waterfront' with Claudette Colbert and Ben Lyon, and Joe. E. Brown in 'The Circus Clown'. It was a quaint place indeed having I think long hard forms for us to sit on, and I do believe its gas-lights were lit by an usherette carrying a flame on a long pole! Even so, Ivy and I were as keen as ever on films. so the programme made it all worth while and reasonable holiday entertainment.

## Chapter 22

### Works and Music

School days over, it had never occurred to me that school had been to prepare me for the world and a future career. It's hard to explain that with childhood in those days came discipline, both in the family and at school. Respect for one's teachers, parents and in fact all grown ups was sacrosanct, so "come here boy" meant you came (probably at the double), and "go and do it" meant just that! So going to school, doing a hundred lines, getting the cane, calling ladies "Madam" (or "Miss" if a teacher) and the men "Sir" was rigidly instilled at school and just accepted as part of living.

Perhaps it was not quite a militant existence (for love prevailed by adults for children) but firmness to all children was also the rule, so the foregoing expressions even now find their use among my generation (and beyond). Thus "Please", "Thank you" and politeness to one's elders at all times was quite a strict requisite (or a clip round the ear would result). So one just did as one was told, the reason didn't come into it. Therefore I just hadn't realised what the intention of schooling was all about. Like most kids I was almost an automaton. Can you understand my meaning? I hope so. I do wish now that I had tried harder there, but on reflection I hadn't done so bad, but was quite glad to leave.

Mum lost no time trying to find me a job. She wanted me to have a nice clean occupation with a degree of permanence, not the unreliability of say, dad's occasional work, (mainly painting the exterior of houses and other properties owned by the local council, the work rarely required, was anyway dependent on the weather), also the recession was so far no nearer its end. So it was fortunate (for her) that she succeeded and I was to work in the office of the Finchley Electricity Department. Ugh!

I was a bit envious of Cyril. He'd got himself a job at the Simms Motor Units engineering factory in Oak Lane which would have suited me better but it seemed that from now on our paths were to separate after so many happy years together. Indeed, even though he was my next door neighbour I rarely ever encountered him again. A bit sad really.

However I was now earning my own pocket money and Ivy and I became fascinated with an advertisement regularly appearing in the papers offering a twelve bass 'Alvari' piano accordion for £2.10s.0d available on hire purchase over a year of weekly payments. Mum and Dad surprisingly let us take on the deal. Well she had recently chanced her arm in similar fashion in order to buy the family our first (second hand) three piece suite from Jelk's Furnishing store at North Finchley.

The piano accordion in those times was very popular, accordion bands pervaded the air-waves, Primo Scala's band comes to mind and quite mundane bands had to have an accordion when the then popular Tangos and Rhumbas were being played. Also the music hall often featured an accordion soloist usually concentrating his act on technical expertise to demonstrate his prowess in the performance of fast moving or complex classical solos. I'm thinking of one called 'Emilio' (but the fashion for many kinds of performers was

to give themselves an Italian sounding name, you may have heard of the big-band leaders 'Geraldo', Edmundo Ross, Roberto Inglez (Robert English?), or of the Violinists 'Alfredo Campoli' etc). Anyway we acquired the accordion and from its inception I was of course thrilled to bits.---but here I must tell you more about my job.

The people at my office were nice enough. but the work entailed was far removed from anything I would want to do. I made a new friend though, he lived in Summers Lane, and his name was Jack Rutland with whom I was put to share duties. The job involved reading aloud huge columns of figures from a ledger as Jack put them into an adding machine and pulling its lever towards him for every entry. We'd change places from time to time. It was a large open-plan office of men and women, managed from a top central desk or table by a gent in his early thirties the living double of Clark Gable.

I had to arrive at eight in the morning, unlock all the small managerial offices, fill a spray gun with what they called 'Carnation Fluid' and spray the stuff everywhere to create an agreeable pong. From noon 'til two o'clock I was put on the switchboard to receive, send out and connect phone calls with orange handled brass plugs on the ends of cords while vigorously turning a small black handle to make some distant office phone bell ring. A little numbered tab would drop down from the unit's fascia to indicate that the person in that office wanted to make an outside call. I would then have to dial out the required number and on reply, plug the caller in, and vice versa of course.

The job was not far from home, about half a mile up Squires Lane opposite the closed in baths, but one day I'd almost got to work when a storm broke and (it's hard to believe I know) tiny but fully developed live frogs fell with the heavy rain from the sky! They were all over the road and lodged in peoples clothing and leaping about all over the place.---but I digress.

Jack and I had another duty, we'd be given a huge pile of letters and blank foolscap manilla envelopes. One of us had to write names and addresses copied from the letters onto the envelopes, the other folded the letters and put them into the envelopes and seal them down. Then once a week I was asked to take them all to the Finchley Borough Council Offices up at Church End. Presumably they were to be hand delivered from there, a nice little bike ride for me and a welcome change from the office environment.

Unfortunately (?) we hadn't realised that the letters had been typed with an address that should have matched the one we wrote on the envelope, but the letters were loaded into the envelopes at random! Jack hated the job even more than I did so we were both quite delighted to be given the sack together. Lucky for me, mum was not very cross about it having no doubt realised that I had not been happy there, but she made sure I searched for another job immediately.

Outside our school was a large black notice board on which (for the sake of the unemployed) was pasted the 'Situations Vacant' columns from 'The Times'. Men therefore queued there to read what was on offer, and so did I but there was nothing for me until I looked in our once a week delivery of the local paper 'The Finchley Press' and there--- right there just for me it seemed,

was the advert I shall never forget, saying 'Young lad wanted to learn light engineering and aircraft work, apply C.T.Opperman and Co. Ltd. Woodside Lane North Finchley N.12'. So I (with mum) went up there like a shot! It was just past the big lorry factory called 'Carrymore Six Wheelers' on the High Road.

The little factory was just down the road a piece from the Plastics factory on the corner (Frazer and Glass Ltd) where Ivy had worked. We were seen by the one office clerk, a fortyish hare-lipped lady who was sufficiently impressed and introduced us to Mr Opperman himself. A German gentleman quite seventy five years old with a much scarred and wizened countenance and twinkling eyes beaming through bi-focused pince-nez. "Come Wilfred" he said "and I'll show you what we can do here". Into the workshop we went, it was rather noisy with all the machines of rather old design being driven from an overhead shafting transcending the whole length of the shop. The shaft itself was driven by one huge electric motor at one end causing all the drive belts to clack,clack,clack rhythmically as their metallic joined ends shot over their respective pulleys.

To make himself heard his voice almost shouted "You see this tube, Wilfred ? my brother in Germany made it on his lathe and sent it to me, isn't it beautiful?". I could see what he meant, true it was just a tube and only about two and a half inches long by perhaps one eighth of an inch outside diameter with its hole right through at only some three thirtyseconds of an inch diameter. It gleamed brightly inside and out and was obviously a very difficult item to make on only a lathe. Then reaching into his pocket he explained "We are friendly rivals" and produced another the same length and showed me its close smooth fit inside the first and itself with a very much smaller hole through. "I made this one on my lathe and I'm going to send them both back to him!" he said laughingly at what to him was a great joke.

His factory had two floors about thirty feet wide by maybe one hundred and twenty but the upper floor was empty, reserved for future expansion no doubt. Soon we were back in the office where I believe mum showed him my schoolboy bits of wood and metalwork. I got the job and was to start at ten shillings per week increasing every three months if satisfactory by half a crown (ten shillings is fifty pence and half a crown is twelve and a half pence today). Four(old) pence had to be deducted weekly for National Insurance. These were the days of the forty eight hour week and only one week's holiday, maybe without pay--I can't remember now.

My little red Hercules bike was now too small so I managed to trade it in part exchange for a larger one with drop handle bars from a man selling bikes from one of the lock-up garages by our school (another of the lock-ups was the head quarters of the local Fascist party!). The bike had plenty of rust where chromium plating had long since taken its leave, but a vigorous rub with soap laden wire wool brightened it up no end. Even so I had to give fifteen shillings with my little bike to effect the deal.

So off I went each day with sandwiches in my saddle bag and a flask of tea and thereby entered the mysterious though fascinating world of Production Engineering. Sometimes mum would give me a tin of soup to take, Lancashire hot-pot I remember too. Heating up these meals was easy because the factory had a cylindrical

shape stove always on the go and we were allowed to put our food on its top about a half hour prior to dinner time. Some times mum would tell me to get a small tin of fruit and a threepenny tin of Nestle's cream on the way to work as an extra. That was a real treat.

For so much machinery the staff was not numerous. Mr Opperman, of course, George Lake the Turner (skilled Lathe operator), Alf Booker the Capstan Setter (setter of semi-automatic lathes), his nephew Ron always singing the new pop song 'Rosalie', then there was a rather cheeky lad of my age (called Sam I think) who started just after me, and myself.

In those days the custom was to 'Initiate' new boys entering the industry by causing them a modicum of suffering. In my case it was mild. They smeared all the handles of the machine I was to work on with engineers Prussian blue oil paint (normally used to show any interference between precise fitting parts). Then I would be sent to the local tool shop for 'A pair of Sky Hooks' or 'A bottle of blue smoke' and once for 'A brass bound bugging iron with long sleeves'. I was also sent to the grocer's shop opposite for 'A Diaper Pie'! Poor Sam however was treated rather cruelly by having his genitals rubbed in with Sloan's Linament, I think, a stinging fluid and was found an hour or two later crying in the toilet and sitting in a sink of cold water! When he returned to the workshop somebody chided him by asking "What's it like out there?---raining?".

Mr Opperman put me on a drilling machine with a little 'jig' (a jig holds the item to be machined before both are then offered by the operator to the cutting tool, in this case a drill). into the jig I had to put an aluminium bolt and drill a tiny hole through its hexagon head. There were thousands to do. Then I had an opportunity to operate a horizontal milling machine. Onto its table Mr Opperman had secured a 'fixture' (like a jig, it holds the workpiece but is offered to the cutting tool by the machine not the operator). The fixture held several round headed screws which passed under the cutter to receive their screw-driver slots. These were clever devices to my mind and I began to take considerable interest in jig and fixture design.

It was the lathe in particular that held my interest because I was put on one very soon and supervised by George Lake who taught me just about all the numerous operations it could perform. Then to my joy I discovered that he was an amateur accordionist! so we became really close friends and I was invited to his house to meet his mum and dad. George was their only child and played his full size accordion to me and showed me the effects he could produce with its registers and couplers.

To date I had learned only 'When I grow too old to dream' and 'The Skaters Waltz' but George showed me some lovely chords I'd never heard before in his version of the then popular 'When day is done' melody. They were a very poor family living in a crude upstairs flat sparsely furnished in Brecknock Road, Holloway. His mum a very frail, thin little lady, his dad jovial, also thin and unfortunately more than partial to drink.

George was a thin man too and very tall with the curious effect that when with head bent over his work and viewed from behind he caused much laughter due to his appearing apparently without a

head at all! Like me he was seldom without a tune to whistle or sing. 'I had an invitation to a dance', 'Bei mir bis du schoen', I recall him warbling and 'Veni Veni Veni' and 'Gianina Mia'. He also liked the music hall and advised me to try to see the comedy dancers Wilson, Keppel and Betty.

He once saved up for and ordered a very expensive micrometer (engineers measuring tool) made by the Ambrose Shardlow Co. It took weeks and weeks to come and when it did, I recall George's trembling fingers as he lifted it from its case, wherupon it slipped from his grasp and fell to the concrete floor suffering some damage. The fellows roared with laughter at his predicament and reddening face but I felt terribly sad for him, a true friend I'm pleased to have known.

After a while I was put to work with the other skilled man there, Alf Booker, a jolly soul. He too helped my career immensely, teaching me how to set and operate capstan lathes. Once set these are capable of mass production (by the operator) of identical screws, bolts, washers, etc. indeed any small turned shapes whether required with screw threads or not. advanced versions were available requiring no operator at all, they're called 'Automatics'. Most of the work we did was of high precision and mainly for the Fairey Aviation Co, I particularly remember drawings we worked to were for the 'Fairey Albacore' plane.

Alf like George was full of songs, but all were comical and many rather rude! but intended to make me laugh, and did so. One was called 'The funny little man from Hindustan' (hilarious), 'Frankie and Johnny' he sang a lot, and another 'The old monk of great renown' was really funny but not for these pages! Alf was short with ginger hair parted centrally so that a wavy mop of it protruded from the sides of his head resembling the wings of a flying gull.

About that time Ivy and/or I made weekly visits to Granny Huskisson's cottage at 58 Church Lane to give the old lady her entitlement of half a crown a week from our family income. This mum could ill afford but the authorities saw the benefit as appropriate in Gran's case as I suppose she was rather poor. Well pensions were pitifully low and she could have got precious little from Aunty Grace (dad's older sister) and Uncle Harry who lived with her. Even so she always maintained visits to her favourite haunt 'The Windsor' pub nearby where she would plant herself in a corner chair while sympathetic near neighbours plied her with drinks until closing time!

I confess to finding the old lady quite likeable for she was good to me. Her hobby had been the upkeep during her life of a huge ledger type scrap book in which she kept local news cuttings and case records of famous crimes, Royal family details etc. As her sight began to fail she gave me the book which I have since adapted by retaining all her original entries but adapting it to a photographic record of family histories, now (the nineties) running to more than thirty volumes. Having in her Victorian youth been on the stage as a dancer it's natural that she loved music like the rest of us. Old age saw her eventually bed ridden and almost blind in her upstairs bed-sit and she liked me to bring the accordion and play the very old tunes for her. Some that I didn't know she would hum to me at her bedside. At that time I was not too keen on the old songs (though some of the melodies are

undeniably beautiful) but I have thought since that they really scored more with the poetry of their lyrics e.g. 'The miners dream of home', 'The sunshine of your smile' etc.etc. Grandma Huskisson died I think aged eighty four.

## Chapter 23

My Career, and Hitler's demands take root.

It was the winter of 1938 when it eventually dawned upon me that engineering in one form or another was to be my vocation and the variations of it were so numerous that if I didn't learn the subject seriously I'd be left at the wayside. George and Alf were super teachers but it seemed that I should also gain more of the necessary grounding by going to night school. My mistake however was that I never dreamed that I should have aimed for the technical side of the subject. For example I didn't even know if there was the availability of the National Certificate course at that time and I didn't have the sense to ask either! No, I was so much enjoying the practical side (I seemed to have a kind of aptitude for it) that I automatically plumped for that.

In the early spring Hitler annexed Austria and his ambitions at last began to poke fear into all the European countries in close proximity. so engineering production was becoming geared to take off.

Every one in Britain was getting more and more apprehensive especially when the message came that we were all to queue to collect our gas-masks from one of the old garage lock-ups near our old school! "Cor! I'll never be able to breathe in this thing!" exclaimed mum on trying hers on.

I decided to get some training at the Albert School in Percy Road, North Finchley and took their subject called 'Metalwork', which turned out to be tinplate work with no precision or production engineering entailed at all! What machines they had were crude and more suited to the home workshop. The teacher was more or less a mere amateur so I began to yearn for the skills of old Mr Dowty who'd taught me metal work at day school. However I did make a beaten copper tea-caddy spoon and soldered a farthing to its handle. That has served us and ricocheted about our tea caddy for some forty years which isn't bad, but that's as far as I got and felt I had to abandon that kind of further education for the time being.

What was to be the last of our holidays from Finchley we spent by going to the new holiday village at Jaywick Sands adjacent to Clacton. An enterprising builder had built up the place by erecting narrow streets of wooden chalets and selling them for only £100. They were of various designs and for entertainment he built a huge dance hall with bar etc. and just outside, an open air summer theatre known as 'Uncle Peter's'. Peggy Binks came with us by first coming up to Finchley we think and staying overnight for the subsequent morning journey. (Gordon wasn't with us, he would have been at work). The five of us stayed in one of the little chalets at the end of a road that terminated in a sort of sea wall backed by open fields.

The beach was lovely silver sand and the narrow promenade was a pedestrian way only. There were no amusement arcades but kiosks pervaded the sea front selling buckets and spades, teas, sweets and the usual holiday fare. The whole week was very sunny and we all had a great time. However I do remember mum and dad were once to be seen looking terribly miserable as they sat on a stone wall

guarding the promenade's edge. This I think was the first time I ever saw them unfriendly to each other and how upset it made me feel. We never did find out what the trouble was. Uncle Peter's shows were marvellous, he was a great entertainer. I always recall his singing a light, happy 'Concert Party' type ditty called "S'art'noon":-

'S'long time, til 's'evening, waiting for the moon,  
Gee oh gosh I could eatya, wanna meetya, s'art'noon.  
'S'long time, til 's'evening, waiting for the moon,  
Gee oh gosh I shall missya, wanna kissya, s'art'noon!

It was he I also first heard sing the (much later version by Donald Peers) popular song 'In a shady nook, by a babbling brook'.

I managed to win his talent competition playing the harmonica there. I chose to play the songs 'Goodnight Angel' and 'That old feeling' which were very popular then, but in the case of the latter I just could not remember how the Dickens it should have ended! so after the third time through it I managed to round it off with a chorus of 'Goodnight Angel' again!

The evenings were very pleasant in the dance hall where we watched everyone (including mum and dad) being taught to dance the new craze called 'Boomps a Daisy' and 'Doing the Lambeth Walk' from the then huge London success 'Me and my gal' with Lupino Lane.

With bus rides to Clacton, Walton on the Naze, Frinton and Brightlingsea etc. it was a delightful week's holiday. However opening the street door on our return home we could hear a strange noise like a mouse gnawing or scampering about and took a long time to discover that our gold-fish had been frightened by the sudden noise, leapt out of his bowl and fell down the back of the piano! A long stick raked him out and he was none the worse when returned to his bowl though he remained covered in thick dust for quite some time.

Returning to work, the staff was beginning to grow. There came a university bloke with a proper apprenticeship who was mad on Duke Ellington's music, though one tune that was forever on his lips was 'Serenade in blue'. We also had a chap come called Cyril Smeeton who looked more like a city gent and could not stand still without constantly swinging one leg! The most important addition though was a middle aged gentleman, a very knowledgeable engineer who was a Government A.I.D. (Aircraft Inspection Department) Inspector. he had all sorts of weird high precision measuring tools and we all felt affronted when from time to time he rejected work that we felt sure was O.K. His equipment though proved us wrong.

Sam and I shared the tea making chore, we had to carry a broom stick with hooks along it around to the workers on which they hung their dirty cups for us to wash. Then we had to boil up the water and make the tea in a rather large ewer type pot. Another chore was to clean Mr Opperman's Morris Twelve saloon car and polish it with 'Simonize' Wax, that was really hard work.

What I did like was going by tram to suppliers in dingy little workshops tucked away in seedy alleyways down among mum's old Clerkenwell haunts. Eight foot rods of brass, steel etc. I had to bring back but sometimes the tram conductors would not let me onto

the tram due to the excessive lengths but if lucky they were stood upright against the staircase. Up the Pentonville Road was Macready's steel stores and here I would have to get some quite heavy chunks of Tool steel or Mild steel but I didn't mind.

Come 1939 the country had a real fear of war. The navy had been mobilised hence the steep increase in our output and employees. Hitler having annexed Austria the previous year now wanted to walk into Czechoslovakia and after much diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing he did so.

Around this time Ivy developed an awful abscess under her arm but continued working as hard as ever at Woolworths. Even to the extent of overtime during the evenings. Mum got cross about it and let off steam to Ivy's manager but the poor chap had been completely unaware of her predicament. On eventually going to the doctors about it she was told that she had worked through the worst of it!

It's worth recording that a fussy customer bought a very small item from Ivy's counter once and insisted on having it wrapped up to which Ivy retorted "You wouldn't like me to take it home for you would you?" In preparation for Easter she worked upstairs with supervisor Annie Logan and together decorated and wrapped Easter novelties.

Throughout her time there Ivy had worked on probably every counter in the store and probably because of that much experience, was asked by the manager whether she would like to try her hand at a job in the office. Her lengthy service there proved it to be a very successful change, though early on she gained some criticism for the very tiny hand writing she had used on envelopes.

Trolley buses had by now replaced the lovely old trams but it must be admitted that they were much faster and considerably more comfortable. Their acceleration was amazing with just a quiet 'whooooooooooooosh'! we were at top speed being thrust back into our seats, an exhilarating ride indeed. So my trips out for the 'governor' were much enjoyed, sometimes to Messrs. Buck Ryan and Co. of Euston Road, who specialised in light machinery and its ancillary parts, or to Buck and Hickman Ltd of Whitechapel who sold every conceivable item of engineering that anyone could want. My trips to Clerkenwell also continued and trolley buses being rather larger than the old trams meant no more trouble getting my rods of metals on board.

I must say I liked old man Opperman (who had gained naturalisation I believe) and I often wondered if all the Germans were as horrible as we were being told, but I could tell that he anyway was O.K. as was his wife for whom I ran the odd errand or two. They lived only just round the corner in Woodside Avenue. he taught me a lot --- Soldering I recall, with large soldering irons heated on a hooded gas range. Hardening and tempering too on a small forge arrangement with leather bellows operated by one's foot. He had a son who also ran an engineering plant, S.E.Opperman and Co. down in Holloway somewhere. He I never met but George Lake commenced his career at that firm. They later expanded to become a large organisation called Opperman Gears Ltd. (on the Great West Road I think).

The Capstan's cutting tools (working so fast) get over heated unless cooled continuously by pumped cutting oil jetting onto the tool-bit against the item being machined. Inevitably much of the fluid gets thrown onto the drive belt which then sprays it onto one's face if in the line of fire. This I and mum was inclined to blame on the development of the severe acne all over my face that has been with me ever since.

After a while I returned to straight forward lathe work but on a different lathe to that I'd first used there. The machine however had some electrical fault giving me quite a shock from time to time. The fault was never isolated so I asked to return to the original lathe and was put under George's tuition again, a very happy association indeed.

I wanted to learn screw cutting on the machine and this is done by a series of interchangeable gear wheels at its left hand end, so changing the wheels determined how many threads per inch would be cut. George taught me the rules thus showing me on to which spindle I was to put which gear (nowadays one merely moves levers according to a printed chart on the machine).

Well I set them all up and was advised to switch on the lathe and view the gear train to check that all the cogs meshed O.K. They did! I was really pleased with my effort and watched the wheels all merrily turning for quite some time. but foolishly as though mesmerised I placed the end of the middle finger of my left hand on one of the wheels and of course it followed the course of the whole series of them, coming out at the beginning again, bleeding profusely and matching the corrugated shape of the gear teeth! I just remember calling for help to someone.

Alf was delegated to rush me up to the nearby doctor in Woodside Lane. He plunged my finger into one of those kidney bowls charged with a pool of iodine, whereupon I yelled and fainted for a short while, strangely it had not hurt until then, I recovered to find my arm in a sling and the finger thickly bandaged. Alf took me home and I was away from work for quite a while but I lost no wages, though I suppose I could have got some compensation had we known of such a thing.

The increasing prospect of war (and us living just to the north of London) worried mum (she'd done it before you see) and although for me the engineering factories may have begun coming out of the recession, not so dad's trade, his work at best remaining only as intermittent as ever. The means test man came and I remember him telling mum to sell the piano. She turned on him enraged and let him know that it belonged to Ivy. After he'd gone (with no prospect of letting her claim any money) she exclaimed "He'd rob Jesus of his sandals!"

We were saddened greatly when to get a few bob dad sold Billy our parrot to the publican down by East Finchley Station! Dad and I were still getting the occasional boils and carbuncles and the doctor told mum ( who was by then getting pretty desperate) that we would never improve our lot and we should all move out of the London environment as soon as possible.

This news gave her a sort of renewed vigour and started her exploration of the idea. One day I have never forgotten was when we were all in the kitchenette and had a sort of family discussion

about it and dad could not raise any enthusiasm for the venture and when all the reasons for the move were put to him including his being forever in and out of work. We were stunned when he quite suddenly got to his feet, blue his top and shouted "It's all my fault! It's all on account of me! I will do away with myself! I must!" and with that he was crying and turned the gas stove taps on, opened the oven door, knelt on the floor and on putting his head inside I remember the broom at the side toppling over and the metallic crash of our small coal shovel shooting across the tiled floor as he kicked it away from him.

I recall screaming out "The silly devil's trying to kill his self" Then grabbing him by the scruff of his neck to pull him away mum was yelling at him "Thats a bloody fine thing for your children to see, I MUST say!" Then it all went calm and all four of us were crying. Ivy and I had never heard our parents have barely a cross word, let alone a set-to like this. It was the most dreadful experience we ever had I'm sure. I suppose the realisation of his apparent failure at being the bread-winner of our family had been playing on his mind for far too long, poor man. My God! I wish he'd known how much we loved him.

Things settled down and dad accepted his lot! We were going to move. Mum began to think that the sea and sunshine would be better for us all healthwise and it might help dad with the realisation that recently his sister Lil, her hubby Fred and family had resettled in Southend-on-Sea so we wouldn't really feel alone there, and after all, we knew it well from of old. She and dad therefore took a trip to Southend and paid some rent in advance for a house at 137 Bournemouth Park Road there.

A chap at work (who I recall was always singing the pop song 'Rosalie') advised me to go for a job at the E.K.Cole. Ltd. factory of 'Ekco radio' fame, and get an interview with a colleague of his who had a high ranking job there, so I felt that continuity of my career was reasonably assured.

Similarly Ivy had applied for a transfer to the office of the Woolworth's branch in Southend.

Mr Opperman had a brand new home workshop treadle lathe as a display item in the entrance hall of our factory. Needing the space and knowing my fascination with lathes he offered it to me for only five pounds, a terrific bargain but we neither could afford the fiver, nor would there have been the room for it at Southend.

Just before leaving my job, my dear friend George Lake was married and invited me to his new flat in Acton to meet his wife Rhoda, a really gorgeous blonde girl who had the strange middle name of Turpentine! and a maiden name of Hughes. He demonstrated his new accordion to me (of 'Paoli Soprani' make I think) and a superb instrument indeed. He was to leave the Opperman set-up to work at a well known engineering concern of the time (Arnott and Harrison Ltd.) It's a shame that I neither met he and his wife, nor any of the Opperman fellows thereafter.

## **PART FOUR**

## Chapter 24

### The War Clouds Break.

So it was farewell Finchley, farewell to our favourite shops, 'Home and Colonial', 'Stevens and Steads', 'Williams brothers' (who issued tin tokens of triangular, square and circular shapes with every purchase), 'Jelks' furnishers, ('International Stores', 'David Greig', 'Tesco', 'J.Sainsbury' and 'Victor Value' were all local grocers then, Supermarkets being unheard of.) 'Salmon's' (an oil shop whose wonderful mixed smells of creosote, paraffin, firewood bundles and all manner of housewares bade you 'go in') 'Everett's' at the bottom of Squires Lane who patted up your half-pound of butter and whose biscuits were displayed in 'look through' glass lidded square tins. Their neighbour, our chemist, who sold us our asprin tablets or 'Thermogen' for mum's 'Screws' (rheumatism), and 'Mentholatum' for our bad colds, etc, and the sweet-shop there with its huge cardboard blue Parrot printed on its orange background advertising "Sharp's Blue- Bird Toffee".

It was farewell also to the beloved music hall (the Finsbury Park Empire) and Ivy and I were to sadly miss our usual cinema haunts. We must have seen all the great films (certainly those that youngsters could see). We saw all kinds and both liked the musicals, not just those of Astaire and Rogers mentioned earlier but Dick Powell, Alice Faye, Kenny Baker, Al Jolson and Eleanor Powell also come to mind.

By the time we left Finchley, colour films were coming in (I confess however that for me even today they cannot compare with the drama-quality possible by a camera filming in monochrome.) The great colour event of the time though was Disney's first full-length cartoon 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' for which we joined an enormous queue. I recall I had just treated myself to a sporty trilby hat with a small feather in its silk band and being of small stature I must have looked rather silly in it and fellows behind us in the queue were heard giggling to my (and poor Ivy's) extreme embarrassment! At this time I was getting more interested in my appearance and took to using Field's Brilliantine with bottle advertising 'Contains no grease!' (Their other type declared 'Contains no gum!' so I didn't buy it because the one with gum kept one's hair in place).

With all our close relatives living in the London area it was virtually farewell to them also and therefore to our musical sing-song evenings and lovely parties in their company and of course farewell to our most happy trips to Peggy, Gordon, Jean and Yvonne.

Strangely, we do not recollect the actual move to Southend, neither the removal van coming nor going, the loading of the furniture or its delivery, nor indeed our own journey, surely by train(?) or how we found the house, an oldish place (built 1911) at 137 Bournemouth Park Road. It was not unlike our first home in New Trinity Road, East Finchley, certainly of similar vintage comparing unfavourably with the house we had just left. Not just its age, nor its atmosphere, being on a semi main road (we'd come from a quietish cul-de-sac), the house was generally rather dark

with a degree of dampness and very cold bedrooms (4 Dickens Avenue had been a very bright place and seemed always sunny).

The house was one of a terrace having three rooms downstairs, (a front parlour, middle sitting or dining room and a large kitchen with a corner stone copper, a butler sink and a walk-in larder). There was no bathroom (so mum had to quickly get a tin bath) and the toilet though built into the house was accessed from the very small square back garden via a tongued and grooved door having a large gap above and below! There was no hot water available. Upstairs were three bedrooms, front quite large say sixteen feet by twelve for mum and dad, middle for me and back for Ivy both about fifteen by nine. The stairs had a cupboard under, accessed from the middle room downstairs. It housed the meters for gas and electricity and had to store dad's tools as well for there was no shed. A back gate led to an alleyway that ran between North and Central Avenues.

I'm sure we began to miss Finchley already! I for one had loved it knowing it's every nook and cranny though admittedly it became a 'dead-and-alive' place on Sundays, boring indeed for youngsters. So why worry? This was Southend on Sea! and we were actually living there!--Marvellous surely?

That first evening Ivy and I went out for a walk together, first down Bournemouth Park Road, then its continuation as Southchurch Avenue, then on up and down its hill to the Kursaal end of the 'Golden Mile' where I'm sure we felt a lot better for we bought and ate a bag of chips each!

Along the golden mile there during daylight hours it was an education to listen to the then well known orator 'Happy Harry' who would spout the Bible to the rude and very unkind interruptions of the quite large crowd that surrounded his every meeting. Cat calling, knocking his trilby hat off, anything they could do to upset his sermons on Christianity. Poor man, he had suffered such assaults for donkeys years thereby demonstrating his firm commitment to his cause.

Another orator there was 'Happy Jack' who claimed to be able to answer any question whatever but he was more of a comedian, having no political or religious message to impart. I recall some wag asking him where all the flies go in the winter time, to which he went into a lengthy rigmarole about his hated grandfather's picture that was never allowed to be touched until the place was decorated, revealing the back of the thing covered in the dead flies of past years! There was also 'Bible Jack', but I never encountered him.

Little did these orators realise that their pitch would not last for much longer, for when the war came and went badly for us, the whole sea front had tank traps built along it with masses of barbed wire interlaced everywhere.

By paying several weeks rent in advance mum felt secure thinking for some reason that dad would find it much easier to get work than had been the case at Finchley but she had a rude awakening when she was told that Southend on Sea was (at that time, March 1939) classed as a 'depressed' area!

So poor old dad's (and mum's) fortunes persisted much as before, the work coming in the all too familiar dribs and drabs. He spent much of those early days making and repairing odd bits of the house wood-work. He had a knack when needing a guide line down near the edge of a strip of wood (in preparation perhaps for sawing), by holding a pencil in the required place, his remaining fingers being allowed to rub down the edge of the wood thus controlling the path taken by the pencil line. With his limited array of tools he made us a fender for the fireplace with a padded leatherette box-seat at each end.

He concentrated much of his time on painting and decorating the house where I loved to watch him paint say the central bar of a window with a single sweep down the edges that abutted the glass without ever a slip onto the glass pane. He made his own paint (a tradesman's custom then) and left-overs were always saved and strained through old stockings prior to re-use.

Colour in those times was not used very imaginatively by painters. Dark brown, olive or apple green, or if in a daring frame of mind cream seemed the only shades ever seen indoors or out. (White would be regarded as really too glaring, but if used, quickly turned to a pale cream anyway!) Dad did sometimes use a lightish colour, a sort of walnut tone that was then treated whilst still wet with a feather or special comb to imitate the grain of the wood. A clever man indeed was our dad.

Wall paper patterns were as varied as today but there were no vinyls, and the edges had to be trimmed at home. There we would all sit, legs outstretched with toes turned up supporting the roll of paper as we cut down the edges straight and true to hasten dad's paper hanging operation. There was no emulsion paint for walls and ceilings, instead one used distemper, a sort of whiting mixed with water that could be dyed to the required colour. It had to be washed away completely when redecorating was contemplated, a tedious and messy dreadful task.

Thus with mum and dad slogging away we seemed to settle in Southend quite quickly. Ivy soon found work following an interview she had at Green's the grocers in Woodgrange Drive (though she had a stye on her eye at the time) although the job was at their Cuckoo Corner branch. Her ambition was of course to get a job back into Woolworth's, this was eventually achieved but she had to wait for the right vacancy to occur in the office.

Mum quickly found a new friend, a dear little kindly lady who was our next door neighbour, Mrs Hesketh. They would go places and shop together, it was lovely for both of them. Mum of course had been friendless of late, and by a happy coincidence Mrs Hesketh had been a Londoner herself and as a child had gone to The Hugh Myddelton School as mum's contemporary so they had much in common.

At first we had no wireless set (our Finchley home-made one being too cumbersome to move) and we managed to get a nice second hand 'Ekco' battery one with bakelite cabinet along at the corner of South Avenue called 'Frank's Cycle Stores'. Radio Luxembourg was a popular programme with advertisements then. Mackintosh's Sweet Co. had a series inviting listeners to tell the stories of how they met their wife or husband. Dad decided to write about mum's life before and after they met, i.e.: as I described here in Part 1. Their story was broadcast a few weeks later but not

expecting to hear any more, they missed it! Never mind though, a huge parcel later arrived full of Mackintosh's Chocolate goodies. and Ivy and I had a generous share.

The man who I'd expected to get me a job at the huge 'Ekco' radio factory turned out to have only a mundane job himself, being in no position to 'hire and fire' anybody. I did get an interview though provided by a charming elderly gent called Mr Gaillard then in charge of the Tool Room---Cor! what a place! No overhead shafting spinning with drive belts thrashing about, no noise to prevent your hearing what was being said. This for its time was ultra modern. There was just a gentle hum from the machines, their motors being self-contained and all of them painted in a pale blue-grey tone and installed on a varnished wood-block floor. I was shown around and saw much of the work being done, but when it came to form filling and a date I could start it turned out that they took nobody on until they were at least sixteen years old! That meant I had a long time to wait but I was promised another interview would be waiting for me!---so meanwhile I patiently had my heart set on becoming one of their tool-makers.

Mum would never have let me hang around for long so I managed to get fixed up first as a van boy with the Albany Laundry in Nelson Road and travelled with the driver to collect and deliver in Hornchurch. Then I tried my hand at Garon's bakery factory in Sutton Road decorating fancy cakes would you believe? Quite an education it was. They had a tiny dwarfish and brusque old fellow there, the manager I suppose, and clad in pure white including a very tall chef hat. He showed me how to put the jam in the middle of the large sponge cakes after slicing them through by spinning one half faster and faster on the fingers of his upturned left hand, then gently pouring just a little of the 'runny' jam onto the centre, whereupon it instantly flowed out to the edge due to the speed of rotation.

Everybody followed a rigid rule where we had to go to the nearby long sink and wash our hands when the bell clanged every half hour! I spent a day or two in the wedding cake room too where really exquisite work was done, and later I was making meringues and had a spell making cream--a boring job of turning a cylindrical drum over and over. I quite liked the madeline cakes, it was my job to coat them in jam and then sprinkle them with desiccated coconut.

I had to fill huge wooden trays with finished cakes, this made them very heavy for me but I had to put them on my head and take them down two flights of stairs to the dispatch department----yes you've guessed correctly, one was 'front heavy' making me go down faster and faster until for safety sake I dropped the lot! Was I sacked? Honestly I can't remember but I do recall wanting dearly to return to a more dirty environment and got myself a job with A.J.Hutchings Ltd in Oakhurst Road.

This move was a disaster in that the pig-headed proprietor seemed only interested in cheap labour by employing only teen- agers, in fact I recall no one there over the age of about seventeen. I'd hoped for a tool-making job but 'Beggars can't be choosers' as dad would say. Principally they manufactured the sprung interiors of car seats with other odd items such as brass corner plates for cafe tables. Most of us worked on an upper floor which for access necessitated climbing an external iron staircase down which I

vividly recall a pretty young girl falling from the top to the bottom! She was taken away by ambulance and someone afterwards said she had died.

My job there initially was the spot welding of seat frames, then I was put on a buffing machine to polish the brass things, the buff mop sometimes flipped the part from your fingers (painful!). It then clattered and banged its escape around the mop's guard so you would stand well clear as it invariably shot out again towards you! To effect the required finish, sticks of 'Canning' brand polish were occasionally applied to the buffing wheel whose rotation at high speed threw off odd bits onto my face. I was already riddled with acne over my face and neck but now it rapidly got worse! Our doctor Bennison told me to take time off work for a while and indicated 'Impetigous Acne' on the certificate. On being signed off he advised me to get another kind of job. I gave in my notice but was told "you're too late for that! you're sacked!"

Up Sutton Road (opposite Garons Bakery, later Kenbro) was the shoe repair shop of 'Smith Bros' who next gave me a job as there were several weeks to go before my forthcoming 'EKCO' interview. The brothers were told of this and kindly accepted this temporary arrangement. The work was an entirely new departure but quite an interesting craft. I learned about leather tanning and the knifing of soles before their being sewn. Soleing and heelng with shoe brads, knife-trimming close to the welt, and machine sanding to finish prior to the application of the heel-ball for a job well done. However cleaning their windows plus riding their trades bike delivering and collecting the work from umpteen other shoe shops around the town made me lose considerable interest.

One such little shop was down the side of an alley way beside the Rivoli cinema in Alexandra Street where to my delight I found the proprietor was my dear cousin Jacky Butler (dad's sister Lily's son) That family as earlier indicated had moved to Southend from Leytonstone and were now living in Hamstel Road though they had first gone to Ennismore Gardens. So this was a nice reunion for me and what is more, he played the accordion! It was a bright blue full size model of Paoli Soprani make which he played fairly well but his main interest was 'magic' and being a member of 'The Magic Circle' he knew a thing or two!

During our first visit to their home we had quite an entertaining evening, with their infant daughter Maureen singing the latest Flanagan and Allen song 'Any Umbrellas' that she preferred to call 'Any Umberellows'!

Jack and I played our accordions and Jack performed a few tricks plus one he'd no doubt shown his mum but involved a 'fall guy' (our dad) and called 'Black Magic' where one held a plate and wiped a finger-tip around its underside, followed by the finger then being passed across the forehead or perhaps down a cheek. The other participant, apparently 'mesmerised' had to repeat the manouvre. This time though it provoked laughter from the gathering because unknowingly the finger tip was covered in soot from the underside of the plate from a lighted candle previously held below it! We had several such evenings but one went sour and poor sensitive Ivy was rightly offended when things got out of hand during the merriment and her skirt was lifted for a joke. She was quite overcome so Mum and dad thought it best if I took her home.

The time duly arrived for me to see the 'Ekco' personnel manager! They had remembered and sent me the appointment time. It took only minutes and I was to start as a 'Tool-making improver' with a clocking in number of 108 at a wage of 11..3s..6d per week. I was put in the care of Jimmy Wales a Scot with broad accent who patiently taught me all his engineering hints and wrinkles as I helped him to make jigs, fixtures and press tools. The latter are for blanking metal shapes with or without holes pierced in them. Other tools might be for bending them or even deep drawing them into tin box shapes etc. So this was the life for me and the other fellows were all lovely blokes--Eddie Sansom (an elderly master of the craft), Kenny Godsill, Freddy Lambert, Sid Cole, Alec Andrews, Ronnie Palmer, Willy Russell, Sid Tuffin--oh and several others including the peculiar but strangely likeable charge-hand we called 'Scruffy Thompson' who though about fifty five, had a 'Bela Lugosi like 'Dracula' face, iron greying hair and always wore an egg stained tie, and badly creased and dirty trousers underneath his regulation grey overall secured with bits of wire, not buttons!. (ours were ordinary light brown warehouse coats, the foremen's were white).

Except for the management of course, all the men belonged to The Amalgamated Engineering Union and persuaded me to join. This I was glad to do and went to the local branch where one of the chaps had to propose me and another second the proposal. It was all very formal and quite a ceremony with us all signing on the dotted line, them taking my fourpence a week and starting a long meeting to solve the workers problems. I soon learned that workers problems are really only solved by union membership, hence the expression 'Unity is strength' I soon noticed that those who don't join and those who love to criticise trade unionism are selfishly quite happy to share in the benefits of the better wages and conditions that unions obtain.

From the moment I started at the firm I admired (more likely coveted) Jim's tool cabinet. These cabinets are for the more precision type tools and are miniature lockable chests of drawers that slide in and out beautifully. His had a lidded recess at the top. All the men had one but his was by far the best and after seeing my sketch and description of it dad set to work to make me one bless him. Well it was a reasonable imitation and although the drawers did not fit at all well (dad was no cabinet maker) it served me very well. It was passed on when I bought one cheaply years later.

Leisure wise I was still as keen as ever on the cinema with which Southend was fortunately well blessed. Southchurch Road had the Gaumont (once their Hippodrome music hall), the Civic opposite and the Plaza at Southchurch. The High Street had Garon's Cinema opposite the alley way entrance to the Strand cinema in Warrior Square. Near to the L.M.S railway bridge was the Astoria (becoming later the Odeon). At the top of Pier Hill was the Ritz and Alexandra Street had the Rivoli mentioned earlier. Hamlet Court Road's was the Kings and there was the Mascot and the Metropole vying opposite each other in the London Road nearby. In Leigh-on-Sea were the Corona and the Colosseum, while Hadleigh's was the Kingsway. The Gaumont, Odeon and Rivoli showed the new productions but all of the rest survived very well showing only the old releases.

Of theatres there was 'The Palace' of the traditional kind, and a so called music hall called the 'Regal' a flea-pit of a dump with one seating level. It only ever put on questionable nude shows and 'acts' that no one had ever heard of, though I did go just once, to see the comic-cum jazz drummer Max Bacon of whom you may have heard.

Come September Hitler's armies marched into Poland and he was given the ultimatum that if they did not withdraw we would be at war! Prime Minister Chamberlain received no reply--or to quote his words at 11a.m. on the third "No such reply has been received, so consequently we are now at war with Germany". Mum, Ivy and I were in the middle room at the time and listening to the message on the wireless.

"Aw my Gawd" mum cried "Now we'll 'av it! I remember the bombs in the last war when four aeroplanes came over all at once"!

## Chapter 25

Farewell Thirties and then the menacing Forties.

So that was it! I knew enough about the '14-'18 war, the umpteen millions dead, Passchendaele and the rest of it so how would we all fare this time? My mates, my relatives, almost all of them seeming so distant now, I felt sort of lonely, it was a foreboding feeling at the realisation that school children from vulnerable towns all over the country were being evacuated to country districts losing the love of their parents for long periods, a few lucky ones would at least have mum go with them, but she probably no longer having a hubby at home to fend for. He most likely being sent abroad to become just 'cannon fodder' as was the case the last time,--- still, that Hitler bloke had to be dealt with somehow.

Within only a few hours of the war declaration we heard the catawauling up and down howl of the air-raid siren's warning but luckily it was a false alarm and nothing much happened for quite a period. We were told to always carry our gas masks of course and conserve energy, foods, water etc. Ration books had been issued, only five inches of water in the bath was the rule! Mum hastily stocked up with all manner of things she thought would be in short supply.

The 'Black-out' was a menace with no lights whatever permitted to show from the dwellings, no street lights, and vehicle head-lamps reduced to a slit by being covered with a slotted tin shield. Trams and buses had their windows painted with a transparent purple paint and all blinds were pulled down in the trains at night. 'Anderson' air-raid shelters were installed in everyone's back gardens. They were of corrugated asbestos panels sunk into the soil by three feet or so with a blast panel fitted to protect the entrance aperture. The E.K.Cole. factory provided long tunnels of concrete for its two thousand odd employees, with wooden forms for them to sit upon and we were to rush to them at the sound of the warning.

Apart from these precautions life proceeded much as before, the tunnels were rarely used, our shelter at home never, because mum swore blind that " We're gonna be safer in our own 'ome!" so things were really not too bad and even dad got some intermittent work, (with a building firm called Byford and Co, I think). Between whiles Mum made a few bob with her crochet work turning out dozens of table mats and dressing table sets that Ivy did a trade with by selling them to her workmates.

Dad showed us how to make another kind. He made up a range of rectangular frames with nails spaced about an inch apart with heads protruding upward. On to these we wound wool up, down, and back and forth across without cutting it anywhere. We then had to tie each of the crossover intersections separately, finally cutting just about two thirds of each set of strands between the knots. When the finished mat was gently removed from all the nails, the wool's elasticity threw up each of the intersections into quite pretty little floral bobbles.

Everyone quickly became geared to the war effort though, some volunteering for the A.R.P.(air-raid precautions), the A.F.S (Auxilliary Fire Service) or maybe the L.D.V.(Local Defence

Volunteers, later to become The Home Guard). Even so, the first few months brought very little worry from the enemy to us in Britain, in fact the media began to refer to the period as "The Phoney War"---Later on of course things were to dramatically change for the worse!

Working for the 'Ekco' as we called it was quite an experience especially at about eight in the morning, for it seemed that the whole town was full of bikes! All making for the factory. I, like every Southend cyclist in those days, made for 'The Tunbridge Road Cycle Stores' for a good bike deal. I traded mine for a second hand smart 'tourer' there, a slim wheeled model with Russ pattern front forks, so I was nicely set up for my bike journey to and from the job.

Ah! the job! how nice it was working with Jimmy Wales and the other men there, this was my first real experience of high precision work--Jig boring (the extremely accurate positioning and making of holes in steel carried out in the confines of a special room of constant temperature). Punch shaping (the machining of contoured punches for piercing or blanking of components for the company's radio chassis). Surface grinding (for creating the highly precise flat surfaces of the steel plates constituting the build up of the production tooling required). Flame cutting (for cutting out, leaving a machining allowance), the rough shapes of the plates from huge billets of steel in preparation for subsequent machining.

Shaping and planing machines are the alternatives used for the more handleable sized pieces of steel. A shaping machine has its tool-holder on a reciprocating carriage with an adjustable stroke operating at the top of the machine. Sid Tuffin liked to sit on this part and enjoy a back and forth ride! When a new version of 'Wotan' make was installed he was not aware that its return (non cutting) stroke was very fast (for time saving) and he was flung off the machine head over heels and onto the floor but thankfully uninjured!

I thought it wise to start evening classes again at the Southend Technical College doing Engineering Workshop Practice (for me they confined it to latework). Also Engineering Science, Technical Drawing and Engineering Mathematics. I was doing quite well at these but half way into the Maths course they changed the teacher! Like too many teachers he (actually a Fire Brigade Officer) erred badly by concentrating only on those who could keep up with him! and being a slow learner I got left behind. This is surely still the cause of failure for many students even today and through no fault of their own.

I supplemented my engineering education by taking the magazine 'Practical Engineering' making a scrap book of the articles of interest, and invested in a weekly book called 'The Complete Engineer', it ran for a year and was then bound into four volumes but was really disappointing in that it covered all branches of the subject, so the parts of interest to me amounted to very little.

Light relief was gained by reading a serial in Ivy's 'Glamour' weekly called 'Anna Chapman' a tale about the evil exploits of a girl bent on stealing other girls boy friends or husbands. I clearly recall regular adverts inside and on the back for 'Coty'

and 'Tangee' lipsticks, the latter illustrating a South Sea Island's beauty. Better reading for me was Ivy's weekly 'Film Pictorial' or 'Picturegoer' magazines.

Ivy was quite an ardent reader and I remember she sent off for a set of books on Law, Medicine, Household management etc. About twelve in all by Odham's Press. Another of her books I liked was a silver covered volume of film star photographs of the day. One of her light hobbies was to make a scrap book of film stars press and magazine cuttings. I think I still took the 'Film fun' and read the boys paper 'The Champion' and an occasional copy of 'Practical Mechanics' a mish-mash of ideas and news for hobbyists with a technical bent. About that time I gave up my stamp collecting hobby amounting to some ten thousand stamps which like a prize twit I sold to a second hand shop for fifteen shillings!

One short lived craze of the period was the making of brooches etc. Ivy would bring home lengths of 1/16" square section gold plated aluminium wire that was easily bendable enabling us to make all manner of things together.

The Ekco factory was of several buildings for the differing divisions of their manufacturing capacity. So they had 'The Radio Division', 'The Avionics Division', 'The Plastics Division' etc. I was a tiny cog in the Radio Division. We could wander about between divisions and departments which was useful for keeping abreast of all the processes going on.

The Radio Division was by far the largest in the complex, its main building being a vast open planned expanse, perhaps a quarter of a mile long by about half as wide and having multiple gangways separating great long and narrow tables crossing the whole width of the building. This arrangement of gangway, table, gangway, table etc. occupying the entire length of the place. Now can you picture the hub-bub and clatter emanating from there when occupied by probably a thousand or more bright blue overalled women and girls? Here they sat almost shoulder to shoulder passing radio chassis to each other for the deft soldering in of the valve holders, resistors, condensers etc.

To get to various other departments and canteen it was often necessary to pass along one gangway or another between all the ladies. The men (and I suppose the girls) quite took a fancy to this arrangement--and I confess I was no exception!

Indeed I quickly became entranced by a beautiful blonde lass (so I was apparently maturing by now) and felt I had to see her just once in every day!--but it seemed she would never even notice me except after several months, then she looked at me just once and I felt myself reddening all over and I just had to look away!. I was inwardly scared of girls you see and was too embarrassed to pursue her any more. Well anyway mum had often said that she hoped I would take no notice of the opposite sex until I was at least seventeen. She did not exactly disallow me but she felt my career really came first! So I didn't mind. I could still privately fantasize about Ginger Rogers anyway!

Dinner times we spent in the firm's vast canteen where we ate our sandwiches or bought a meal. If the latter, one had to buy tickets so that for hygienic reasons the counter ladies would not have to handle coins. It was an enormous building like a theatre and

complete with a fully equipped stage, curtains, lighting etc. Here they performed plays, amateur variety shows, held factory meetings etc. I seem to remember the B.B.C doing their then popular 'Music while you work' programme there on occasion and (in better times) the Wilfred Pickles 'Have a Go' show.

There was time after the meal for us chaps to either stroll about the complex or join in a ball game on a large triangle of rough green just outside our tool-room. The ball frequently landed on the low flat roof and it was invariably I who took the easy clamber up to get it. In bad weather we congregated in the heat treatment shop (where the flame cutting, hardening and tempering of steel was done) to play darts, one of the few games I quite like.

Back at the bench Jimmy taught me how to read precision measuring instruments, I was already familiar with the micrometer from my 'Opperman' days but now it was the 'Vernier Caliper', its counterpart the Height Gauge both of which measure in thousandths of an inch and the use of even more precise 'Optical flats' and 'Johannson Slip Gauges'. Having mastered these fairly quickly and could operate all the different machining processes I must have become rather big-headed, for Jimmy and others would promptly 'slap me down' when I developed the undesirable habit of verbally interjecting their engineering conversations with high-falutin opinions of my own.

I was virtually cured of this when Jimmy once picked up a piece of work I'd made entirely, (a part for his tool and of which I was quite proud) and saying "Did YOU make this Wilfred?" Expecting a little praise I replied "Yes Jim" but he viewed it closely, measured a part of it and suddenly threw it hurtling down the workshop's long gangway! Thereafter he softened and showed me where the piece was in serious error, remonstrating to me also by explaining that I still had much to learn. He was really the kindest of men, a superb craftsman and a true friend to whom I realised much later I owed a great deal.

Another lovely chap was our repair man Jack, he serviced old tools with Willie Russell and got to hear of my accordion playing. As I recall his daughter played quite well but had had a dog she adored and the poor thing would howl pathetically whenever she donned the instrument (dogs tend to howl or cry at the sound of various musical instruments). In this case however the poor animal became ill and died! Jack deemed it purely a coincidence but the girl was convinced her accordion playing was the cause. She was bent on selling it as soon as possible and (via Jack) offered it to me for five pounds! It was a Hohner 'Verdi III' in navy blue, a fine instrument and quite a bargain. Mum and Dad decided to let me have the money and so of course I was 'tickled pink' with my new possession.

By mid 1940 the war had gone badly for Britain and France, the country's general apprehension induced all us lads to spend much spare time making identity discs from the sheet metal piercings from our press tools for family members and friends. The evacuation of our troops from Dunkirk had been effected and Paris had been occupied by the Germans. Now 'The Battle of Britain' (indeed FOR Britain) had begun etc. so the Ekco management decided to evacuate their activities inland to Malmesbury in Wiltshire. To me, you can imagine this news was a disaster for as much as I

enjoyed my job with the firm I could not see myself leaving home. So what to do?

Well Jimmy Wales told me of a Belgian lad (Ray Phillippe) who had left Ekco's a couple of years earlier and was successfully re-installed at a place called 'The Rodenside Engineering Co. Ltd.' at Barking. I think Jimmy or our manager Mr Gaillard arranged an appointment there for me, so I went. The interview was short "What limits can you work within"? the manager (Mr Dunkley) asked. "Half a thou" I replied and was in! with my new clock number 103.

Before long came the appalling air-raids on London, Bristol, Coventry etc. Southend was let off fairly lightly I suppose but the 'Starline Paints' factory suffered a big bomb and went up in flames and the school at the junction of Hamlet Court Road and London Road was bombed also. There were several other bombing incidents that I forgot and several fire bombs too. So many folk volunteered for fire watching duty and issued with stirrup pumps in order to aid the town's emergency services. Ack-Ack fire could be heard from several directions and we had an anti-aircraft or Bofors gun close to us at the junction of North Avenue and Sutton Road.

Mum still refused to go down our shelter repeating "I know I'll always be alright in my own 'ome"! I have to say she seemed to have the power of premonition if ever something was wrong or if good news was on its way. So we never used it. However there was much written about staying near the party wall of houses for safety when bombing was imminent so I set to and cleared our under stairs cupboard and arranged wooden boxes as seats, thus into the cupboard we would go when the air-raid warning sounded, but it was sometimes a couple of hours before the 'All Clear' signal was heard and our close confinement became by then too uncomfortable, so the idea was a failure even though air-raids by nightfall became the norm as the weeks and months passed.

The Rodenside Co. made tools like those at the 'Ekco' of course but not confined to radio parts, and their sizes varied much more widely, also the tool-room was about three times the size. On the debit side much of the machinery was quite old and shafting driven as it had been in my 'Opperman' days and the floor was just a concrete expanse not a patch on the sophisticated wood-block affair of the Ekco plant. The place was heated by only two coke fed round tubular fires, a most inadequate arrangement and in winter the work-pieces were so cold they tended to stick to the fingers.

They had a vast main workshop for general tooling with benches filling one side and relevant machinery filling the other. Above each end projected a mezzanine floor. On that at the front was the canteen occupying half of it, the Drawing and Costing offices having the other half. The canteen was run by an extremely old gent called Harry whose cooking was excellent but he had a strange trait of wandering to and fro singing "Oh my Kingdom for a bloody 'orse" as he carried out his duties or shouting "Come and get your eating irons" or "fork an' knife".

The opposite end's floor carried a separate workshop for precision press-tool making only. The main office, toilets etc were on the front at ground level, The stores of steel, screws et al were at the back as was the fuel and packing room. Behind this main

building was another sizable workshop, quite separately confined to making high precision gauges.

To get there and back added an extra three and a half hours to my day so I was setting off each morning at six to catch the six-fifteen (always crowded) at Southend Central station then I would change at Upminster for the Underground train to Becontree station and walk (ten minutes) down Gale Street to the factory facing it in Barking's Ripple Road. Sometimes though, due to some bombing incident our six-fifteen train would be diverted to Tilbury where it would wait and wait! then pull out again and crawl along to Barking. There I would have to get a bus that went down the Ripple Road where I would then alight at Gale Street perhaps an hour or so late!. It was on Barking station once that we all took rapid cover as a Stuka dive bomber 'screamed' downward (they were noted for that sound) aiming straight at the station with its machine guns blazing. It soared away again with much roofing glass broken but nobody hurt.

On starting work at the new job I soon met Mr Brown the director, Mr Eric Edwards a foreman, Mr Theobald, another foreman (he was also a Major in the Home Guard and once when in his office a few of us narrowly escaped death when in demonstrating his automatic rifle it rattled off about five rounds that splintered his wooden office and continued through the factory smashing through glass windows and two roof panels!). But I've digressed again.

They first put me on a small lathe on the main floor for a time but soon wanted me to try my hand at 'Tool-Inspection' under the Chief Inspector Bill Helps--the most inappropriate name for such a man! Far from 'helping' anyone his policy was 'if you check a tool-makers work and pass it O.K. you've given it insufficient attention!' He had such a notice pinned up on his wall! The men had to have me check each machining operation to the tolerances given on its drawing and I had to return it to the workshop with one of these notifications:- 'Scrap, to be re-made' or 'Rejected' or 'Passed with comment' (all followed by reasons why) or 'Passed'. You can bet I much preferred making the bits to inspecting them so before long I appealed to return to the workshop, preferably to do a stint of press-tool making that I had been learning under Jimmy's care. They transferred me at once which pleased me no end.

Writing here of Jimmy again I recall that the Ekco idea was to have each man completely responsible for making each tool in its entirety, handling all his own machining processes, heat treatment and inspection necessities (except for the jig-boring, where a specialist was employed) whereas at Rodenside all the men specialised in their own field as is generally the case nowadays. So we had milling machinists Ray English and Jack Jackson (to become the jig borer and a future works manager elsewhere), surface grinder Georgie Webb (mad on Roland Peachy a guitarist of the Felix Mendelsohn Hawaiian Serenaders). fitters Eric Downer, Peter Brimble and Jock Collie (he was also privately a violinist of the B.B.C. and the London Symphony Orchestras?). There were many others in the main shop of course whose names escape me now, slotters, turners, cylindrical grinders, cutter grinders and the like. However, close friends Joe Popham, Johnnie Kerby and Bill Zolowski I'll tell you of later on.

Mum was right about our house. We did remain safe in it but the risk of external bombs blowing in the windows induced most people to take the advice from the media to put sticky tape in cross shapes over the windows which would not prevent breakage but helped contain the resulting slivers. One peculiarity of a bomb explosion was the blast first blowing every thing outward, then (because of the vacuum at the source) sucking a great deal of the glass etc back inward, i.e. an implosion. We were lucky to have no windows broken at home, our only dangerous incident being a chunk of anti aircraft shrapnel striking and ricochetting off the back door!

The incessant night bombing and Battle of Britain continued so I was not too surprised on wending my way down Gale Street for work one morning when I was met by one of our night shift chaps waving his arms and shouting "Go careful at the factory Wilf, its all dahn mate! its all dahn"! but he was only joking. Windows were broken and my tool cabinet was flung across the bench and the place was afog with dust, but that was all.

## Chapter 26

### On with the war and show business

So I had now got back to doing the work I enjoyed and working upstairs on the rear mezzanine floor. The charge-hand was Tom Kerby, about fifty five, totally bald and almost stone deaf but an extremely fast tool maker, he was at the bench to my right. To my left was a stout bespectacled elderly gent with a red face and painful feet. He was Bill Watling, full of sound advice and a fountain of wisdom, his work was always beautifully executed. Others there were punch shaper Johnnie Harris, a youngster in one end workshop (son of the inventor of London Transport conductors ticket machines). There was a young lad, 'Snowy' (surname White of course). Another elderly pipe smoking hand called Jim Ayers, a Lancastrian Ken Land, skilled but less mature chaps James Barrowman, Dave Wylie and Ron Spiers. The latter two shared one end workshop with an able young engineer (a sea-scouting enthusiast) Ted Elliott, who I still regard as a close friend (although we met only once since the war). I recall he liked a film of Eddie Bracken's and another with the Glen Miller orchestra he (or us both?) saw at the Dagenham Princess cinema called 'Sun Valley Serenade' also starring ice skater Sonja Henie.

Having diverted the story to the cinema it was probably about that time that Ivy and I went to the Garon's Cinema at Southend and saw Bob Hope's fine but already ageing film with the lovely Shirley Ross called 'Thanks for the memory' in which she and Bob sing the title song (that became his signature tune), and the other hit of its day 'Remember me?'. The nearby 'Strand' cinema had their 'hocus-pocus' night every Friday when talent competitions were held between the A and B pictures. I think I had three go's at this, coming second, then tying for first with a lass who sang 'The Holy City' and finally getting the first, all within six months or so, I reckon the audience by then had had enough so I didn't try it again!

What also comes to mind is that when alone once down the High Street I had not realised until my eyes were streaming that a mock gas attack was under way and like most other naughty folk I was without my gas-mask! I hastened up the road and round the corner and into the Gaumont Cinema where the gas had so far not penetrated. They were showing Disney's 'Fantasia', marvellous! An education in cartoon art form and classical music, the latter of only marginal interest to me at the time. but to return to Rodenside's:-

Christmas time down on our factory's main floor was a jolly affair, the office girls and lads cladding the machinery with decorations, (including those of one wag who was rudely blowing up three condoms and tying them together to represent male genitalia!). Someone asked me to bring in the accordion so we had singing and some dancing. The management and senior men conducted a quiz akin to the then popular 'Brains Trust' programme, where they attempted to answer serious questions of the day on science, religion, politics, etc. Anything really, but I remember one question being 'Do we live to work or work to live'---quite a teaser but I can't recall the answers.

Having heard me playing the accordion, Ted Elliott invited me to the Barking Technical College where they were putting on a show

compered by a light comedian called Charlie Mason. I don't recall much of the show but a chap made a fine rendering of the ballad 'I Travel The Road'. Charley did his comic and dance routine, and a lady called 'Madge Thomas' sang soprano ballads exquisitely. In short though, Charlie wanted me to join a new Concert Party he was forming, principally to entertain the troops in the surrounding area. I was pleased of course to join.

We had our introductory meeting at his home. The guests were all talented from considerable experience. He, of course, was the leader. Madge Thomas was our soprano and accompanist for everyone. Tom Wills the comedian, Ray Patman the 'Ray of Sunshine' (a tap dancer and acrobat). Mitzi Stamford was the soubrette. The Bonner Brothers were ukelele duetists, (Jackson Bonner doubled as our magician and illusionist). Then there was me, of course, on accordion mainly, but doubling with impressions (Gordon Harker, Cyril Fletcher, yodelling George van Dueson etc) and piano solos from time to time.

I found stage fright a bit of a menace though, always wanting to empty my bowels just before going on stage!

We were called 'The Spitfires' and our bookings grew thick and fast. The opening number was 'Light up Your Face with Sunshine, put on a great big smile, etc', and we closed in the same morale boosting vein with 'Smile All the While, that's the thing you've got to do today, etc', after being sure to make the show as fast moving as possible. Any slow features were kept well apart, for example Madge's ballads and Jackson's illusions. The programmes were in two halves, of course, and we had a spot in each. I was first turn playing two flashy solos, such as 'El Relicario' and 'Ragamuffin', followed by a selection of pops of the day. Madge (self-accompanied) then sang a couple of ballads, maybe 'One Fine Day' and 'Shine Through My Dreams'. Platinum blonde Ray Patman would then come on stage, usually scantily clad in what resembled a sequinned bikini to do her somersaults and quick-fire tap routines. Then Charlie Mason's jokes, song and dance. The Bonner Brothers followed with their alternative mimicking of George Formby's ukelele numbers. Then Tom Wills doing perhaps his 'drunken army cook' sketch and finally Mitzi Stamford belting out a raucous 'There's No Business Like Show Business' or the like.

The second half ran generally in similar order, but with our better numbers presented. The ladies in particular wearing a change of costume and Jackson would create a fascinating illusion, and I (as the last turn this time) would invariably finish with a great deal of old time choruses and get the crowd to sing along to them. Soon after we got established we were struck a blow when little 15 year old Ray Patnam contracted T.B. and died of it after a short illness. We continued with no replacement by extending our acts a little, or occasionally engaging Alan Vines, a very talented local ventriloquist.

Many of our shows ran late of course, or involved awkward journeys, so I had to take my accordion into work and sleep on my bench amid the noise of the night shift's machinery and the initial curiosity of the employees! Madge got to hear about it and from then on offered to put me up at her place on such occasions. Her soldier son had been called up, so his bed was very welcome, and in the mornings Madge saw to it that I ate a hearty breakfast and would also give me a meal after my day's work prior to any

show we (or I alone) might be doing that night. How she managed it with serious food rationing in progress I can't imagine.

Some times of course her own programme made it inconvenient for me to stay the night and if it was during the week end I'd invariably go home. Arriving there usually exhausted, it was a relief to get my bow and separate collar off, and releasing the diamante studs of my stiff fronted white shirt enabled me to feel quite relaxed. It would be very late at night of course with mum and dad long since in bed. As a smoker I recall with humility how dad on such occasions always left me his packet of fags and his box of matches on the table at the position where I always sat.

It happened that quite a lot of jobs began to come my way in and around the Dagenham cum Barking district. I even got a gig playing in a dance band discovering that Accordion bass sounds do not blend with the sounds made by the other instruments, it's not to do with misplaced harmony but the sounds merely not able to mix. As an accordionist I've listened intently to various bands since and the typical accordion bass sounds are just not played.

As time went by Madge became a sort of second mother to me. She and her husband, Fred, were middle aged, he worked in the electrical stores of the London Transport Underground railway.

His hobby, though, was model engineering, so naturally he and I became really close friends. He had a little garden shed that was festooned with equipment and included a motorised lathe on his bench, quite a rarity for those times. I was a smoker then, and Fred made me a quite superb cigarette lighter of polished brass that he then proceeded to silver plate for me, a fine present that served me well for many years. Fred came to all our shows, becoming a sort of 'roady' by helping backstage in any way he could e.g. lighting, curtains, equipment, anything.

Madge and Fred's frequent sojourn not surprisingly was to the theatre. They loved the Ivor Novello musicals that were to influence Madge's choice of songs for our shows. Some years later I recall them being enraptured by the musical 'Bless the Bride'. Of course they liked the Music Hall and took me to the West Ham Empire with them to see a comic magician called 'The Great Claude' a forerunner of the Tommy Cooper type of humorous magician. His act opened with an easel on stage, displaying a huge card notice proclaiming 'The Great Claude'. Then his tricks failed more and more and were interspersed with other cards declaring 'Claude' then 'The Little Claude', 'The Big Clod' etc.

Around this period the impresario Carroll Levis was holding auditions at the Golders Green Hippodrome so I thought I'd have a go but was unsuccessful, so many turned up for it that there was no time for anyone to give of their best anyway, --- but back to Madge and Fred.

Madge and Fred lived in Arden Crescent, near Gale Street, so it was very convenient for me to get to the factory in the mornings. They were a lovely couple and I only wish I had been less thoughtless in those days, that is to say I don't recall ever buying them presents or paying anything to Madge for my keep, or for the Cossack style ice-blue satin blouse and sash she made for me to wear for our shows.

Their home was only a little Council house, (the exact reverse but identical design to Gordon and Peggy's). Fred had made most of the furniture it contained for he was a fine woodworker and his french polishing showed exceptional skill.

Walking up to Madge's one lunch-time the air-raid warning sounded as did the sound of fighter aircraft in battle, and then the distant familiar rat-tat-tat-tat-tat of machine guns, and a woman at her street door yelling to me "Come in here cock quick!" and from her doorway we saw flames belting from a fighter and its ever increasing roar as it began to fall by tipping angularly out of the sky. Also falling, though gently now, was the ejected pilot by parachute! He had presumably aimed the plane to miss the populace as best he could, for it crashed at the centre of the junction of Gale Street and Hedgeman's Road, still with its machine guns blazing! It was one of ours --- a Hurricane or Spitfire, I don't now know.

Walking down Gale Street each morning I would nearly always pass a pretty girl, and as a month or two went by we would exchange a smile and I began to look forward to those few seconds each day. On the first occasion that she smiled I was absolutely hooked and sure she was destined to be mine! I told my mates about her and they would keep asking daily if I'd got a date with her yet? and at first they were sympathetic when I said 'No', but they got so used to that answer that they began to guffaw at my continued lack of courage.

Dave Wylie though remained forever consoling to me and kept reminding me kindly that 'faint heart ne'er won fair lady'. Of course, I knew full well he was right but I just couldn't bring myself to stop and talk to the girl. So things got worse and worse, so that I couldn't get her out of my mind! and I was crestfallen if she was not there on any morning. My weekends were dead because I could not abide the wait till Monday morning ---and so it went on --- and on !!

Because of the anticipated invasion of Britain by the Germans and their ever increasing air-raid menace, the 'Morrison' shelter was introduced. It was solid steel, the size of a double bed but like a table on four steel legs. One was delivered to us at home and installed in our middle room and from then on mum and dad slept underneath it and a single bed was put against the wall that was party to the kitchen. Ivy slept on the bed and I slept beneath her. The floor seemed very hard and Ivy's sheets etc. being tucked down against the wall had a habit of swinging about and tickling my face if she moved at all. How mum managed to make my bed or the Morrison one I can't imagine, but the latter served us well as a table.

About this time Ivy and I encountered Mr Muggleton working on a fish stall opposite the Kursaal entrance, he and his family having long since left their home in New Trinity Road when they were our near neighbours there. Ivy therefore soon renewed and developed old friendships with the Muggleton girls Lilly, Kitty and Gladys. They all lived up at Leigh-on-sea in Pall Mall.

Gramophone records were beginning to be in short supply but I had built up a rapport with the man in a shop at Victoria Circus called Heaths, and was ordering my records almost weekly. To play the fancy solos on my accordion I felt it was necessary to learn

them religiously from records. Thus I built up quite a comprehensive collection and Dad built me a cupboard for it between the fireplace and the inner wall of our front parlour. Not being able to play well from music, but finding it easy to play by ear any familiar tune, repetitive record playing was the quick way to solve the problem.

Bill Zolowski at work first suggested the idea when he politely remonstrated with me for my declaration that I did not like classical music. "What you mean" he said, "is that you don't listen to it! for if you really listened to it you can't fail to like it!" Then he advised me to get a record of 'The Dance of the Hours' from La Gioconda by Poncielli as a good place to begin. This I did and discovered that it is full of different melodies and all of them good. Later he proved to me that his own taste in music was varied indeed. He had heard me playing the accordion and once asked me if I was trying to emulate Toralf Tollafsen --- I had never heard of the chap! "Learn his recording of 'Dizzy Accordion' and I'll give you a pound", he said. Well, one pound was quite a lot of money then, so I accepted the challenge, won the pound and was hooked onto Tollafsen's recordings thereafter:- Hungarian Rhapsody No.2, Poet and Pweasant, Carnival of Venice, Invitation to the Waltz, etc. These I learned and used in my act quite soon.

From then on I was buying mainly symphonic and novelty orchestral stuff to learn, eg:- The Barber of Seville, Hora Staccato, Dizzy Fingers, The Dance of the Comedians from The Bartered Bride, Orpheus in the Underworld, etc, etc. All of them, I suppose, ultimately earned for me a good deal of pocket money.

Bill Zolowski was Jewish of course, very fat, with flaming red hair, and more freckles than me, (but no acne!). He was about 21 and part-time he was in control of all the electrics at the famous Windmill Theatre in London, and took me there a couple of times and I met several of the staff and saw their shows. It had a tiny stage and a strange communal atmosphere where it seems the girls (all picked for their beauty) would maybe this week be in the nude but clean show of tableaux (nude movement was disallowed in those days), but probably next week serving in the bar or selling programmes or tickets down in the foyer's paybox. Embarrassingly I met some semi-clad girls on our way out at the back one evening. One such gorgeous creature was Valerie Tandy who went on to become a comedienne. Many (later famous) comedians served their 'apprenticeship' on the Windmill stage. I think I am right in including the following:- Michael Howard, Jimmy Edwards, Arthur English, Ronnie Corbett, there's quite a list. Really hard work for all concerned, well they put on six shows a day! and never closed during the entire war nor even stopped during the bombing raids. We were walking along Dean Street behind the Windmill once when we were accosted by a negress who said to one of us "Coming home with me, big boy?" to which Bill replied, "What! All the way to South Africa?" and we laughed as we hurried on our homeward way.

About this time a series of naughty books pervaded our tool-room, all being read while Tom Kerby wasn't looking, there were two American magazines I recall, one called 'Spicey Stories', the other was 'Saucy Stories'. In a tattered state 'Lady Chatterley's lover' also did the rounds, and as Tom spotted anyone of us reading he confiscated the offending book. We all had a good laugh though

when we kept catching him with his bench drawer open thus exposing one of the books staring up at him in an opened position!

## Chapter 27

Acne, Some home life, Right, Wrong or Controversial, Rene.

In earlier chapters I mention my acne trouble, and trouble it was! Great red pustules and occasional boils etc. Doctor Bennison sent me as an out-patient to Southend General Hospital where I saw a skin consultant (a Mr Bartholomew) who over the next couple of years tried out umpteen lotions, pills, ointments and balms upon me all to no avail whatsoever! On complaining that no relief was in sight he had the gall to exclaim "Well Rome wasn't built in a day!" I gave this all up as a waste of time and tried commercial remedies 'Valderma' was one and 'Germolene' another plus others galore -- all to no good.

I was still on my usual Blaud's Pills, Yeast tablets and Cod liver oil and Malt. Aunt Lil Butler swore by cleansing with surgical spirit between applications of Zinc cream ointment. I gave it a trial period but objected to getting on the train in the mornings looking white faced like a clown! Anyway it did nothing for me though I confess the malady was not helped by the Leichner theatrical make-up used on my gig nights and its after-show removal with cocoa butter.

Over the road, just into North Avenue was Frank's the barber's shop where men did not merely go for a shave or a hair-cut as had been my wont. No, there was no doubt about it he was just what you would imagine a 'Quack' to be, but highly praised by most of his clients, well his treatments were merely a hobby but they were free! So it was that I gladly accepted his offer of twice weekly treatments of my face and neck with very hot towels and weird lotions that he made up himself! No, he did not cure me but things were really quite a lot better. The complaint has stayed with me in a very mild form even to this day.

With show business increasing, naturally a strong friendship grew with my work-mate Joe Popham. Joe was well known around the East London dance-hall circuit as a Jazz drummer with his band called 'Joe Popham's Hot-Shots'. Although my own field was not Jazz orientated then, we shared anecdotes regarding both gigs and workaday tool-making exploits.

Joe was the firm's precision horizontal-boring machinist working on the main shop floor. Our linkage was aided also by our journeys to and from work together on the Shoeburyness-Fenchurch Street line when no gigs divided us, but Joe lived near Laindon Station where we'd meet or depart. He was sixteen years my senior, an avid reader and a deep thinking man.

I was beginning to take an interest in politics as incessant wars, some as recent as the thirties, (China, Japan, Abyssinia, Spain etc.) and now between most of the world's nations (many drawn into the present conflict who had no direct connection with the original cause) seemed to signal that there must be a better way to run the world.

Joe who I sincerely thank for my political insight, showed me how the media became the government's propaganda machine (the war going so badly for us I saw some excuse for it at first) e.g. we were given daily indoctrination to loathe everything about the German and Italian ordinary people rather than just Hitler's

Nazis, and Mussolini's Fascists. They even made out that the Germans were starving and had to eat cardboard! 'Erzatz' food they called it.

My eyes were opened really by how they had sown seeds of hatred of the Russian people throughout the entire period since the foundation of the Soviet Union in 1917, until they became allied to us following their invasion by the Nazi hordes, whereupon they were promptly elevated to be among our closest friends! and could apparently do no wrong!

Joe's remarks showed that there could be only three areas of debate, i.e.: - Things are either RIGHT, WRONG or CONTROVERSIAL (by 'Right' and 'Wrong' I mean 'as accepted by every reasonably intelligent person, male, female, British or foreign').

Joe explained the difference between 'Communism' and 'Capitalism' that there can be only one system or the other. Communism, an unvariable philosophy aimed for the peoples ownership of all the land and the means of production, the idea being guided by two main maxims: - 'Each according to his ability to each according to his needs' and 'He who does not work, neither will he eat'.

Work would be available to everybody with hours varied to avoid unemployment. Freedom of religion and the press. There being eventually no need for money since all goods would be free according to one's need.

Initially a policy of socialism would be followed (with no territorial aims and a full peaceful co-existence with all other countries) real 'co-operation' between individuals to be sacrosanct and rigorously taught within a child's education. The insidious inherited greed of aeons of centuries being gradually eradicated naturally over the course of time.

Joe acknowledged though that Capitalism's success is due to the 'freedom' allowed. He meant freedom of competition for the pursuit of gain i.e. private ownership. (rather than public). All political parties (other than the communists of course) want the freedom of individuals to rise above the tide leaving the less fortunate at the wayside. i.e. the rich get richer as the poor grow poorer!

Working hard or studying for qualifications are no guarantee of achievement. We all know that the best workers are kept where they are and can seldom overtake their unqualified 'superiors' unless of course they are better schemers! Hence the old saying "It's not 'what you know', it's 'who you know'!"

Capitalism works well of course if you've the skill to be an entrepreneur, for the more money you make, the better your living standard, at your competitors expense! The philosophy is therefore competition between each and every citizen. Thus the whole of life's very movements (from your very first day at school even), is to seek gain, of things, or of wealth.

So as Joe said, the rich become the rulers often merely by inheritance (or just by greed). From the Royal Family (and hangers on), the Lords and land owners (e.g. I understand the whole of Scotland is owned by fewer people than we have on the fingers of one hand!). Even the Church of England's land and properties put

them among the top of wealth creating companies. (Christianity is hardly the name of their game!).

Those on the 'left' of capitalism said Joe, do have the 'conscience' to control it a bit. So, various social security schemes are tried with wider taxation scales. It does not avoid the fact though that if one needs essentials. (even if its a roof over your head) you have to repay any loan with high interest so that its final cost far outweighs the original value, yet the rich can afford the purchase with no interest to pay what ever! Also, goods in short supply rise in price, so the well off can buy them before the poor have enough to get the chance.

Surely then, no one should be allowed to acquire more money than he can really earn? What a pity we fail to recognise that profiteering is virtually stealing from one's fellow human beings!

I've tended toward socialist ideas ever since. In short it just boils down to being 'fair' that's all!. In Britain the nearest we had to it in government was the Labour Party who seldom 'make it' because the electorate are riddled with factions wedded to greed.

Considering my earlier remarks--is that Right, Wrong, or Controversial?

So I decided to join the Communist Party, Southend branch!

After listening to Joe, I read and learned a great deal from books of all political persuasions at the library during my train journeys. it was obvious to me that it must be more righteous, more satisfying, (certainly more Christian) and better indeed to live like one's fellow men, than live in a way that tends to keep them down.

Those train journeys and the use of the libraries helped me in many ways, for aside from politics I learned a great deal about music and furthered my career by increasing my knowledge of production engineering processes. Unfortunately though, often I would fall asleep during my journey home to be awakened hurriedly when the train clattered and banged its way across the numerous points at the approach to Southend station, my poor old coat suffering the effects of my dribble down its lapel whilst I slept.

The morning train was always crowded and the compartment tended to house a regular crowd of commuters and it became the custom for the men to take the seats and the women old or young to sit on the men's laps. A sign of my increasing maturity occurred one morning with a young and pretty lass on my lap when after a few miles I had my first sensation of an erection and the pleasant feeling producing my ultimate ejaculation! She of course was totally unaware, our only contact being her sitting position.

On one of the train's homeward stops (due to an air raid) we had to alight at East Horndon station (now just Horndon I believe), There was to be a long wait and on entering the waiting room Joe and I had the great pleasure of meeting a well known serio-comedy star of countless English films of the period. this was Wally Patch who was glad to open up his big case to show me his film and theatrical scrap book. We must have passed what for me and Joe was a very pleasant hour in happy conversation.

Joe Popham it must be said had his lighter side telling me a tall story for example about his 'old pal Josh' who learned by diligent practice to stand above the ground and eventually walked across the sea! A short tale that I've long since expanded into a story to tell one's children. (but not here).

Things began to change a bit at home. Due to the bombing, Aunty Edie with Jean and Yvonne moved out of London, Jean and Yvonne had previously spent some time evacuated to Dorking and later to Cambridge, but now it seemed prudent for Uncle Billy to have them with their mother come to Southend and move in with us until he could find a house for them all to live in.

This was October 1941 and in the coming January they were all resettled in a nice house only a couple of hundred metres away being No 68 on the other side of our road, so it was lovely having us all reunited again especially as Aunty Lil, Uncle Fred Butler and family moved from Hamstel Road and were even closer to us being just a few doors northward along our side of the road. From now on Uncle Billy caught the same 6.15a.m. train as me, as indeed did Aunty Lil, both continuing their journey beyond where I changed trains at Upminster.

About that time we all got a bit of a shock. Things had been jogging along fairly well for us all. Even dad had acquired a more permanent job. He was now working down at the Shoeburyness Army ranges, building sheds, barrack buildings, painting and decorating them etc. I recall he was pleased to make the acquaintance of one of his 'gang', it was Arthur Lucan of 'Lucan and Mc Shane' fame who were an Irish 'Mother' and daughter comedy film and music hall act of the period. But as I say we got a bit of a shock:-

Ivy was called up for The Auxiliary Territorial Service! (Nowadays, since 1949, called The Womens Royal Army Corps) She tells me that she went in at seven stone seven and came out at ten stone!

Except for my childhood holiday with Peg at great aunt Edie's, this was the first real separation of a family member. She was put in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. and initially was stationed in Durham. How dead the home becomes if anybody leaves it? Of course she had occasional leaves and was later on transferred to an army base at Feltham in Middlesex. Before very long she was elevated to Lance Corporal and made old dad laugh for they'd told her it was the custom to 'wet the stripe' she'd received. Ivy had thought they meant she had to do it literally with her moistened finger, not treating all her mates to a drink!

I must say though that mum, dad and I were really proud of her that day! she later expected to acquire a second stripe (to make her a Corporal but failed on one question asked---"When was The A.T.S. founded"? She didn't know that it was in 1938. Her superior was annoyed that they could fail her on such a thing. Later on we were reading in the paper that because some big brass of the army were due to visit one of the camps the army girls tarting up the place were actually ordered to Paint the coal supplies! We later discovered that it was Ivy's lot who had to do it!! By the way both cousins Peggy Binks and May Servant were also called up for service, in their case they were part of the Land Army. In that role May spent some leave in Southend and joined me on a bike ride once to Rayleigh and back. I had suffered a bout of yellow

jaundice and the doctor advised me to get a lot more sunshine and exercise so such bike rides became a sort of hobby to me for a while.

Ivy had originally wanted to be one of the land army girls too (apparently you could choose your preferred service) but dad wouldn't let her join as she had been so prone to colds at Finchley, partly influencing our move to Southend. Gordon, like myself was excused call up (we being in reserved occupations) meaning we were more use to industry. Gordon was working throughout the war at the St Neots power station.

A new fad overtook our tool room where we made brooches using farthings (its face depicted a wren) or halfpennies (depicting a galleon) which we cut through with fine drills and tool-makers needle files carefully removing the copper around the features but leaving the outer circular edge of the coin. A duplicate coin was then de-faced to make it smooth, polished and enamelled dark blue before soldering it to the back of the first one, the finished pair were then gold plated and soldered usually to a tie-pin. I made several of these and lighters too were popular and easy to make. I made one of a windmill which pushed into a black 'paxolin' base to serve as an ash tray. Make no mistake though, these were spare time pursuits that in no way detracted from the war effort.

The Communist party's newspaper was called 'The Daily Worker' which I continued to read for many years because the standard of its journalism was so good (regardless of its political affiliation) with writers such as Ilya Ehrenberg, actress Beatrix Lehmann and editor William Rust, also dear old Willie Gallagher the party's only Member of parliament. I used to buy a few copies and sell them at our factory each day.

The Southend branch held their meetings in an upper room of a fairly large house in Porters Grange Drive, one long wall of it was a mass of full book shelves containing only political literature, English translations of Russian, German, Spanish and Italian political party literature of all persuasions. plus numerous stacks of pamphlets membership cards etc. It was quite well run and had some excellent invited speakers. I didn't like the lady members though, they seemed to have lost their femininity, a sort of womens lib brigade (not without cause of course). I went only a few times realising that I was not militant enough to be of much help to them, though I did feel a strong commitment to their beliefs, except that they were sure a communist government would only come about by a revolution of some sort, but I felt we should be able to get one elected by democratic means. I did not renew my subs after that first year because the Southend branch was a pretty dead and alive affair and I was not the type to be able to rally it.

The Barking (or Dagenham) branch of the party, itself put on a rally at the Gregg Hall near Gale Street and I was engaged to play as one of the 'Turns'. A popular film at that time was 'Dangerous Moonlight' with Anton Walbrook and had a pleasant semi-classical music theme called 'The Warsaw Concerto'. This took all young romantics by storm so I chose to play it on piano that night having listened to it frequently from its Louis Kentner Columbia recording I'd bought earlier, and who was in the audience? I didn't know 'til walking down toward my 'Gale Street girl' next morning, when on closing she said "I saw you last night!" and

thereby the ice was at long last broken! I remember reddening terribly and my cheeks seemed to freeze but with difficulty I asked her for a date and she readily accepted. I discovered her name was Rene and all the lads at work cheered when I told them I was to see her at last-- and that evening too!

She was on time and we went down to the Dagenham Heathway cinema and now I had a new problem, to me this was absolute heaven of course but for the life of me I couldn't think of anything to talk about and by and large the evening fell a bit flat! Seeing her homeward she asked if I knew how to get a record of the Warsaw Concerto as not only were copies in great demand but records of any sort were like gold-dust then. I knew my Southend man would turn up trumps so we made a date for some days hence, smiled and chatted on passing each morning of course.

Come the morning of our next date I presented it to her. She was thrilled to get it as a present and that evening I waited and waited---and still waited but she never came! nor did I ever encounter her again-- she just sort of disappeared!--for ever.

I was pretty crestfallen you can bet and the lads at work were really kind to me then, saying she was a gold-digger etc, etc, well perhaps, but in retrospect I reckon that either her parents didn't like her associating with a political party member or more likely the girl herself thought I was too much of a wimp!

Johnny Kerby shared my embarrassment about being new to the idea of taking girls out and suggested that we go to learn ball-room dancing at a popular 'school' at nearby Romford. 'The Nimbus' they called it where the just preened girls sat along one side of the hall as petrified as the boys sitting opposite. (Johnny and I at the extreme end I recall). The ice took some time to break but after a few such lessons the atmosphere was more enjoyable than tense, but no dates resulted. It was good in a way for we were made to take a different partner for each dance in order to gain a bit of confidence. Glen Miller records set the scene.

I went over to Chadwell Heath a couple of times to Johnny's house in order to improve my education in classical music. In particular I remember his huge, up to the minute radiogram some three feet square by about twenty inches deep and in particular the records of which he took great pride. 'The Meditation from Thais' by Massenet, Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata played by Solomon and 'Softly awakes my heart' sung by the contralto Marion Anderson--- All beautiful stuff that I later added to my own collection.

It seemed incongruous that this was also the home of Tom Kerby (his father, my foreman) who was such a rough and ready Londoner type but the place was really beautifully furnished and proudly managed by his wife a charming and dignified stately lady, Johnny's mum of course.

Mrs Hesketh our neighbour had a nephew Maurice I think whose car I was once admiring and told him I was looking forward to learning to drive one day. He had a full size accordion and wanted some lessons himself! So it was obvious that lessons were freely exchanged. He taught me about clutch control and the rules of the road. I taught him bellows control and to regard the keyboard as absolutely red hot because accordion players tend to drag out the notes, when they should nearly always be played very staccato

like. This was a very good deal for both of us but neither of us becoming particularly adept, petrol rationing put a stop to it in the main.

## Chapter 28

### Photography, Showbiz, An elevation and Vera.

Old Bill Watling had been a keen amateur photographer in his youth and seeing the beginnings of my own interest in the subject (from the snaps I had taken of Zoo animals with mum and dad's old cardboard 'Box Brownie') he wanted me to visit his home to show me all his equipment. I tried to find his Dagenham street in the 'black-out' and walked into a concrete tank trap and arrived eventually with blood running from my nose! He hadn't used the stuff for donkey's years but there it all was in highly polished and newly dusted mahogany.

The camera, its shutter fired by a huge rubber bulb took whole plate pictures on glass negatives eight and a half inches by six and a half from which it had been the custom to make 'contact' prints by placing the 'plate' in contact with the emulsion side of a sheet of photographic paper. There were bottles galore, weird thermometers, ancient chemicals, separate lenses, plate holders, measuring glasses, scales and balances etc. The tripod was a colossal wooden affair alone. There he was offering the lot to me for only a fiver, but where would I put it? How would I get it home? All of it was so out of date and I had to disappoint the old boy.

He and I were at our bench one afternoon. Our window overlooked the river Thames with the Barking power station over to our right. Between us and the Thames was an expanse of grassy marsh land on which cows grazed. Watching them for a moment we saw two of them leap about a foot into the air! followed by the sound of 'Boomph' then again they were lifted upward and came the sound 'Boomph' once more, and then our window blew in and for the second time my tool box was tipped right over! and we were just in time to see a German plane roaring down the Thames, jettisoning its load of bombs while pursued by our planes. You see the cows were lifted in silence (to us), the bomb sounds taking a second or two to reach our ears.

Bill Zolowski worked on a lathe down on the main shop floor and would collect a couple of bob a week from those of us who wanted to get tools at a discount. He was also instrumental, in forming and organising 'The Crown Theatrical Club' over at Barkingside on the North Circular Road, enlisting the help of several of his theatrical friends and any local talents. We all paid him our first annual fee for membership. To my delight Bill gave me a full dress suit, several white shirts, black and white bows, a white waistcoat, a top hat and a tuxedo all in spanking condition that he said Geraldo the band leader had grown too large to wear! The venture was a sort of night club with a large and fully equipped stage, plus bars, games rooms, etc, a fine posh place. He had done a great job getting it together and running. His big mistake however was in using a replica symbol of the king's actual royal crown, not just the printed ones on his notepaper but huge affairs he'd had made to decorate the place. None of us dreamed there was anything illegal in this, but illegal it was and he was very heavily fined I think and pseudo crowns had to be hurriedly made.

The government were calling people up of both sexes, the men even forty and beyond and I suppose most of the men in the young age groups had already been roped in and I had had the required

medical down in Alexandra Street. Three of us lads at work were getting worried about when it would be our turn! None of us thought we'd fancy going into the army. Dad was still imagining that if I got called up he could go instead of me! (due to his experiences in the first world war I guess).

We had heard that you could join what you like providing you volunteered for service prior to call-up. We therefore decided to volunteer for the Navy. Johnny Kerby chose to be an Ordnance Artificer, I chose to be an Engine Room Artificer (and had a special interview at the Royal Navy Recruitment office in Royal Terrace at the top of Southend's Pier Hill). and the other lad (his name escapes me now) chose to be an Electrical Artificer. Can you believe they switched all three of us about?. As it happened, Johnny was the only one to actually get his call-up papers and served the rest of the war as an engine room Artificer on H.M.S.Arethusa.

Probably the nearest I ever got to being called up was for E.N.S.A. ( Entertainment of the National Services Association). Bill Zolowski felt there was still a strong chance that the army would get me in the end and kept advising me to try to get a compromise by being involved with the entertainment side as many entertainers were doing and through some army chap he knew, arranged for me to have an audition. It was a half hearted affair held in a Walthamstow cinema managed by one of Bill's friends after the cinema had closed for the night, but he seemed barely interested and I was the only participant! I went through my stuff and he responded by saying "Why do you people always want to go on the stage and even doing it for the army? it's a much better life doing anything else---get a job on the council!" I can't say I really cared that I heard no more on the matter.

By now our workshop was taking on more people, a young ex-carpenter who was more interested in showing us wood working ideas than as a trainee learning the precision engineering way. "If you ever buy a saw for wood, get one of Diston's make" he said. I recall also a laddie called Dennis coming who was enraptured by 'The Ink Spots' new recording of 'Do I Worry' and another boy on a lathe who could not stop telling us about the great Fats Waller and the record collection he had amassed of his performances. It was my job to teach incoming people lathe work, one of which was a charming lady who was planning her marriage and eventually actually spent her honeymoon at our house in Bournemouth Park Road! A lovely couple they were and in spite of the war had a great time in and around Southend. Mum and Dad by the way developed quite a summer trade one season putting up Londoners mostly for 'Bed and Breakfast' at 2/6d per night I recall. Among such holiday makers were dear old Madge and Fred though for no charge in their case of course.

Another newcomer I had to teach was Joe Paxton(?) a most jovial trainee worker who spent more time laughing and joking than trying to learn anything, he was absolutely mad on cowboy films, in particular one that came out called 'They Died With Their Boots On'. At one point I wanted to give him a shilling for something so I needed change for half a crown, Ken Land nearby was chiselling some steel in his vice and I said "Can you split half a crown Ken?" placing it on his anvil "Sure" he said and swiftly placed his chisel across the coin and brought the hammer down, thus shooting each half in opposite directions across the workshop

to his and everyone's laughter (except mine of course)! Young Joe had to wait a mite longer for his shilling.

Johnny Harris operated our punch shaping machine, quite a skilled chap of only seventeen or so and was always singing the main themes from Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in blue' whose haunting tunes fascinated me also but in his case he never sang nor whistled anything else. Johnny suddenly became very ill and it seemed that in no time at all after being rushed into Oldchurch Hospital died of colitis!

We were all seriously affected by this news, it seemed so terribly unfair that such a lovely lad and good friend could be taken so suddenly. Bill Zolowski decided to put on a 'Benefit' i.e. a sort of 'extravaganza', a show at the Crown Theatrical Club to raise money for Johnny's family. All the factory folk went including all the management and a great deal of money was raised, the whole thing being a great success. I think this was the most impressive stage I'd worked on to date. Bill put me on as the last act preceding the finale and of course I played 'Rhapsody in blue' and Bill's expertise arranged for the lighting to commence bright and full, but gradually introducing one blue light after another as the white lamps were gently deleted. Then as the melody progressed with the stage in blue alone, the blue lamps gradually dimmed until just one blue limelight was upon me and that too he skilfully timed to completely extinguish as the piece came to its end. Quite a thrill for me and with great thanks to Bill the whole evening a fine tribute to a beloved work mate.

Shortly thereafter I just couldn't believe some news. Someone in the firm must have had it in for Bill Zolowski for he was charged in court with embezzling the firms tool-club funds---perhaps he borrowed some for the big show or something, to me he was just not the type. However they put him in prison for three months! We never saw him again. Nor have I encountered him since.

That three months sentence reminds me that at about the same period employee Frank Rayner a Southender and mad brained motor cyclist and communist party member, also got three months, for manslaughter of a little girl he'd knocked down along the Ripple Road en route to work. He was not a popular individual but they seemed to blame him more for being a communist than for his careless driving!

On the subject of motor cycling another employee from Southend called Doug Smith travelled to and from work by that means and was a much more serious road user taking every pride in his driving. He was one of the firm's gauge makers and quite often would offer me a ride home on the back of his bike, this was a 'Triumph Tiger 75' machine in crimson and chrome livery. His ambition was to save up for the 'Tiger 100' model marketed in silver and chrome. This he later achieved and cosseted with almost ridiculous pride. Another lovely bloke to be sure, he would sometimes divert from the usual way home so that we'd travel the sea front from about Leigh. He reckoned that if the Kent coast could be clearly seen we'd be in for rain pretty soon, he seemed to be right. We'd cover the sea front along as far as Southchurch Avenue and turn left there to get me home. The ride was exciting with the wind constantly on my face inducing tears as we whizzed along and my cheeks having stiffened by the time it came for me to alight. It

was always nice to go home by bike arriving me home earlier than if I went by train.

At this time I was full of ideas for improved tooling methods and a chap called Bill Blainey, the firm's designer, was called up and to my delight and surprise I was offered his job. The drawing office was quite small but had two large drawing boards and one small one, a table and a couple of chairs. We had no print machine, having to use the one in Wacket's Factory next door.

An adjacent office to ours housed the firm's estimator, one Bob Neeshaw whose pride and joy was his little baby girl that he and his wife (both with trendy ideas) allowed to learn by mistakes, so if the child say, fell down stairs no effort would be made to soften its fall nor add a stair gate as a result. I was amazed that they allowed the kiddie to climb its way up onto the mantelpiece above their winter fire and allow it to crawl along the top dislodging everything in its path and allowing her to fall on finding no way to get down again!

Most of our tool designs of course were for war products, but they got me involved also in designing not only the tools but products as well, some having no connection whatever with the war effort. Hence I was sent out hither and thither to discuss various customer's wants. One I recall was an 'Ardinco Toaster' consisting of a piece of wire mesh trapped into a folded square tin tray with a wire handle enabling the housewife to toast a slice of bread on a gas ring. Something of which I was much more proud was a figure eight shape cosmetic powder compact for the Yardley company. It involved several pieces, the hinged back, hinged front, mirror for the lid, bezel to retain the lid, inner powder dish, hinged powder screen, spring clip to retain it closed, push button to facilitate its opening.

For such a programme many tools are entailed and the design of the products takes ages when you consider the customers myriad of minor changes required. For economic success I learned that a new design requires the following three maxims:- Function, Cost, Appearance---in that order. All told I suppose one man would on average take some four to five months just to design such a product. You would then add about six months for the tool maker's work. Of course it doesn't work quite like that, for example I had two draughtsmen to do a great deal of proper drawings from my initial sketches. They were Jack Hogben quite a skilled chap, and a new Welsh beginner called Gwyn (ever willing but not much good). There were also several tool-makers to make the tools in between war work and probably during their overtime stints, (after all it was then the law that we had to work fifty four hours per week).

While doing work such as just described we would on occasion be suddenly visited by manager, Mr Dunkley, from his little office next door declaring that a Ministry of Defence bloke was on his way up to see who was ripe for call-up and we would have to scurry around hiding any questionable drawings and plonking on to the boards those that looked too complicated for the big-wig to understand. When he arrived he was invariably a lah-de-dah wallah whose questions on the work showed an appalling ignorance of what his mission really required of him. Now and again though one would come who secretly objected to anyone having a reserved occupation so if he asked a pertinent question I was usually able to justify

our existence backed up all the way by Bob Neeshaw or Mr Dunkley who I suppose had to provide monetary figures and time scales.

Charlie Mason was still getting our 'Spitfires' party a lot of gigs. We did one over at Brightlingsea, a long trip for those days with us all sitting on the back floor of a van. It was a troop show of course and held in the local theatre. In effect we were the backing for a few professional acts, Beadel and Dair a comedy hubby and wife team whose act was continual argument with each other. They'd earlier worked the London Palladium and spent all their off stage chat with us criticising the place. I remember too Carlos Ames, a quite well known harpist playing popular songs and classics. The show was supposed to be given voluntarily or subtly put as 'expenses only'. We therefore got nothing nor anticipated anything! but we saw the professionals handed many notes and Charlie being drawn aside to receive some as well!

Working men's clubs were frequent venues. The Rainham one had a poof pianist with his face prettily made up. Someone down the front was incessantly ridiculing him with the result that the man stopped playing got down from the stage and literally carried the offender out through the side door after beating him up! The audience wildly cheered his return to the stage and the show continued with no more interruptions.

We did another at a place called the Basildon Country Club where the stage was an old full size billiard table! Mitzi Stamford's brother had a deep 'Paul Robeson' style voice and got himself a gig at the 'Harrow' pub some half a mile along the Ripple Road from the factory. It was rumoured to have been bought by Vera Lynn and it was hoped she would put in an appearance so we all went along but she didn't come. However the bass singer went down well and we got gigs there ourselves later as did I alone and made a new friend of their pianist, a first class jazz player who showed me better chords for some of my numbers, and told me he had taught himself from a book called 'The Lee Sims Piano Method'. I soon bought a copy but after several tries over the years still do not seem to get far into it.

Another pub job was at the Fanshawe Tavern in Gale Street, very clean, very posh, a bit sedate even. One old lady asked me to play 'Home Sweet Home' but I just could not think of its melody. Charlie thought he knew it and started the audience singing 'Its home sweet home again, no more roaming'. Not the old version of the song the lady had wanted at all!

One big pub job was at the junction of Ilford Hill and Cranbrook Road where I played what had become something of a 'standard' for me (The Poet and Peasant Overture), followed by all the latest pops. It was a wedding party who'd hired the very large upstairs hall. Next morning Jock Collie, a fitter at work who was the symphony orchestra violinist I mentioned earlier, said to me "I saw a bloke like you playing an accordion at a wedding reception last night and he had the cheek to say he was going to play The Poet and Peasant Overture--- It was disgusting! in the wrong key and often with errors in the melodies! You never heard anything like it! Some people have got a nerve, insulting the composer like that! and would you believe? on a blessed accordion!" Well I didn't know where to put my face. Did he secretly know it was me? Perhaps he was giving me a polite message. It certainly pricked my conscience! I hadn't realised before how every thing I played was

stealing real musicians work, playing only by ear, and always in 'C' meant that most of 'my' stuff was in the wrong key and I was ignoring any key changes that occurred along the way. Jock was right of course but I couldn't rustle up the necessary decency to chuck it all in. The one saving grace was that I had never meant any harm by it, but I couldn't deny how fraudulent I was being, it had just not occurred to me before. I can only console myself with the fact that probably half the world's amateurs are doing the same.

My favourite gig was the 'Dagenham Working Men's Club' near Becontree Station, at the bottom of Vincent Road I think. It was run just like a Victorian Music Hall complete with the requisite chairman and his gavel, the dressing rooms adorned each with its mirror and surrounding light bulbs. The place was always crowded, the acts generally excellent. Here I met another poof, a huge fat fellow, a 'Dame' comedian whose act entailed the wearing of special lady's stays that he would ask me to pull the strings of tightly as he dressed for the part. I managed to get several return dates there always at the same fee of £1.

I was also a standard invite to my various workmates parties. One was in Ilford where a mate called Heslop was getting engaged. There was always a piano at these do's so the accordion and that I would occasionally interchange. They would invariably put glasses of beer along the piano lid as a token I suppose of appreciation, but booze was never my weakness so if I managed to get two or three halves down through the night I was doing well(?). A new experience at that party was the sight of quite a pretty girl staring me out or smiling and occasionally winking but I hadn't the nerve to do anything about it. I was really shocked to see her and the chap who'd just got engaged actually smooching in a darkish corner of the hallway!

Like Heslop, Peter Brimble worked on the main shop floor and he had a similar party, but for his twenty first birthday at his home in Dagenham. A lot of our mates came and a lot of his relatives including a slightly crippled girl wearing a caliper on her leg. A nice looking girl of seventeen who'd come up from Hersham in Surrey. As the night wore on and the kissing games began to pall, couples began to sleep either on the floor or in pairs on the settee or armchairs etc. I sat on an armchair and the Hersham girl was planted on my lap by somebody. What remained of the night was from then on very pleasant of course, in spite of the pins and needles! but I will tell you more of Vera anon.

## Chapter 29.

### The War - Tide begins to turn.

Here we were, well into 1942. 1941 had seen Rommel's attack in North Africa and the German invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia, H.M.S. Hood was sunk but so was the German Bismarck. The Japanese had occupied Hong Kong and shattered the Pearl Harbour American fleet provoking America's participation in the war. The really good news was that the R.A.F. boys had won the Battle of Britain albeit at the expense of appalling losses to both sides.

Now at last things slowly began to change with the Germans held at the gates of Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad by the patriotic tenacity of the Soviet people and their severely battered forces, plus Montgomery's huge success at El Alamein and the victorious Allied invasion of North Africa. However Singapore was lost to the Japanese. Canterbury was terribly bombed but so was Cologne.

Having taken up draughtsmanship and design at work I began to take an interest in freehand drawing, mostly in Indian ink. I was interested mainly in static subjects and due to the play of light and shade I found churches and monuments around Barking and Dagenham good subjects. Drawing the Barking War memorial I was a bit puzzled by peoples somewhat glorification of war in their habit of providing obelisks and the like, though understandably recording on them lists of their town's dead from the first world war, with extra engraving stating that 'They bravely gave their lives so that we may live in peace'! 'Their memory liveth for ever more' or maybe 'At the going down of the sun, and in the morning we will remember them'.

It seemed to me that few read them from one armistice day to another, then a few poppy wreaths would be laid on November 11th, we'd have a two minutes silence and a hymn or two and a year to wait to do it again! Ninety per cent of the killed lads neither died bravely nor died for us luckier ones to live in peace, few indeed wanted to be called up in the first place!. Further, only the still grieving friends or relatives would even remember them. Worst of all none of the living would bother to do anything whatever to stop wars happening in the future, but would reap some gratification by buying a poppy each year! To be fair there was formed the League of Nations after World War One but it was allowed to fall apart after a very few years.

I remember thinking that there wasn't much space left on the monuments for the names of the dead of this current war to be included. Had every one thought that there would never be another war?

I took to drawing copies of pictures also. One of Durham Cathedral based on a postcard Ivy had sent us I recall. Another from a fine picture mum and dad had on the wall of an old man setting his watch to a Grandfather clock. Others were from photographs of Churchill, Lenin, Roosevelt and Stalin. I also did a couple from photos of both Vera and myself. The best one I think was of a Hawker Hurricane Fighter plane (well I knew a fair bit about aircraft) this I coloured also, and after an appeal from Vera's cousin Jean to have it I was pleased to pass it over. Her husband was a Hurricane pilot you see. I'm afraid I really wasn't much good at any of this! but for anyone who has never tried it (like

me at the time) it is a very satisfying and relaxing pastime, however bad you are at it.

I was now seeing Vera for about one week-end every fortnight. I would leave work at one o'clock on the Saturday afternoon, catch the tube from Becontree Station on the District Line to Charing Cross (nowdays called 'Embankment'), change to the Northern Line for Waterloo and catch an electric train for Hersham in Surrey. Hersham is a village adjacent to Walton on Thames. Claremont Close where she lived was about three quarters of a mile from the station. It was a semi detached bow-windowed house of three bedrooms and two reception rooms where her parents Mr and Mrs Silver welcomed me from the very start.

They had one other child, Derek, a lad then about thirteen. Vera's parents hove from Somerset originally. Both having a broad accent of that kind. Vera worked as a typist just around the corner at the Hackbridge Transformer Co. Mr Silver's career had always been in the Navy. He was always neatly turned out in the uniform of a Stoker Petty Officer but those days he was stationed not on a ship but somewhere in London. He was therefore able to come home at week ends, and come early Monday mornings he and I after breakfast, and before the other occupants arose, set off quietly together for Hersham Station and the London train. At Waterloo we parted and I made for Becontree to be at the factory for the 8a.m. start. The Silvers were a very nice family Mr Silver and I becoming quite firm friends. He had a little Austin Seven car and was able to get petrol and kindly gave me several driving lessons in it.

Bill Nagel was one of the newer people on our main workshop floor and used to do a fair bit of singing in his spare time. Seeing that I was getting a lot of gigs with the accordion he reckoned that with the aid of Jock Collie on violin I was missing a trick by not forming a 'Hill Billy' group. Nowadays they're called 'Country and Western' but that kind of music had been quite popular since the early thirties, (mainly from the records of Carson Robison and his Pioneers) so it seemed a reasonable idea to me. Bill Nagel for vocals, Jock Collie on violin and me on accordion suggested quite a nice little trio. The problem however was where to rehearse?

Jack Penwill was a foreman at the factory and heard of this pending idea, offering the use of his front room in nearby Barking for the purpose. The trouble with that was he'd got an appallingly croaky voice and could play no instrument at all but was so hooked on the idea of joining us that we had to resolve the situation somehow. We finally settled it by putting him in a battered old stetson that held down a huge beard we'd made of various types of string in long lengths and gave him a washboard which he had to scrape up and down with his thimble mounted finger tips. Add to this a large pair of ill fitting boots and you get the picture! Somehow Jack could not play his washboard without also jumping around peculiarly in those dreadful boots!. Anyway we proceeded to rehearse the old favourites 'Home on the range', 'Boots and saddles', 'I'm an old cow hand', 'Empty saddles', 'Wagon wheels', 'Old faithful' etc. and the more recent hits 'Don't fence me in' and 'Deep in the heart of Texas'. Unfortunately rehearsals were a bit rare due to my occasional week-ends away, overtime at work and other gigs.

I'm reminded here about rehearsals, we never really needed them for our 'Spitfires' show, just changing our repertoire for repeat dates, but once our comedian (old Tom Wills) had worked out a couple of new army sketches that he wanted us to see before he presented them to an audience. I can't remember the sketches now except that we went to his council house to see them and they were constantly interrupted by loads of children (all his!) as he tried to perform. As one child went out of the front room door another entered from the back and so on and so on. We never worked out how many children he'd got but it seemed like about a dozen and once one of us started laughing so we all gradually joined in! We were supposed to be laughing at Tom's comedy but his rehearsal was really a waste of every one's time.

I suppose that all these goings on meant that mum and dad down at Southend were having a rather quiet if not boring existence. I remember they developed the hobby of rug making using either one of dad's own designs or one supplied by the 'Readycut' Wool Co. Some they did were quite professional looking, but they took ages to complete. Another of dad's skills was to design knitting patterns that mum or near neighbours would follow quite easily. One I remember was of a mass of sailing boats on a royal blue background and another was ever so complex in 'Fair Isle' fashion, an absolute myriad of colours so where did he learn all about knitting? Then I remember mum having difficulty singing some ballad or other and dad re-writing it out to accommodate her voice range. Where he got his hidden musical talent we'll never know now. The man was definitely an unsung genius.

Mum would often sing for herself at the piano. It was rather nice I thought and she would say that if ever you're down in the dumps about anything at all, "go and have a tune on the old piano". First class advice I've employed many a time since I can tell you! I didn't really like her old songs then, for the melodies were inclined to be rather corny, but as I said in an earlier chapter I've come to realise long since that when one listens carefully to their words they really became works of art in many cases.....for example this that describes a poor man's will and called 'When I leave the world behind':-

I leave the sunshine to the flowers,  
I leave the spring time to the trees,  
And to the old folk I leave the memory,  
Of a baby upon their knees  
I leave the twilight to the dreamers,  
And the song birds to the blind,  
I leave the moon above to those in love,  
When I leave the world behind,  
When I leave the world behind!

Thus mum chose many of her songs more for the poetry than for the tune (though that above has a beautiful melody also).

Mum and dad gave us a bit of a do when Vera and I got engaged. Mr and Mrs Silver came to Southend for the occasion and stayed for the week end. So we had one of our old fashioned 'singalongs', us all doing our party pieces of course, including Vera who could play the piano reasonably well (she seemed to like the pop songs relating to the air force such as 'Silver wings in the moonlight', 'If I only had wings', 'Johnny Zero'etc.). Mum had rigged up a bed for young Derek in my room and when we went to bed he was soon asleep and began talking in his sleep at first, then

shouting very loud reducing it to an in-coherent mumble, then he suddenly rose from his bed and started running around the room in small circles, so as this was all in his sleep I rose and gently wakened him, and he slowly normalised while I sort of cuddled him as we both sat on the edge of his bed. Poor lad I don't think he'd ever been away from home before and anyway our house was not nearly so cosy and posh as his. The family were a shade above our station you see.

Although any prospect of marriage to Vera could not be envisaged for a long time to come, mum and dad were obviously concerned for my possible lack of understanding of money management, that one had to save for one's 'bottom drawer', for the wedding, for furnishing the future home etc. Although mum did all her arithmetic on her fingers she showed me how she put money by for every known forthcoming expense, showing me examples from her own budgeting including a payment for her endowment policy. She needn't have worried for as stated earlier I'd remembered dad's maxim "With what's left over" dad said "spend half and save half for a rainy day" Saving in those days meant the Post Office. Nobody ever thought about using a building society for the purpose.

From their sound advice I took out an endowment with the Liverpool Victoria Assurance Society via the now ageing Mr Ranstead who'd served for all our family's insurances since mum was a girl. I also started buying things for the 'Bottom Drawer', brooms and brushes I recall and I designed an ironing board in my spare time and built it in mum's kitchen and stored it in my bedroom. (Due to changed circumstances though, it didn't see the light of day until 1950 but has stayed in regular use ever since).

I was getting more keen on photography and had an old V.P.Twin camera for 127 size films but the only film easy to get in these times was 35mm size so punters were busy converting old cameras to take it and this worked for me on our holiday.

Vera came to our place rather infrequently but we had a nice week's holiday at Clacton from there. For this we had to catch the Eastern National Bus from outside Southend Victoria station. This took us to Chelmsford where we changed buses for a Clacton one. I had a folding 'Coronet' camera now due to my growing photographic interest. We took bus rides to Walton on the Naze, Frinton and to Jaywick Sands that I had such fond memories of when Peg came on our family holiday there in 1938. Returning now, the trip nearly reduced me to tears for the long promenade had been bombed to smithereens and the once pretty little bungalows and chalets were all empty and crumpled and some were laying on their sides, all in all like a scene from a derelict town in a western film. Our digs were excellent in Clacton so I induced mum and dad to holiday there the following year.

Come 1943 slogans were being chalked up everywhere saying "Second Front Now!" and similar incantations and meetings in Trafalgar Square that implied that the brunt of the fighting was being bourne month in and month out by the Russians, for with them holding off the Germans at Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad, it seemed obvious that the time was long overdue for the western allies to invade. Us socialist minded folk were also beginning to think that the west were secretly hoping for a German victory against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

I must say I was beginning to take that view once declaring to dad that we seemed to be just hanging around and that the German and Axis forces seemed to be better managed and at least got on with the job as they saw it. "Oh Son", he said almost tearfully "Don't be a defeatist, don't be a defeatist!" As always he was right of course.

As it happened the awful siege of Leningrad ended after sixteen months and the deaths of almost a million. The Germans under Von Paulus finally surrendered at Stalingrad having lost 200,000 killed. The allies successfully invaded Sicily and Mussolini was overthrown. The Germans were in full retreat from the Caucasus. The Italian mainland was soon invaded and Italy surrendered at last.

The Strand Cinema at Southend still held its 'Hocus Pocus' night between the films on Friday nights and the manager felt like a change and asked me if I could put on an entire one hour entertainment choosing whatever performers I would like. I was quite thrilled to get the opportunity and felt this was the ideal time to try out our 'Hill Billies' group. I thought we'd start with a couple of their numbers then I'd do my piano and impersonations stuff then some light relief ballad singing from Madge Thomas and close the show with the 'Hill Billies' again. All participants were willing to come down from Barking for it, the fee was modest but tolerable and everyone arrived in ample time and changed to go on while the 'B' film was drawing to a close. The big picture was called 'The Hairy Ape' with William Bendix. Mum and dad were to be in the audience (strangely this always made me nervous). The manager introduced me first and I walked on just in time to view my dad through the footlights and the hazy atmosphere, I saw his white hair as he rose to his feet and shouted "That's my boy up there!" So by now I was already embarrassed!

I introduced the 'Hill Billies' and the songs were not too bad until Jack Penwill in his knee length string beard started his clomping around and tending to drown us out as he clattered the washboard!, God it was awful! My piano cum impressions act was appallingly weak as a result. I thanked heaven for dear Madge who made up for so much by belting out her songs so professionally and to rapturous applause. But then according to plan I had to introduce the 'Hill Billies' AGAIN! when some wag responded by shouting to me "That's right mate. Bring on the Hairy Ape!" which of course brought the house down! I assumed he meant the film not Jack Penwill!

On seeing them all onto their train afterwards, Madge whispered to me "Poor old Wilf, don't dare try it again with them !".

Knowing I was a bit broken up, neither mum nor dad later mentioned the show, but the manager had been kind to me. 'It was just an experiment' is the way he put it. The last word on the disaster came from my dear motor cycling friend Doug Smith next morning at work, who without my knowledge had also been in the audience.

"How can you face me this morning ?" he said laughingly. " You Hilly Billy Bugger You! "

At that I just curled up into my shell.

## Chapter 30

### Sorrow in Surrey, a poor show in Southend and Youth club dramatics

Hersham was a nice area for the Silvers to live, well I suppose anywhere in Surrey is. So it was that on my visits there Vera and I went to all the popular places thereabouts. Vera seemed to know how to get to them all.

Nearby on a short bus route was the town of Esher that straddles the Portsmouth Road. Here we would go to the cinema or going southward from there a bit we would wander around the Whiteley Village, a complex of homes for old folk provided by the London store magnate and benefactor William Whitley. Near there was a region called 'The seven hills' where we would take a picnic occasionally adjacent to a lake on whose banks lived a myriad of water fowl, ducks, moorhens, swans and the like. Many years later I found this an ideal resting place when on business visits to the Portsmouth area and also with my family if on a holiday journey.

Vera and I would visit her cousin Jean at Weybridge which is quite close to Hersham or to the other nearby town of Walton on Thames where there was a lovely old pub on the river's edge. Hersham itself I think had only one pub and one evening there I was able to meet who to her was her beloved uncle Jack, a lively 'Eric Morecombe' type of individual buying drinks all around for everybody. I was no drink authority and ordered with safety a brown ale. Vera had what he called a 'Pimms No1' I've heard of it since of course but am really none the wiser as to its content. Frankly I found the golfing (actually they call it 'goff' there) stories a bore and had my first experience of being crowded like a sardine against the bar when there was plenty of vacant tables and chairs and with all the girls grinning like Cheshire cats while pretending to enjoy themselves trying to laugh in the right places while gazing glassily up into the eyes of their hoped for admirers. This kind of atmosphere has been duplicated up and down the country ever since and I still can't enjoy it nor even understand it. 'Being sociable' I suppose they call it, well a Socialist I may well be but that has quite a different meaning.

The war continued in our favour in 1944 with the defeat of the Japanese in Burma and news of a bomb plot on Hitler's life (it failed) but at last came the long awaited 'Second Front' effected by the allied invasion of Europe. On the debit side the Germans defeated our attempts to take the bridge at Arnhem and they started sending over their hitherto secret weapon ---The buzz bomb! Officially called the V.1.(a flying bomb in fact). This for its time was indeed an ingenious device being a high explosive in an un-manned miniature aeroplane. These were launched from Peenemunde to fly over Britain and given a limited amount of fuel that could be timed to run out approximately over an anticipated target. They were nerve racking, first due to the buzzing note of their little engine that warned of their approach, second due to the dramatic silence created immediately the engine stopped. and third the fear that now it will fall and explode on impact....but where? They came fast and frequent, by day and by night but thanks to our R.A.F. boys who flew up to intercept them, many were turned gingerly around by gently having their wings and rudder tipped so that they flew out to sea again or diverted to safer areas.

Many families who had given up the discomfort of using their air raid shelters, had been taking a chance with the ordinary bombing missions, but now contemplated using their shelters again. So did the Silver family and we packed in there most uncomfortably. It was summer time and got awfully hot and I could not get to sleep for the snoring of the family around me. I therefore donned a minimum of clothes and gently departed and wandered around Hersham for most of the night. I don't recall us all doing it again.

Why though I don't know for soon after came the more frightening threat of the V.2. Rockets. These were so fast that they could neither be seen nor heard in flight until one maybe heard the explosion and or saw the dust cloud from the crater and rubble it had caused on impact. One just had to go about one's business each day hoping that if it was to be your turn next you would know nothing about it. Sadly, such was the lot of many folk, mainly Londoners.

So all this did not stop my week-end visits. I remember we went to Hampton Court and saw the enormous grape vine and ventured into the maze there, to Kew Gardens, to Richmond, to Runnymede, I also remember a trip along the Thames negotiating several of the locks. We also had a London trip to Petticoat Lane that she'd only heard about and we were fascinated by a con-man selling some stuff called 'Spanish Demerera' and producing a flask of very dark yellow liquid that he claimed was the urine of a little jewish girl. He dropped a little of his potion into it and it became crystal clear, whereupon he drank it all down to demonstrate the purifying effect of the product!

Another London trip was to the 'Adelphi' theatre to see Ivor Novello's 'The Dancing Years' after which we had a meal in one of the Lyons Corner House restaurants, either the one in Coventry Street, always a delight, or the nearer one junctioning the Strand and Duncannon Street. This had a basement part called 'The Brasserie' of which I was fond, both these places had been introduced to me earlier by my old friend Bill Zolowski mentioned in earlier chapters.

I tried to seize any opportunity possible to talk to Vera about getting things for her 'Bottom Drawer' or about helping me save for this and that as I imagined we might get married at the war's end. I thought about us having a joint Post Office account but she didn't seem to have any idea or any interest in financial matters. I didn't quite know how to handle the situation, she never offered to pay her share for anything we did. For this it wasn't any personal need of the money but I was a stickler for principle and just an occasional offer would have given me a renewal of confidence. Things were just too one sided for my liking I suppose.

We had a nice holiday that summer at her aunty's house in Reading, The lady, a widow, ran a general shop full of lovely smells and attached to the house. A loud mouthed but jolly soul she was. Always busy with something or other, a rather huge and upright woman who showed us all sorts of places to go even though we didn't go very far as Reading had a very nice town and a park and a lovely old style traditional type theatre. Ah! that theatre, here we saw a Music Hall type of programme with comedians Dave and Joe O'Gorman, Herschell Henlier who impersonated famous composers styles when playing quite ordinary well known tunes, and a couple

of hilarious and knock about uni-cyclists. There was also a chap dressed down one side as a woman and down the other in top hat white tie and tails, though we didn't realise the illusion until the end of his act that had convinced us that we were watching a couple of ball room dancers.

It would have been about that time that Ivy and George had been courting and he being a Freemason invited Vera and I to a 'Ladies Night' function at a lodge in Clapham. Not knowing the ropes, when the meal was about to be served we followed the crowd to our allotted positions at the huge tables, I pulled out a chair for Vera and then sat down myself. I didn't exactly notice any ghastly hush but one is supposed to wait for the Grand Master(?) to be seated before sitting down one's self so I felt a prize twit I can tell you!

After the meal and during the dancing I think, I was called to one side by George and told that one of his colleagues wanted to speak to me. I thought maybe I was to get a rocket for my faux pas described above, but no, I was given a discourse by the chap on how to become a Freemason, that I could not be asked to join but would have to apply for membership myself and now was a golden opportunity to do so. I was well aware of their good works for members, their quite famous hospital etc. but said I would have to know the rules before I could make any such commitment. Unfortunately the reply was that it was a secret society so no one outside it could acquire knowledge of its rules.

I think therefore I put the cat among the pigeons yet again by politely finding those conditions unacceptable especially as I didn't believe in secret societies of any kind, Indeed I didn't think it right for anyone to keep secrets from anybody. I suppose poor old George must have thought I'd let him down that night but there had been no indication beforehand that I was to be approached on the subject.

Regarding secrets, even today there are many wives for example who do not even know how much their husbands earn! Their men mistakenly believing that they are for some reason sort of special, often with their wives given a mere pittance for running a home and family, the work for which invariably far exceeding the daily output of their man.

I have always felt that knowlege is a gift and so should be available to anyone, anywhere, at any time. I don't suggest one should volunteer every snippet of information, but I do think it should be given if asked (unless it is intended to come as some surprise later). If we could have that, there would be nothing suspicious in the world and possibly no more wars either!

There came another visit to see Vera when to my delight she declared that Bentall's store at Kingston were selling off grey blankets very cheaply and could we hurry along there to get some?. This was more like it I thought and sure enough we went, and got some. They made up to quite a bundle that I had to carry back to her place, and moneywise that day I recall I was virtually cleaned out.

It was a few visits later when on meeting me at the station she asked me how I liked her new coat, "Fine" I declared and it was, but then she told me it had been made up from one of the blankets

we'd got at Kingston and that she'd had another made up in a different style I think (but can't be sure) for her cousin Jean at Weybridge.

I'm afraid this was too much for me to take and I decided we'd got to bring our engagement to an end. At the end of that week end I told her so and that she could keep the ring. There was no row about it all but I did explain that it was due to the lack of co operation generally on her part. Both long faced we kissed goodbye and that was that.

Perhaps luckily for me Mr Silver was not with me on the train back to London that Monday morning for I felt terrible all the way to work. Had I done the right thing? Had I been fair about it? God, what would her mum and dad's reaction be? Would she (being slightly crippled) be able to get another boy friend? I was already wishing I hadn't done it.

I promptly wrote an explanatory letter to Mr and Mrs Silver thanking them of course for the hospitality they'd always shown me through such a long period (roughly three years). However I got a real stinker back from her dad who it seems must have been enraged about it, this truly hurt me because I liked him very much, well both he and his wife were really lovely people. I was a misery for weeks about it, and began to wonder if I'd been too hard, or if the break up was too sudden. I hadn't noticed before that a girls main interest seemed to be in clothes, and clothes rationing at the time seriously restricted their purchasing power. Getting the blankets I reasoned must have been a very tempting idea. So I began to contemplate starting things up again and wrote a note to that effect, tore it up, wrote another, tore it up and so on, but ultimately let the matter slide into the oblivion.

A Southend man called Len Polly wanted to organise a concert party and had heard of me from somewhere or other. It seemed a good idea to me as (a) There was not a lot of entertainment going on in the area and (b) The change would help get rid of a bit of my depression.

In a short while we had a sort of rehearsal at his lady friend's home in St Anne's Road I think. She was Constance Reeve with just an 'ordinary voice'. He and she were 'duettists' singing the most corny and out of date material you ever heard. Essex folk had never by then cottoned on to the more lively London type of showbiz procedure. In fact they didn't really take to ex-Londoners much at all (I thank heaven for the great change to the better after the war, probably due to the rapid influx of more Londoners).

Anyway for now we had to manage with those available and willing to perform. Mrs Sawyer was the pianist, classically trained at that! She was married to the band leader violinist of the local Regal theatre. Their daughter Jasmine, a plump but pretty, red headed, nineteen year old girl was a coloratura soprano who sang much the same repertoire as Madge Thomas but in a higher key and of much less power of projection. (The Sawyer family lived in a posh-ish bungalow with all its furnishings in white including carpets and a grand piano, in Darlinghurst Road up at Chalkwell). I, of course, did all my usual routines with accordion, piano solos and impersonations.

That was it really but Len Polly was also supposed to be the comedian. Good grief it was all pretty dreadful but I must say livened up immensely when I introduced them all to cousin Joan (Butler) a very good general purpose vocalist of songs of the day and with real 'Go' and a vibrant personality, (that's a gift I've envied in her and countless others, and in which my own personality failed).

So we had done a few shows with mixed success and I had even taken Jasmine out once (on the rebound I suppose from Vera), just for a drink at the Pier Hill Palace Hotel's Palm Court where the small music ensemble played romantic light ballads. Then I heard that Mrs Sawyer was getting upset by my modest success at the piano. i.e. SHE was supposed to be the pianist! Why couldn't I stick with the piano-accordion?---I felt for her a little because she was really skilled and could no doubt do my solos not only better, but in the case of the classics, PROPERLY. but given the chance she didn't want to be a soloist anyway, just the accompanist. I must say I felt much more at home with the 'Spitfires' and can't now remember what Len Polly's lot were called.

My good friend Ted Elliott invited me to join his youth club at the Gregg Hall by Becontree Station. He and I had a close affinity at this time and his family including Joy his sister always made me welcome. This youth club thing seemed a nice idea and a pleasant change for me, they were a young Christian group numbering about fifty, managed by a very dear old man whose name sadly escapes me. They had use of not only the main hall but of a smaller back one also and it was there that the older teens congregated. It had an old mini piano so I soon felt well 'at home' with the girls around that piano asking me to play the pops of the day. I was jolly glad to have joined, and at the right time for my present state of mind. In fact getting to know everyone came easy and in no time at all I dated a young lass called Ivy Lofting and we saw 'Anchor's Aweigh' a nice film with Kathryn Grayson and Gene Kelly (spectacular in a dance routine with a cartoon mouse) at a Barking cinema. She turned up plastered with make up and in only minutes seemed much too young and immature to me so after seeing her home we amicably called it a day.

The old man had been told of my theatrical interest and explained that the club badly needed a dramatic society and would I contemplate organising it. I was thrilled with the idea but hadn't realised what I'd be taking on, it being a limited part time venture anyway. But there it was I'd said "O.K"!

First off I raided the library for theatrical books on stage management, theatrical make up, the costume department, scene painting and the like. Not everything was available so I wrote to Samuel French in London, they sold, or loaned for a fee, all manner of theatrical books, plays comic scripts etc. They gave me a lot of help and meanwhile we were asking for volunteers at the club to take on all these various functions. One beautiful girl, (Barbara Newcombe) was a typist and became a great help in typing my correspondence. She kept a close eye on the books and pamphlets that I'd borrowed or temporarily lent out, she was good too at reminding me of what I had to do next etc. The club got too noisy for my planned serious meeting so I invited the three most involved (Barbara Newcombe, Audrey Coloff and one of the chaps) to the Aldwych theatre in London to see Anton Walbrook in 'Watch on the Rhine' so as to see how the professionals do it, and thence to

a meal in the Strand. with the idea of discussing our problems both during the journeys and around the restaurant's table. This went very well until I was charged about twice the government's meal price limit. (5/- was the maximum in wartime they were allowed to charge anywhere!) You can bet I got on my high horse over it and no doubt embarrassed the girls,. You see they got around the rule by charging for all manner of unexpected extras!

I got myself an old second hand typewriter up at Westcliff with two complete keyboards (one for each of upper and lower case characters) for five shillings, and I would burn the midnight oil in my bedroom typing extracts from all the books for the girls and lads to learn and work from. All this preparation took an age and politely snide remarks were appearing in the monthly newsletters such as 'When is Wilf going to present his first play? I hear he hasn't even chosen one yet'

The trouble was that I'd taken the whole affair too seriously and should have chosen a play to act at the outset and muddled through every thing in a basically amateurish way. Why, I'd even designed an idea to operate the curtains in a professional manner!

Then some of the lesser members who had been joining me for numerous play readings just dropped out and Barbara was trying to handle some of that as well. I began to realise that she and I were beginning to get rather fond of each other's company and of course before long I asked her for a date which she turned down! but the second time after some persuasion she accepted and we were to meet at Valentines Park in Ilford.

Hearing about it, one of the lads who I think also fancied her started making jokes about 'Wait 'til her husband finds out, she's married you know!' Well I was so green I didn't even dream that it could be true and I went to the park in anticipation of a new romance developing, but she never turned up, and what's more she never returned to the club again either. It turned out that indeed she was married, to some poor soldier lad fighting in France!

Without Barbara's help the dramatic society just collapsed and I had to apologise to every one --- and the old man too.

Thinking again about that film 'Anchor's Aweigh', the love angle included Frank Sinatra at his best where he sings 'I fall in love too easily' a beautiful song and certainly appropriate to me during this and ensuing times.

## Chapter 31

War ends, a new government and Ivy marries,  
my holiday heralds a new romance.

Now being 1945 it was the last year of the war. February that year saw the dreadful bombing of Dresden (original home of the famous Meissen potteries) which we entirely destroyed! killing between 120 and 150 thousand people! Then the biggest death toll known for any air raid.

The Americans invaded Okinawa, the Russians entered Vienna and also linked up with the Americans in Germany. Hitler killed both himself and Eva Braun. Berlin was captured by the Russians effectively bringing about the end of the European war on May 8th. The Americans dropped their newly invented atomic bombs on Japan, laying waste Hiroshima and Nagasaki and causing the surrender of Japan on the 14th August.

This year also saw the marriage of dear Ivy to George (Leggett) making him not only my cousin but now my brother in law too. Lil Servant and a work friend at C & A (Madge) being tailoresses made Ivy's beautiful wedding dress. Ivy was particularly impressed with the wedding presents and especially with a beautiful tea cosy made for them by Aunt Lil. Many saw them married at the Sutton Road church and joined the large reception held over the Garon's restaurant in Southend's High Street. They employed a professional photographer but I also took pictures using a newly acquired second hand small plate camera.

On photography, Gordon Binks called sometime before all this and we shared photographic anecdotes. He had just bought himself a rather dinky camera called a 'Perma Plus' taking '127' films and he gave me a jolly fine booklet on building your own enlarger. This I did and used it on photos of Ivy and Georges wedding (and on cousin Jean's). Jean had met a submariner called Bill and so I was also able to photograph their wedding, clashing with another Southend photographer (Laurie Mathews) who had not been engaged for the job. Happily for everyone it's as well he was there because mine were taken with the little glass plate camera and in the dark I dropped the plates and some of them cracked! The enlarger served me well for many subsequent years.

This was the year too that the United Nations Charter was signed giving the world hope at least for a more peaceful future. That year too Britain's electorate returned a Labour government with a huge majority and Clement Attlee as Prime minister.

This was great news and a stunning landslide for left wing politics. The people wanting a change had thought it would be a close result knowing the general popularity of conservative Winston Churchill, but this was indeed a magnificent achievement for a party out of office for so many years.

Probably most memorable though were the main victory celebrations where the crowds flocked the streets (of London in particular) frolicking in the fountains of Trafalgar Square, dancing about and climbing lamp-posts and the like. Also the very moving victory march through London of all the armed forces. One couldn't help feeling for those though, whose sons and dads would not be coming

home and for those thousands killed or maimed in air raids here at home.

Although one of dad's frequent consoling expressions after any trouble was "All these things are sent to try us" I think he remained silent regarding this issue. During that era I developed a rotten habit if arguing with mum and dad about something and yet when discussing the same topic with friends I'd use the line my parents had as though it was my own opinion. I've never understood why I went through that phase.

People in all the churches here (and no doubt throughout the world) were thanking God for the war's end, but I began to wonder 'If we're to thank Him for this deliverance how come it took Him so long? A few days maybe, but SIX YEARS? when indeed everyone had been praying for its end during all that time! Did God consider nobody's prayer even a little justifiable? or did he even hear it? Or maybe the war was the work of the devil then? If so why let it end? and if he was responsible for all the mayhem it caused what did he personally hope to get out of it? and if God conquered the devil to effect the war's end, couldn't he have conquered him at its outset? and what of all such disasters since?'

You may understand that these thoughts began to arouse a quest in my heart to search for possible reason and truth in the Bible so that I could maybe in time confidently separate the feasable from the ridiculous.

Some of the best of the victory celebrations of course were for the children whose street parties were organised up and down the country. Our Spitfires concert party played at some around Dagenham and Barking and believe it or not our 'Hill Billies' group did just one only! That was for the kiddies in the street where 'Hairy Ape' Jack Penwill lived, we re-formed the group at his request and (by comparison with our last fiasco) strangely the children loved it!

My draughtsman and friend Jack Hogben, a deeply Christian baptist lad knowing well of my musical interests wanted me to consider giving a lecture on classical music at his Ilford Baptist church hall with the aid of my record collection. Well I'd done nothing like that before but he was convinced I could 'pull it off' and as I'd spent many train journeys reading about the great composers and their famous works and he promised that the hall boasted a fine electric radiogram I thought I could possibly work out an interesting programme. The audience was to be the young teenagers of his church's youth club and I realised that they were more likely to be interested in pops of the day than in classical music, so remembering Bill Zolowski's advice to me when I was in a 'Don't like classics' frame of mind a few years before (described in an earlier chapter) I decided to start the 'lecture' with 'The Dance of the hours' due to the various tunes in light vein it contained. I also included extracts from the tuneful Grieg A minor concerto and the still popular Warsaw Concerto and bravely demonstrated bits of them on the upright piano there upon the platform. The whole thing went surprisingly well for me (presumably there were no real musicians in the audience!) and Jack was really grateful to me.

My love life though was still making no progress at this time but Bob Neeshaw tried to do something about it by fixing me up with a

blind date with a niece (I think) of his. I was to meet her outside Mile End station and did so. A funny little fat girl she was, about my own age and full of jokes and of cockney voice and I suppose quite good company --- but not for me! We just walked the Mile End Road until we passed the People's Palace theatre, then we retraced our steps to the station again, and that was it!

For some months thereafter I had been passing a very good looking girl on my morning walk down Gale Street. No it wasn't Rene described in earlier chapters but the similarities were obvious, i.e. The place was the same, my lack of nerve was the same, so it took me quite some time before grunting a 'Good morning' to her. Each day she came out of Langley Crescent into Gale Street but once a week she would come by dressed in an expensively magnificent get-up, the full regalia of a Dagenham Girl Piper! (well although my station was called Becontree this was actually in Dagenham). In those days those girls made several recordings and are even well known today. As with Rene I became really depressed if she did not come past me any morning and with much encouragement from the lads at work I eventually stopped her and politely asked her to come out with me some time. She was more than charming as she replied that she would really love to but was already engaged to be married! So that was that! Madge Thomas knew my feelings for the girl, and of my past experiences, so was most consoling.--- and I've only just realised that I never even got to know the girl's name!

Madge's hubby Fred had a niece (Diane) who I came upon shortly after these events, discovering her sprawled out seductively on Madge's settee during one of my visits there. Diane, to say the least was a bit more than just good looking, she was always impeccably dressed, strongly perfumed and positively glamorous! such that I blushed in her presence. She was one of 'The Windmill' girls, newly appointed there and short of digs, so Madge and Fred decided to put her up. She wasn't very talkative and I was never any good at conversation but she was often there if I called and Madge or Fred seemed then to make haste out of the room leaving us alone. We seldom said more than 'hello' however, though I recall mustering some chat about showbiz once and my friend Bill Zolowski's connection with the Windmill theatre. My mates at work reckoned that Madge and Fred had adopted a policy of matchmaking for the girl and me but I thought that ridiculous at the time (being so naive) but long afterwards I was not so sure and thinking 'Fancy letting a chance like that go by? when there it was, more or less all laid out on a plate for me!'

We were well into 1946 when I think it was Ted Elliott who told me of a future holiday offer coming up with the Workers Educational Travel Association organised from the South East Essex Technical college in Barking under the direction of the Science Department head, Dr Smith (a delightful elderly man). The holiday was to be for sixteen days full board in Switzerland at the village of Wilderswil near Interlaken and at a cost of £25! Well I'd never been abroad and coming so soon after the war years the whole idea was magical. Jack Hogben and I just couldn't turn it down! Why Ted didn't go I can't recall. We were to depart on August the sixteenth.

Meanwhile production engineering was slowly drifting back to peace time projects and a new kind of tooling was on the horizon and beginning to beckon me. MOULDS! I had already been involved in

rubber mould projects (for tennis balls I recall) and I'd worked a little on die-casting techniques (this process entails the pouring of molten metal into a closed mould either by gravity or under high pressure means). My main pursuit though was still the presswork of metals and the design of products, but the latter was now becoming concerned withk'with my new possession.

There are two groups of these materials (a) the up and coming 'Thermoplastics' (soften with heat but in clear or any colour), Polystyrene, Acetate, Acrylic (its trademark 'Perspex' and friends. The evacuation of our troops from Dunkirk had been effected and Paris had been occupied by the Germans. Now 'Thark colours but heat resistant) already developed as 'Bakelite' 'Urea' 'Melamine' etc. for door and drawer furniture, crockery Malmesbury in Wiltshire. To me, you can imagine this news was a disaster for as much as I enjoyed my job with the firm I could nolined kettle handle with spout in black Bakelite. Not only that but we were to tool it for being moulded at of all places mould and after it was sampled at Ekco's I was asked to call in holiday.

So it was goodbye to all my workmates at the Rodenside Company after six years, years later, on opening up my tool-cabinet I discovered several of my tools missing! I suppose someone at the firm had raided the box during my last hours there. Leaving Rodensides meant goodbye to the youth club, The Spitfires and the Hill Billies of course. However Madge, Tom Wills and I still managed to work the occasional gig.

The holiday departure date duly arrived and we all met at Victoria station in London. Dr Smith introduced us all to each other, Miss Lines, Mr Mercer and three others (names unknown) were teachers, there were two students whose names also escape me, Joan Wade a teleprinter, Eve ? a typist, Jack Hogben and I engineers and James. E .Ball. proprietor of a Plastics factory! what luck eh?

Dr Smith hurried us through the station's customs house and thence to the luggage department where ours was weighed and in my case charged only 2/6d for its journey all the way to Interlaken!.

Thence to the train and its reserved seat to Dover and a pleasant crossing to Calais on the biggest boat I'd ever sailed on up to then. The huge French train belching steam and with tolling bell was awaiting us and soon set off on its journey of many hours and into the night across France, through I think Rheims, Chalons sur Marne, Strasbourg, Mulhouse and on to Basle. Sleeping had been difficult with interruptions from French officials wanting to see our passports and checking what money we had. Others coming along the corridor selling sweets, nuts and drinks (of recent war questionable quality) and Miss Lines trying to get up a rubber for a game of Bridge!

I often think of Basle the multi-border station where on the Swiss platform plied trolleys selling oranges and bananas neither of which we'd even seen for years and the cakes! Oh those cakes! bedecked with lashings of cream!---but we'd arrived for breakfast and were ushered into a hugely ornate rich looking restaurant for coffee and croissants with loads of butter! (Like I say 'I often think of Basle!')

So it was onto the Swiss electric train bound for Interlaken passing quite flat regions of lush countryside for several miles

but the land dotted with pretty little toyland type chalets and a freshness and cleanliness such as I'd not seen before anywhere. Then suddenly Whoosh! we are in a tunnel and soon Whaah! we're out of it again, and those who have snatched a little shut-eye are gently wakened by a neatly uniformed little man wanting to see their tickets. The terrain is getting hilly now and before long we enter the blackness of another tunnel, now of considerable length so that they have to put on the lights and we go through it for what seems like several miles and certainly for many minutes indeed until there's a sound like WHAAAAR!! the noise and fierce glare of sunlight that declares our exit at last to view the most magnificent panorama the like of which one is never likely to see elsewhere. For we are now skirting the gorgeous lake of Thunersee with Mount Niesen and the little town of Spiez at its foot.

This view is the most memorable introduction to Switzerland I know and has to be by train due to its sudden and unexpected exit from the tunnel. A few more minutes and we arrive at Interlaken Ost where we collect our luggage and board a little train for Wilderswil, one stop only, just two or so miles away.

Just by Wilderswil Station was the Balmer Bahnhof (our hotel) but although we had all our meals there (six on our table, the students, Joan, Eve, Jack and I) a few of us slept at a nearby chalet run by the daughter (Elizabet) of the hotel's proprietress Frau Balmer. Jack and I were given a fine room in the chalet and checking my watch I observed that the journey from Southend door to door had taken twenty nine hours.

Dr Smith arranged an enormous programme of visits for us such that every day was filled and entailed taking packed lunches instead of us partaking mid-day meals although we were in no way tied to his itinerary. On these trips we all seemed to get paired up. Miss Lines with Mr Ball, Mr Mercer with a ginger haired teacher, the two teachers, the two students, Jack Hogben and Joan Wade and Eve with me.

We visited the Grindelwald Glacier, Brienz, The Beatusholen caves, Thun, The Blue lake, Berne, Zurich, The Brenner Pass, Wengen, The Kleine Scheidegg for glorious views of the Eiger mountain's ominous north face etc. The Jungfrau mountain's ice palace, outside of which the hot sun beat down upon the thick snow where we could view the awe inspiring Aletsch Glacier, Kandersteg and its stiff climb alongside a rushing stream to the lake of its source. I must have been at my fittest then for the walk was a tiring struggle for almost all of the party, resting to recover their breath every few minutes, whereas I wanted to get along and aided some of the older ones by an occasional pull or push up the meandering hill. The Innertkirchen Gorge, The Giesbach Falls, Lauterbrunnen's Staubbach Falls, Murren, Schynige Platte entailing a walk along a cliff edge narrow path. Here at the plateau the student lad asked me to hold his camera while he clambered down the cliff face to gather a little white flower for his young girl companion. All of us tried to stop this mad-brained idea but he insisted and deftly managed the venture to some applause.

I had to admire that camera of his, the first 35mm reflex type made, being the very expensive 'Ihagee Kine Exacta'. For that holiday I had bought a second hand Agfa camera with an f6.3 lens of no comparison of course. Nevertheless I brought back over a hundred quite good snaps I'd taken with it.

Memorable on that holiday was the marvellous food and the cafes selling Cassata, a multi-coloured crescent of ice cream or Meringues heaped high with cream and at the Interlaken Kursaal the gorgeous cream cakes eaten to the accompaniment of a full symphony orchestra playing light classics.---er coming next year?

One black spot was a pair of marvellous sandals I bought at the nearby village of Matten and had to pay about four times the price I'd interpreted from the man's confusing price ticket!

Compensating for this though I got mum a hand carved musical box very cheaply and also a quality wrist watch for dad but sadly he could never take to a watch on his wrist ,preferring his old top pocket type suspended on its short chain. I bought myself a pipe (being a smoker still) and an Alpenstock (walking stick) from a wayside wood carver. Most things in Switzerland being quite cheap in those days.

By the time our holiday was drawing to a close I'd got involved with Mr Ball the proprietor of W.W.Ball and Sons Ltd of Billericay. learning a little of his Plastics business and he knew those who mattered at the Ekco Plastics division where I was very soon to find myself. He and I got on very well (becoming quite friendly in my future years too) and we would enjoy political banter, he being a staunch conservative and me of socialist leanings. He reckoned that I should move gradually to the conservatives by dropping the 'Daily Worker' in favour of a half way stage, the Liberal's paper of the time 'The News Chronicle'. I later did give it a try but it became hilarious how almost daily it changed its mind on really vital issues.

We had wonderful weather for the whole of that lovely holiday and modest romance tinged the atmosphere here and there, the two sets of teachers eventually married, the two youngsters went home lovingly but neither Jack nor I had any particular feeling for our partners.

However during the final part of my journey home (on the Liverpool Street to Southend line) I sat next to Joan Wade with Jack Hogben on her other side. He with some others had to leave the train at Ilford, before which time Joan had fallen asleep and had her head very pleasantly on my shoulder! Here she awoke declaring that she had to alight at forthcoming Romford. In that short remaining journey we chatted profusely with she pointing out her house and waving at it as the train rattled by, and in the last moments we made a date to meet at Romford station the next week-end! "You're a rather fast worker" she exclaimed (knowing nought of my past efforts!)

She was such a nice girl and lovely to talk to, (we having seldom conversed whilst on holiday) but now I was thinking it a fantastic way to end such a great time !. 'At LAST!' I thought, 'This is going to be IT' 'This is definitely IT!'

## **PART FIVE**

## Chapter 32

### The new beginning.

Well, the arrival of the next Monday saw me enter the familiar gates of E.K.Cole Ltd. with some trepidation, for this job in the Plastics Division was (except for having read a couple of books on the subject) something really new and to enter a largish drawing office after the tiny attic-like room I'd left, and work among a new set of strangers was a bit of a worry. So it was with a somewhat sad heart and not a little longing that I passed the old tool-room where Jimmy Wales my old mentor had taught me so much all those years ago. Much later I discovered that he was now the manager! He and the lads having returned from the Ekco plant at Malmesbury. However they were now installed in a different building, their old workshop so far not yet re-occupied.

Now though I was en-route up the stairs to the gantry overlooking the vast thermosetting presses of the plastics division. It seemed precipitous with its guard rail resembling that found along a ship's upper deck. Here it protected a four feet wide walkway giving access to several offices. The Drawing Office at one end, Mr David Radford's at the other. He was the General Manager. Others' offices were occupied by Mr Frank Pullen the Sales Manager, Mr Gill Collier the Production Manager, Mr Bill Day the Chief Inspector and Mr Head the Commercial Manager, I think with his secretary who was what the saucy magazines loved to call 'voluptuous', and radiated a soft, sort of glowingly pure beauty and with sex-appeal a-plenty! she was Barbara Murray who staggeringly resembled her namesake the famous British film actress, I've often wondered if---? I soon learned that Barbara was adored by everyone and nearly conquered by the Sales Rep Al Bruce one lunch time when she and he were embarrassingly interrupted by me when I entered the drawing office. The Technical Manager was Czechoslovakian Max Freund. Another room housed two ladies, Mr Radford's secretary and a Miss Gladys Mudd ("Pronounce it 'Miss Mude' please!") There was also a Mr Skellern whose function escapes me, he resembled Will Hay the comedian but was of quite a different personality. he was nicknamed by some as 'Sanctimonious Sam'.

A fascinating feature of that press shop was the fenced off Pump Room at the southern end, a softly humming complex of gleaming and spotless machines of chromium, green and scarlet, boasting connecting rods and huge wheels rotating in gracious harmony just like the engine room of an ocean liner I imagine. These pumps etc. served the power requirements of the aforementioned presses, and these were virtually unique in this country due to their mammoth capacity, not merely for the size of mould they could take but for available pressure too. i.e. 500 tons, 750 tons and 1000 tons!

They had been acquired and installed early in Ekco's pre-war history by a German engineer, (a Mr Hahn) to enable the moulding of very large products. Hence the company was able to steal a march on its competitors by moulding its radio cabinets, always large in those days, but now possible to have ornate embellishments or complex shapes in bakelite where wood had hitherto been the norm. It was now diversifying by moulding radio cabinets for its competitors also! (Philips in particular) and huge mouldings such as coffee tables and smaller items like toilet seats, cups and saucers, trays etc. High above me straddling the

entire width of the factory were cross beams supporting a crane and winch adjoining a tiny office-like wooden structure occupied by the crane driver, allowing him to send himself and it not only across but to transcend down the factory to overhang the desired position to load or unload the huge moulds. Standing on that gantry, itself pretty high, one had an excellent view of the production processes but it could be noisy there and due to rising heat it was sometimes an over warm place to be, though an awe inspiring introduction to my next move:-

Nervously I opened the door to the drawing office area and after knocking entered the small outer office now occupied by Mr Wally Laxton (Mr Mason had left the company since my interview). Wally therefore knew nothing of my new appointment but was very kind and rapidly hurried around introducing me to everyone and in no time at all I was made to feel at home.

In a small room annexed to the main drawing office were the tracers being two girls, one was what we would call at that time a 'sweater girl' of gorgeous curves, the sweater of course accentuating them, she was Gwen Turner a quite lovely and socially chatty, wise-cracking character but who surprisingly lacked sex-appeal of the really 'desirable' sort, though forever suffering such jibes from the lads. The other was quite a plain and mundane girl but she had a delightfully sweet nature, she was Iris Butcher. The girls kept the files of the mould and component drawings in order and their department contained the print machine on which they printed copies of the drawings as and when required. Those expected to be used for many years would be traced in Indian Ink on linen and in that capacity both those girls truly shone. They had a lad working with them there, I think about eighteen and later to be a firm friend of mine, he was Bob Beale.

Entering the drawing office proper, Charlie Leger was on the first drawing board and was for ever singing 'I talk to the trees' and some other song about 'Brown skin girls' he was better educated than the rest of us. I was allocated the next board which like all the rest was the latest kind with a counterbalanced pantograph draughting head and had a nice little adjacent desk. Eric Kemp came next whose prime interest was boats and lived at Benfleet, he loved singing Grieg's 'Song of the morning'. Next was Johnny Stanhope, a youngster and like Bob Beale soon became another close friend. Then came Bob Fincher who seemed to know even more old tunes than I did! He could sing very well and we'd discuss music a lot, though he was not a player of it. He was a little on the plump side and tried all kinds of dieting to no effect. On the last board was Ken Warwick, tall, ginger but balding and the neatest draughtsman I've ever encountered, his pencil hard, dug deep into the paper so that his work resembled an engraving. A rather simple soul though having a peculiarly violent streak, loving to grip your neck from behind until you gasped for breath. He possessed and cosseted a sort of stiletto knife that he would skillfully throw at people to just miss and twang menacingly as it sunk deeply into the adjacent structure of the door, floor, desk etc. Sometimes it would accurately land among the hands of those discussing a work problem around someone's desk! He rode a racing cycle with a spike-like saddle and adored his bike to a ridiculous degree. Its hard to put into words though the truthful fact that in spite of all this he was really a likeable cove.

All these boards and men were placed one behind the other, each board in line with its occupiers desk and at right angles to the row of windows that overlooked the managerial parked cars. We used plasticine to model awkward mould features and on hot days the lads would drop balls of it onto the roofs of the managers' cars where in the sun's heat it would slowly melt, spreading itself into a large disc shape to the owner's considerable annoyance! On cold days the seagulls would come inland and fly around the factory complex and we'd throw out cubes of bread to see them swoop down to seize them before they reached the ground. One other person worked in that office but in an internal corner away from the window wall. He was Bill Crannis whose job was 'Checker', a very necessary occupation, as the possibility of mistakes were numerous on the complicated drawings, not just with the delineation but with the dimensions that involved considerable mathematics.

I soon discovered that Bill was not too adept with the engineering aspect of the job but seemed to be well versed in radio problems. Radio had been his origin as a lad when he first joined the Ekco works. He was also a keen amateur car mechanic and was well versed in most subjects and a good conversationalist. He was a conservative politically and a vehement atheist. He coveted anybody's sweets or nuts and once to everyone's amusement stood talking to Eric Kemp while gradually wolfing his whole bag of peanuts! Bill's great hobby that had to be admired was his love of Civil Defence and First Aid activities having served in that part time capacity throughout the war and perpetuating it now. I think he was the most 'interesting' character I've ever met, most likeable, though some might say in truth that he was a lovable old fraud!

The office that first week there proved to be a haven of sheer fun, so enjoyable that I would go home at night and tell mum and dad about each day's delights such that they would laugh as I had done and would look forward to the new tales I would relate to them each day. They were so pleased to witness my general contentment and the knowledge that I had no further cause to catch that very early morning train to work every day. My own contentment was enhanced of course by the added thrill that I was to meet up with Joan come the next Saturday. One train journey I was now impatient for!

We met as arranged at Romford Station where under the bridge was a cafe, here it became our frequent rendezvous. Thereafter we'd catch a bus to Jutsoms Lane and walk the half mile or so down to its continuation, Crow Lane, where she lived at No 31. an ordinary but very comfortable three bedroomed semi. Her mum was a short tubby little lady, just a housewife and made me feel welcome as did her dad, (a double I'd say of comedian Eric Sykes). He worked at the Rank Hovis flour mills. Joan had a sister Helen of whom they were all very proud because she had recently become a Bachelor of Science, she was a local teacher of mathematics. The family were related to Derek Roy the comedian at that time who was alternating weekly with Frankie Howerd to chair the B.B.C.'s 'Variety Band box' Saturday night radio show.

Joan and Helen were as different in nature as chalk and cheese Helen was always jocular but I felt sorry for her because she suffered acne as badly as I had. Joan, although liking a joke was more serious with a lovely nature and quietly spoken. She was two

years older than me and looking back now I could not say she was a beautiful girl but at the time 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' as they say, she did have lovely soft small hands always beautifully manicured. I really felt I was in heaven when as the weeks passed we'd sit in the front room to listen to her records or mine playing on her radiogram.

Her real love was the ballet which up to then had not taken my interest, though I had discovered years earlier that its music was always reliably pleasant to listen to, I having records in my collection of Coppelia, Ballet Egyptienne etc. She loved opera too and we were both captivated by haunting romantic music such as Swan Lake, The Sleeping Beauty, La Boheme etc and she, as I, liked the piano concertos; Tchaikovski's No1 and the Grieg A minor having been featured in films of the period. She it was though who first introduced me to the Rachmaninoff No2 concerto having the set of records (78's) and these we would sit in the twilight to 'drink in' the sound as it were.

Now though I return to tell you of two of my new bosses. First 'Maxey' Freund whose English left a lot to be desired. He was Jewish having escaped the Nazis by fleeing with his wife (a popular classical pianist of frequent B.B.C. broadcasts) to England. He was about fifty, balding, rotund and always clad in a pin-stripe royal blue suit and flourishing a huge gold wristwatch and massive gold fountain pen to match. He would enter the office and declare something of this sort:- Vee are goink to moult a chilled's buggle ant ziss iss vot I vont you to be doink.(the chilled's 'buggle' turned out to be a child's toy bugle!).

Walter Laxton our immediate chief hove from Manchester University having first set his heart on becoming a doctor but it seems he just couldn't take to the gory aspects of the profession. He'd done well at chemistry and entered industry to follow that line and thereby drifted into the plastics field. So his use to the company was entirely technical. His politics were very left wing (suiting most of us in the office and inducing me to get back to selling 'Daily Workers' there and in the tool-room). A lover of cricket he would generally enter the office swinging his arms over in bowling fashion and earnestly asking everyone the latest score. Football too he loved and was thrilled to bits if the Russian 'Dynamics' were coming to Britain for a match.

Wally healthwise was sadly a shocking bundle of nerves being always trembling, with hands actually shaking, a highly embarrassing sight indeed if he placed a hand in his trouser pocket! He is the only person I ever encountered who was so ambidextrous that in attempting to write anything or make a sketch he would start with his left hand at the left side of the paper and change hands at the centre of the page in order to continue filling the right hand side!

He wore expensive suits but he was small, thin and wiry and could not abide his braces for he'd often have one of the straps hanging down below his undone jacket, he seemed to have a slight limp that maybe caused this for one foot scraped the floor a little when walking. His trouser leg was thus invariably crumpled at the ankle in Charlie Chaplin fashion. His tie was usually loosened about his neck. However he was always spotlessly clean but loathed 'nice' clothes, any idea that 'clothes maketh the man' he saw as

repulsive and fraudulent and I tend to agree but I suppose his devoted wife Vi made sure he always wore them for the job.

He had an educated Lancashire accent although like us all he was inclined to swear occasionally. (e.g. much later he took a call from Joan Wade intended for me shouting "There's one of your bleedin' women on the phone!" and she heard him!) He was an avid reader of Plastics technology and classic literature (I recall his enjoyment of a famed book of the time called 'Auto de Fe'). He shared my love of music and adored Beethoven and Operas of which he had a fountain of knowledge and would loudly sing arias as he went about the office. He loved fun and especially the latest jokes which he would try to tell us lads but he would be red faced with guffawed laughter and unable to register the punch line before the tears ran down his face. He lived in a downstairs flat in Westcliff, he and Vi having an eleven year old son Michael who on answering the door to me once yelled out "Wally! some bloke for you!" (It was pretty staggering in those days for a child to use his parent's first name rather than the accepted "Dad" or even to refer to an unknown visitor as a 'bloke').

At work Wally was hospitable to visiting business men or colleagues from other divisions but on their departure would refer to them by some vivid description (such as 'a prawn' for one I recall with a red face), 'a long green tube' for a tall slim lady in a green dress etc. Thus we were often in fits of laughter. He like Bill was atheistic, I recall him making fun of 'the immaculate conception' by saying that God was wearing his top hat at the time!

Wally was a most lovable character though. Indeed I think he was loved by all who knew him. You will have suspected that his administration was far too free and easy? It certainly was, for many days were blessed with song and fun but when real action was required we respected Wally's knowledge so much that we'd do anything for him to back up his design requirements or expected delivery dates. In spite of all the fun, we turned out a great deal of really pioneering design there with as much overtime as he asked of us.

Joan and I wrote to each other often even though we met almost every week and soon I was staying there for the whole week-end, she would sleep in Helen's room and I slept in Joan's. Here I had a bit of a shock as on her bedside table was a large framed photo of a Royal Air Force Pilot Officer, a swarthy chap resembling Clark Gable.

Joan explained that she had been engaged to him during the war when he was in the thick of it and she herself was one of those map plotting girls who had to record aircraft movements on a table-size map by pushing plane models and flags around. Towards the war's end he was in a skirmish over Rimini in Italy, was shot down, killed and buried there and Joan had never got over it. Somehow I began to feel that I could never compete with him nor even his photograph and tactfully suggested that it should be now put out of sight.

Things continued for some time much the same, both enjoying every moment together. We would walk miles together in fine weather, once to Hainault Forest where I recall a pleasant small lake fringed with reeds and bulrushes and people fishing and a huge old

barn being now a cafe where we had tea and cakes. We went to London's Covent Garden Opera House to see 'Chopiniana' the ballet choreographed to Chopin's numerous compositions. We visited Ivy and George at their home in Wood Green, Joan came down to my home in Southend too. I recall my embarrassment at dad sitting at the tea table in his collarless shirt with its gleaming brass stud exposed for all to see and his head doffed with his workaday cap!

Gradually we began to find it very difficult to make conversation though, and we'd walk or sit listening to music in silence. This new situation caused I'm sure by the terrible winter of 1947 when snow lay on the ground in drifts for months on end offering no inducement for us to go out, with heaps of the old snow stacked along the pavements growing dirtier by the day--and the whole nation began to freeze because of a terrible coal shortage so that our fires had to be kept low. Dad bought cement and mixed it with coal dust and water to make coal bricks and eke out our fuel supply.

Joan and I did go to the Royal Albert Hall for a Symphony concert conducted by Sir Malcom Sargent who with members of the orchestra assembled and played wearing their overcoats and scarves! How Moira Lympnay managed to keep her fingers going for the Rachmaninoff No2 piano Concerto I can't imagine. Under like conditions we later saw a Paul Robeson concert there. He parodied part of his 'Old Man River' song with "I'll keep on fighting 'til I'm dying" thus bringing out his very left wing political stance. Joan had no particular political bent but we both were fond of his vibrant deep voice. The auditorium though was without heating and the journey was freezing cold both there and back.

Spring time came late that year and I couldn't take to the piano mum had bought since Ivy had taken hers to her home in Wood Green but Eric Kemp had an ex-piano-maker grandfather, a dear old chap who for a hobby was refurbishing a very old Collard and Collard small grand piano (though much too large for his upstairs bedroom) at his home in Benfleet. The work completed, it was offered to me for £50 and with considerable joy I bought it. It was an engineering feat though to get it out of the old boy's upstairs window and not without difficulty getting it into my home in Southend itself, a small terraced house its little front room looking decidedly uncomfortable with the monster once installed.

Brian Michie an impressario in respect of discovering new talent was to conduct auditions at this time at the New Cross Empire in South East London. I got an invitation to go but just like the Carroll Levis one described earlier it was packed solid with hopefules and similarly no one got to see the man that mattered. One lady sang only the first couple of lines of her song and was told "Hokay lady, we'll let ya know" the voice came from a cigar smoking American bending over paper work laying on the grand piano. "But I've come all the way from Norwich" she complained. "I said we'll let ya know" was his response. So it was for all of us. Some had waited several hours. My own effort met with the same "Hokay we'll let ya know" but I had waited only two hours. I heard nothing from them thereafter.

## Chapter 33.

### Moving on again and some near 'Misses'

Back at the Ekco drawing office we had a new bloke start whose arrival virtually disrupted the whole atmosphere of the place. His name was Ernie Wilkes, a rugged looking character partly resembling a gorilla for his hairy arms seemed to reach almost down to his knees. He was an out door type loving to tell us of his walks into the mountains. The Dolomites were to be his future adventure. I do admit however to coveting his expensive camera, a Zeiss Super Ikonta it was. His voice had a grating rumble and his face resembled that of Hitler's henchman Rudolph Hess.

It must be said he was basically well versed in production engineering but his manner like his appearance just offended all in his presence. In fact Maxey Freund came into the office, espied Ernie, turned to Wally and asked. "Who's zat in zer corner?" "That's Wilkes sir" Wally replied. "Trow eem outs" said Maxey! and actually this happened rather suddenly, for during an argument with Wally, Ernie lost his temper bringing his arm up with a swift thrust aiming his hirsute fingered fist with a crash into Wally's right eye!

This was just as Mr Skellern entered the office. Seeing it happen he quietly turned to Ernie saying "Wilkes! Get out, and don't come back!" Nor did he, but poor Wally was bathing his eye and putting a steak on it, a cold plate, anything! for days afterwards.

Peggy Binks and Dick Peak got married that year on July 28th and paid us a visit during their honeymoon and Dick showed fascination with the workings and my playing of the accordion. That summer too was Swiss holiday time again, this time to Vitznau on Lake Lucerne for a week followed by a week in Lugano, Mr Ball and most of last years Wilderswil crowd met up again. Joan was accompanied by Helen making it awkward trying to get an opportunity to enliven our affair so it was brief encounters all the time.

I had now joined a dancing class called 'Dallens' in Alexandra Street run by a middle aged couple. She, Spanish looking, tall and very slim. He, rather short, balding, bespectacled and of pale complexion. We danced to a record player churning out the records of Victor Sylvester's orchestra. As was the custom, after a bit of instruction the chaps had to cross the floor to select a partner from the line of waiting girls.

One, (only sometimes there) was a certain Mary Rutland and I would always seek her for my partner because she was so indescribably light on her feet enabling us to sort of float around the floor. A 'natural dancer if ever there was one. I really felt that with her I could learn much quicker even than with the teacher who, although efficient was by comparison quite 'heavy'. Fred Astaire I'm sure would agree with me about Mary. I asked to take her home once but couldn't because she was already fixed up with two chaps, a Gordon and Bill, friends whom she knew well from her frequent dancing sessions.

On my Romford dates Joan would emphasize that she always looked forward to our meetings but due to her inability to forget the loss of her fiance and even though we remained quite affectionate

to each other I ought to miss no opportunity to take out other girls to whom I might be suitably attracted.

Until then I had no intention of any such manoeuvre but conceded to the idea thinking maybe----just maybe if it happened strongly enough Joan might be induced to leave old memories behind and believe in the prospect of a future with me!

The idea took off quicker than I dreamed, Johnny Stanhope, or Bob Beale and I were cyclists and became great friends riding hither and thither around the area including our journey home from work. I would tend to leave John at Cromwell Road where he lived at No 2. but near its corner was a cafe we all frequented selling Nelson cakes and Russian cake that John and I enjoyed before he slipped off home. The cafe was decorated in the most hideous combination of pink and green. There was a blonde lass in there once with whom I struck up a conversation culminating in us making a date for a bike ride. We cycled over to Barling and sat on the sea wall there but before long she got worried and even cried a little because her mum had not let her out with boys yet! It then dawned on me that she was made up to look a good deal older than her actual years. I promptly took her home, her mum saw us coming, invited me into her South Avenue bungalow where I managed to break the ice so that the girl would escape any wrath and departed myself unscathed.

Walking on the cliffs one day a pretty little thing with a yapping Yorkshire terrier was seated there and the animal started snapping at my ankles. The girl was a la-de-dah type as I discovered on walking her home to Chalkwell Avenue saying her daddy would be cross if he knew she was accompanied by a fellow from the east side of Southend! So no luck there either!

Bob Fincher, Charlie Leger and I took to walking in Priory Park at lunch times and we would sometimes link up with girls on a similar mission. I was beginning to show interest in one called Jean but Bob got there first. No matter! Charlie and I on a later occasion came upon a girl alone whose raven hair was so long it danced enticingly as she sort of walked with a bounce along her way. Charlie reckoned she fancied me so encountering her walking the park alone next day I was able to arrange a date for the pictures at the Corona cinema in Leigh near her home. My word! by comparison she was all over me showing no interest in the films (and I then showing no interest in her!) I was glad to get her home and then to contemplate the situation in the light of 'Who or what next I wonder ?'.

I thought I'd go dancing again and went down to the Kursaal Ballroom and took another girl home more from courtesy after the last waltz than any particular desire, but blow me she was as fast a worker as the last one! So that was that!

While the scheme was failing miserably I decided to take on a postal course in Engineering with the British Institute of Engineering Technology. Johnny Stanhope did likewise, We were both inventive and long before the creation of tape recorders I visited his home where he had devised a method of recording using a toy cinematograph and a gramophone's sound box with the needle running along one side of the film so that speaking into the sound box transferred the sound to a track being cut into the film by the needle. A very clever bloke was John.

Some of us in the drawing office were keen photographers, Charlie Leger had an Agfa Karat Camera a dinky little affair taking twelve exposures on 35mm cine film. Eric Kemp had an Ensign Selfix folding camera for the larger 120 size films and my other firm friend Bob Beale had I think a Baldini 35mm folding model. Bob and I cycled together all over the Southend district, noses pressed to photographic shop windows, Brown's in Hamlet Court Road, Body's or Atkinson's in the High Street, some side street near Southchurch Park, one just into Southbourne Grove and our favourite one Joe Patience's shop in Queens Road. I think Joe taught us all we know about photography but you couldn't leave the shop without spending a small fortune. Joe was a member/lecturer at the Southend Photographic Society which I joined, it was then held at the Municipal College by Victoria Circus.

One day walking the promenade down at Thorpe Bay I espied a blonde lass smiling at me so I thought maybe this will be the 'Miss Right' that dad assured me would come along sooner or later. This was Miss Isobel Godfrey playing there with her very young brother and we got along fine even though I made sure to tell her about Joan. We dated several times going to what became favourite haunts, one the Thorpe Bay Golf course, the other wandering the cliffs above Leigh Station. She really was a nice girl who rapidly got too serious. I realised that although I liked her a great deal (enough for us to indulge in some occasional modest petting) she was not my type and I couldn't possibly allow another Joan/Wilf situation to arise. So with some difficulty we were able to amicably part.

Joan and I still dated occasionally. We went to Sadlers Wells Opera and saw Rossini's Barber of Seville. We still wrote letters and our walks etc continued but she had turned my now almost frequent marriage proposals down saying "we must wait---we must wait". In Joan's absence once her mum and dad expressed to me their sympathy with my trouble and had told Joan to try to consider her future more saying that they admired my patience with her. etc.

Bob Fincher and I would discuss our girlie problems at work and I told him about Joan and I having difficulty to make conversation and he kept telling me to keep talking at all costs, even about the first thing that comes into my head, regardless of its importance for it could develop into a short conversation. "mention that car you're passing, or that tree---even that crack in the pavement". He was right of course but I couldn't get the idea off the ground.

My dates with Joan did begin to get less frequent and as time went on I saw that our romance was flagging, in fact it was going down hill fast with the problem looking insurmountable. Mentally I was in a shocking state, retiring early and often tearful when alone in my room and frantically pondering "What the hell am I going to do?"

Apart from this love-life trouble the Ekco Co. and many other businesses were suffering a sticky patch by the Christmas of 1947 and temporary redundancies became the order of the day. I among several others was soon a victim. The firm helped me though by getting me a job as Assistant Chief Draughtsman with one of their old employees Chris Ladd who was Chief designer at Lacrinoid

Products Ltd. They specialised in the moulding and fabrication of buttons of all kinds, the factory being at Romford----ROMFORD!! Now I thought, maybe I'll get to see Joan more frequently!---or would she be frightened away? I was to start the job in the coming January.

Lacrinoid's was quite a nice new experience for me, a clean drawing office a nice but not very bright boss and a decent bunch of chaps and girls. We had to refer to each other by surname while at work, so it was Mr this and Miss or Mrs that. The presses for thermosetting plastic buttons were small compared to those I had left and thermoplastics was virtually a new field to them. Button production had numerous tricks of the trade that I was able to learn though and all in all its fair to say we learned numerous ideas from each other. I made still more friends among students. It was my job to teach Harry Levy a university graduate of wealthy Jewish stock and of whom he was so proud that he would invite me to his home to meet his parents and a very old grandmother who I recall was dressed in black silks and a shawl and seated with her feet on a heated footstool. Another time Harry took me there when the family were out and he demonstrated his cooking ability by making me a meal including boiled rice from which he'd exuded all its moisture by putting it into a cloth, taking it outside and rapidly swinging it round and round like a centrifuge. It was assuredly the best rice I've ever eaten.

Then there was Ralph Ehrmann also Jewish, keen to become a good plastics man and 'leaned' considerably on what general engineering expertise I could offer, a most likeable chap, fond of cruises to Norway and Scandinavia in general, He was full of praise for the Ellerman Line Shipping Co. Perhaps he had shares in it? In later years he became the founder and owner of Airfix Industries Ltd. of plastic model kit fame. Another fellow called Trevor was only sixteen and was our general 'dogs-body' making the tea, doing the prints etc. he was very skilled as a jazz pianist so we conferred on music a great deal. There were some pretty girls there too but I could raise no enthusiasm in that direction, feeling that I'd had my share for a while yet.

I missed the local journey to work, now having to catch a train to Harold Wood Station and walk about half a mile to the factory. Getting home was easier because Chris Ladd had a car and would take me as far as Wickford Station each day and I would continue homeward from there by train. Joan worked in Romford High Street's telegraph office so by dialling Romford 4161 I was able to talk her into joining me for lunch time snacks at our old rendezvous under the station's railway bridge.

So all was not lost, we visited a Romford cinema once where I recall we saw 'Song To Remember' a somewhat distorted but pleasant enough tale of Chopin's life and love of George Sand the novelist (played by Merle Oberon). Franz Liszt was played by George Sanders and Cornel Wilde the Chopin role.

Thus my life and love continued much as before, our affectionate warmth was still there but the whole thing was decidedly slow moving. I had told Joan of my string of disappointments with the other girls and though reluctant would continue the 'experiment'. A long time later she said maybe she would change if she could be without me for a while--say three or even six months? Just to see how much she'd miss me. To her surprise and I think my own

acceptance of defeat and chagrin I agreed! but it didn't come off we still jogged along as before with her phoning me at work for a chat or even a date, or me more frequently doing likewise.

The maths of my postal course were not getting on very well either! so Joan's sister Helen helped me along making algebra seem very easy to grasp saying "When you've finished a problem PROVE the answer by doing another of the same kind but of which the unknowns are KNOWN". This worked beautifully in her presence but I'd forget the original method by the time I got home. Actually my maths in general were not too bad, my work more usually employing trigonometry (largely taught me by Dave Wylie at the Rodenside Co. in the war years).

I started going to more dance lessons at a place over some Westcliff shops called 'The Studio Ballroom' a jolly friendly little place run by a quite elderly couple. They taught all the usual dances and a new one to me called the 'Samba' which seemed very easy at the time, I could already do the quarter turns of the 'Quickstep' and 'Waltz' but was never cured of being heavy on my feet and I always wanted to learn the 'Foxtrot' but could never quite grasp it.

Well into summer now (this was 1948) and dates with Joan were still a bit rare and Doctor Smith wrote and told me of Swiss Holidays available, In a telephone chat he discreetly told me that Joan and Helen had already booked to go to Zermatt for views of the Matterhorn range. Well Johnny Stanhope wanted to come with me to Switzerland this time so it seemed prudent not to follow Joan (due to the prospect of two people inadvertently playing gooseberry!). Hence we chose Aeschi on Mount Niesen and Lenk for the second week.

The final stage of the outward journey was by bus from the foot of the mountain up to Aeschi, We had to load our cases on to a huge rack on the back of the bus outside. There were several such buses and crowds milling around, somehow John hung his camera on the wrong bus! To our surprise he was actually handed the camera by the hotel manager on our arrival! To this day I've never worked out how it could have happened. John and I were stuck with two teen-aged girls throughout the holiday so we felt rather restricted and I was the only one who knew the best sights to visit around that Bernese Oberland area.

These included a chair lift ride up to the Rigi mountain's summit but about halfway up, the chair lift stopped! All became dead silent and we were stuck up there for a good hour when I looked down and joyfully exclaimed "Look down there, the grass is really not very far, we could easily jump down that distance couldn't we?" John's reply put me promptly in my place "Have another look, but at the grazing cows this time" and to my horror they were no bigger than ants! Gladly we waited a bit longer to get pulled safely in.

The cause of the stoppage? some old gent's overcoat had been taken off at the station and got caught and tangled up with the huge cable-driving wheel! Who was the old man? Gosh what a coincidence ?, he was my dancing teacher from the Studio Ball Room! We didn't even know he was to holiday in Switzerland.

Luckily the weather was grand throughout the holiday. That is until we crossed the channel coming home! Huge waves tossed the ship high, low and from side to side passengers were being sick all about us, even sailors were being sick over the side, dreadful it was, people were advised to get below but I recalled my dad had told me if in those conditions to stand as near the centre of the ship as possible and fix an unchanging gaze on any distant object or cloud. So that is just what we did by huddling together braced against a central feature of the top deck---And it worked! Not one of us four were sick, though we were indeed wet and very cold.

The Labour Government at that time had a scheme called Training Within Industry or T.W.I. and a lecturer came to the firm to gather us seniors and the young girls and boys together to show them that it's possible to learn anything at all as long as the teacher works by three maxims. 1. To TELL the student how to do it, 2. To SHOW the student how to do it, and 3. To ILLUSTRATE how to do it. First he showed us seniors an 'electricians knot', then he TOLD us how it was made, then he SHOWED us how to tie it and finally ILLUSTRATED it with a pencil sketch. It was marvellous because we were all then able to do it immediately. Us seniors then had to use the method to teach the youngsters likewise. We were then invited to think of something that they were unlikely to know how to do. I chose to show the class how to accurately draw a perfect hexagon and it worked marvellously! Naturally I've found many occasions since to employ the tactic when teaching young draughtsmen.

This was the year I think when playwrite Ted, (later Lord) Willis and I think Joan Littlewood (of 'Oh what a lovely war' fame) were encouraging the development of countrywide branches of the 'Unity Theatre' organisation. These were mainly Left wing groups performing plays favouring particularly those with a 'message'. I don't know now whether I was invited or volunteered to join the new Southend branch but I got in. We did several play readings of G.B. Shaw (Major Barbara I recall) Thunder Rock I remember and Emlyn Williams' 'The Corn is Green' which we eventually performed about three times (twice at the Ekco works) It was a good experience enabling me to utilise some of the knowledge acquired at the youth club earlier described. I had like most there only a small part however, the leads being taken by a professional male as the student and a female as his teacher. The secretary of the group was a Jewish girl living in Genesta Road in one of those Edwardian towered houses and she would invite me there for rehearsals of our two parts. I was too naive to think she was actually fancying me but that's what the others thought and in retrospect I now think they were right.

Around that time dad had been having waterworks trouble it was something, to do with enlargement of his prostate gland (common among men beyond middle age) Poor old mum too had a setback, she did her local shopping mainly at 'Botts' the grocery store just down the road, this time though she tripped going in, falling heavily, her face crashing into their entrance door! She thereby lost her front upper teeth. The resulting dental treatment gave her a rectifying upper denture but she never took to it.

## Chapter 34

Three 'Hail Marys'  
"That's the one, son, That's the one!"  
1948-1949

About that time I was getting interested in radio construction and wishing to build a radiogram. Cousin Gordon (whose hobby among others was radio) came for a visit, and he gave me plans and lots of parts leaving me just a few to buy from the Graham Farrish Co. I built it up all very neatly but hadn't the technical know-how to realise that some components must never be placed near certain others. Oh it worked reasonably well but introduced weird howling noises from time to time. I swiftly lost interest in radio from then on. Moving parts I can understand but static ones teach me nothing.

I think it was about now that dear great aunt Edie died, thus passing over a truly lovely lady who made such a strong impression on me so many years before. Her hubby our dear uncle Jack had died just before the war we think.

Lacrinoid like Ekco's the previous year suddenly hit hard times and I'd heard of a designer's job going at Chelmsford's Marconi Co. I coveted any job there albeit though it was back in the field of my old love, the design of press tools, jigs, fixtures &c. Just the interview clinched it with quite good money and high quality engineers to work with, but of course it was another couple of daily journeys by train. This time from Southend to Shenfield and changing there for a Chelmsford train so it was a bit of a drag each day. However I returned to my old habit of reading a great deal on the journey, this time concentrating such study on the rudiments of music composition. I confess though to reading also the funniest paper back I'd ever encountered called 'Rose coloured spectacles' that stripped everyone of their clothing when looked through!

An oldish gent called Sam Craigie ran the drawing office and he put me with the cleverest engineer I've ever encountered. One George Nichols and in no time at all we were very close friends and turned out some spectacular work together. We shared an interest in radio comedies of the day, 'Take it from here' with June Whitfield and Jimmy Edwards and 'Much binding in the Marsh' with Kenneth Horne and Stinker Murdoch. George loved music too, a bit more highbrow than me though, his particular favourites were German 'lieder'.

I also gained a new friend in Harold Chivers (their entertainments chappie) who got me a few gigs playing accordion and piano. Later I met a chap from the accounts office who travelled from Southend each day in his little Austin Seven, so for half a crown a day, I with a couple of others saved travel time by going with him (and killed it anyway by jointly doing the Daily Telegraph Crossword puzzle on the journey).

Hughie Green was doing his 'Opportunity Knocks' radio show at this time and I obtained an audition with him at the B.B.C's Aeolian Hall and I must say this was much better managed than the Carroll Levis and Brian Michie ones described earlier. For example we all got to meet the man himself and I was able to give a full ten minute spot for him. No I didn't get selected but the producer

(Denis Maine Wilson) wrote on my relevant paper work "Excellent on straight stuff". It was a fair deal indeed.

Travelling to work by car made time for me to go to night school a couple of times a week. Once to Professor Chambers who taught the piano on an ancient huge black upright battered model and for once I did make a little progress. On one occasion he was so heavily critical of jazz that one student was learning, and foolishly and unwittingly claimed that it was too simple to learn to play. Having my own record of 'Honky tonk train blues' (that the lad wanted to learn) I had recently got the piano copy also and unkindly brought it to Mr Chambers to play the following week. Poor man, he did actually get through it all but with absolutely no 'jazz' feeling whatsoever!

The other lesson was with Mr Eric Emery to learn harmony which I thought would concentrate on piano or orchestral composition (I was becoming interested in that field by inventing what I thought were interesting melodies but my accompaniment as always was too weak). I had recently developed a sort of Rhapsody based on my affair with Joan that was sadly in need of the kind of expertise that I found noticeably wanting on a disc recording I'd locally made. To our joint surprise Mary, my favourite dancing partner from 'Dallens', was in the class. However the basics of elementary harmony turned out to be concerned with voices! Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass and a jolly sight more complicated than I'd dreamed and before long Mary left, and I followed suit only a few weeks behind her. Mr Emery got involved in a scandal about interference with little boys and was not heard of again. Sadly I'd quite liked him, especially his teaching of 'Musical Appreciation' (mainly of the Sibelius compositions) I'd attended a couple of years earlier.

My dancing efforts continued now at a hall behind S.M.A.C.'s Garage in the London Road at Chalkwell and at the Arlington Hall there. It was here I met Valerie a most jolly girl, a very plump young thing who was full of fun and laughter and I'd see her there almost weekly and joined her family at their happy home on Leigh Hill over the 1948 Christmas. They were a delightful crowd making me most welcome. Their name was 'de-Lobel' the father originating from France the mother as all mums, a superb manager of her large but beautifully cosy home. There were three grown up children, a son and two daughters, Pauline, and Valerie, who I was now dating but who was a bit too young for me and although not my type either was a truly lovely companion. They were catholics and followed their religion very faithfully but none minded my intrusion into their lives realising that Valerie was merely a ship that would pass in the night. In any case Valerie knew about Joan---and as they say, couldn't care less!

Joan and I had fixed a dance date for the New Years' eve. I knocked at her door and Helen answered saying "The iceberg is upstairs getting ready!" This was my first encounter with the formality of the midnight 'Auld Lang Syne' thing. Still, I quickly got the hang of the linking arms idea as we formed part of the great circle of dancers. However it wasn't until some years later that I learned the requisite custom of the celebration is to kiss your partner as you both enter the new year. I have a recollection of Joan being particularly quiet on our way home to her house that night. Only the Lord knows now, how she viewed my omission. Our relationship was at its lowest ebb anyway!

Marconi's was free and easy with the use of private phone calls so Joan and I kept in contact O.K. but I was beginning to wonder what I would do if our affair just dried up and we parted for good? It was on the cards and began to seem that I just must find another 'Miss Right' for I already felt badly (and naturally) in need of a really permanent, indeed a physical relationship. After all, most people need love---lots of it! needing also frequent cuddles in between to make sure it keeps going.

How would one really know which girl is 'Miss Right' anyway? I'd long since discovered that although 'love' is the one essential ingredient, the one you're even deeply in love with may not turn out to be her! (as my affair with Vera and hopeless quests for Rene and Barbara had shown). So what then of Joan? Dad had often said "If you can find anyone even half as good as your dear mum, you won't have done too badly".

That was a pretty good guideline, she and dad were certainly in love and for no reason at all would put an arm around the other's waist or each other's neck, share a kiss or a hug regardless of whoever saw or was in their presence though mum might be heard to jestingly yell "Oh git aht ov it!" In fact they shared everything and would neither harbour secrets nor throw or give things away without the other's knowledge. Any windfall or income would be for them both.

Mum being the better manager did hold the purse strings but regarded no money as strictly her own, saving for the future too was a vital requisite having long since abandoned the idea of getting things on hire purchase or acquiring credit to buy non essentials i.e. if they wanted something they SAVED-UP for it, or merely went without! They never argued about religion or politics and over all I frankly cannot imagine a more ideal partnership.

Therefore a partnership like theirs I felt was surely just what I should firmly seek. I could hardly expect all aspects to be quite the equivalent and indeed most of the girls I'd encountered so far showed no desire for participation in either sharing expenses or even saving for their future. In my frame of mind at that time Joan then was as near the ideal as I was likely to find. All the others I'd dated were apparently concerned only with expenses on new clothes (in the latest fashion) and of course their make up!

The truth is though that I'd got it all wrong! having not seen the wood for the trees in that girls though looking for a husband were not seeking one in quite the serious way that I was seeking a wife. They had the good sense to have some fun in the course of finding the right man, whereas any idea of actually having fun was far removed from my own objective though I'd obviously encountered some along the way.

Marriage even so, was to a girl the ultimate aim also, and she could not share the prevailing custom where only a man could ask for a date. Although they did of course enjoy looking lovely, they really were stuck with incessantly beautifying themselves because they liked doing it, but also in the hope of an eventual conquest. Further, even if they were 'lucky' enough to actually get married, most would find themselves deprived of the pocket money to which they'd been used, due to the male assuming some God given right to keep all his income and in most cases not even declaring what it was to his wife. So to my sincere regret my earlier criticisms

were quite unfounded realising that the girls were and are entirely justified (and anyway what man how ever old he gets does not enjoy the sight of a pretty girl?)

Thoughts about much of the above became a bit of an obsession with me over several months and I started working on a little book of such ideas principally the financial aspects, but I was mainly concerned for couples to pursue the following concepts in the attempt to ensure a successful married life.i.e:-

1. Fairness in preparation for marriage by each saving for it in proportion to their income.
2. The marriage itself to be based on a couple sharing everything---all forms of income, troubles, joys, pain, the lot.
3. Having absolutely no secrets from each other.
4. Standing by your partner in any argument even with your parents and especially when its with your child i.e. Not siding with the child against your partner. If your views actually differ, waiting 'til later to sort out the problem with your partner in private.
5. Except in an impossible situation don't 'solve' your child's problems unless your partner is also available to participate in them.
6. Don't 'spare the rod and spoil the child'
7. Keep the intensity of your love going at all costs, being sure your partner is not frustrated in any way .
8. If you're unwell be sure your partner knows---and to the exact degree. i.e. don't make out that "it's nothing" nor exaggerate the problem.
9. Be reliable with time-keeping and let it be known where you are, or are going to be, at any time.

I became convinced that these were maxims couples should follow, feeling them imperative and realising that settling down with the wrong partner being an alarming risk.

I even thought that it would be a good idea for couples to live together for say six months to assess their situation before tying the knot, which however would have to be tied anyway if a kiddie was on the way. (Such an idea was absolutely unheard of in those days and would be frowned upon by the whole of society, so I knew I could never get away with it myself). I condensed all this stuff as a brief article hopefully for Daily Mirror publication it was encouragingly acknowledged but not accepted. However I did get rather over obsessed with it. Even today though I think it offers a sound basis for successful marriage.

While writing in this vein I was also mindful that one big barrier to a successful marriage is poor management of the home's finances and devised a method for controlling it and incidentally I eventually used it for many, many years years. IT WORKS! so it could be of interest if I divert a little from my story to describe it here.

Write down a separate column of your vital expenses for each month of the year, not forgetting any known quarterly or annual bills to be inserted in the appropriate column. Any uncertain but vital amounts can be estimated e.g. Birthday/Christmas cards, gifts etc. Total the columns, then add about ten per cent to cater for inflation and as a margin for errors.

Now total the totals to find your year's expenses. Subtract it from your annual income to show what surplus there is. Save as the very minimum of this, ten per cent---hopefully fifty per cent! as a savings necessity (for household disasters and the numerous other unexpecteds). Dividing this by twelve gives the amount to add to each monthly list above. The remaining money is for free use (house keeping, holidays, outings etc.). If there's a short fall at this juncture, it's obvious that you have some serious pruning to do---DO IT! When your list is reliable, you can divide the year's total costs by twelve to establish your regular monthly contribution to deduct from your income. Use a building society for the dormant money to acquire some interest as a bonus that you can raid at the year's end! Your lists clearly show your most expensive month, so now prepare a twelve month table ending with that month's position to show what's happening as the year progresses. It will show how your contributions will accumulate to pay for your most expensive month.

This is how your table might appear:-

March contribution.....	£650..26
March expenses.....	£528..32
	£121..94
April contribution.....	£650..26
	£772..20
April expenses.....	£498..13
	£274..07 etc. etc.

In this example the table would finish at February and the balance would match February's expenses having slowly accumulated to pay for them. I've been brief here but it should be understandable.

Lets now return to my story.

Working at Marconi's was most enjoyable but I missed Ekco's modern drawing boards for I was now back to the old fashioned board and Tee-square system of my Rodenside days. Adjacent draughtsmen were a jolly crowd (like draughtsmen everywhere) and all blessed with that lovely musical Essex accent.

Steve Gowers was an A.M.I.Mech.E, a son of a baker whose shop was in Leigh-on-Sea near Belfairs Park there. Stan Byfield and Peter Hall were considerably under the wings of George Nichols and I. I was able to help Eric Buckley too, he was put on mould design for the firm's only thermosetting little press, a sort of development project as the company had no plastics expertise. We would all have a laugh when old Sam Craigie brought us new drawings to contemplate saying " `ere y're, 'av a think round that" and when he'd gone we would put the drawing on a chair and all walk around it in single file holding a hand to our heads in deep thinking fashion! As at Ekco's we had a lot of laughs there but engineering was seriously intent. Ekco's of course made radio receivers whereas Marconi's were at the other end of the trade, making transmitters for the numerous radio wants of the rest of the world.

Meetings with Joan getting rarer I recall one we had merely to do a bit of soul searching, that was to explore just what might be irritating one about the other. I could think of nothing at all

other than a fervent desire for her to just look to the future and religiously put the past behind her. She responded by saying I had no faults at all---"except perhaps for your 'silly laugh'!". I have to say that was something I hadn't known existed. Later on she rang me to say that a certain opera company were to put on a series of popular operatic works at a London theatre and would I be interested in seeing Puccini's 'La Boheme' about a month hence? I was keen of course and we decided to go. I can't remember which of us bought the circle seat tickets, but due to imminent dramatic events, the arranged sojourn did not take place in the way expected. Indeed I never actually met Joan ever again!

Soon I made another trip to a dance at the Arlington Hall and who should be seated there but none other than my favourite dancing partner, Mary, from our Dallens and night school days! She was sitting with her friend Vera, a jolly lass. I sat with them for a chin-wag and on seeing me light up my pipe I was asked what tobacco I was smoking. "Exmore Hunt Mixture" I replied, whereupon Vera rejoined with "It smells like it!" We all laughed.

I think Mary and I had several dances and I was reminded with great pleasure how soft she was to hold, how she seemed to just float about the floor, a really lovely experience. It was probably an omen when the band played 'I'm gonna change my way of living'. Looking back now I suppose I'd possibly upset Valerie a little and rudely interrupted Mary's and Vera's evening into the bargain, but it turned out memorable for me as I now explain. Near its end whilst dancing again, I ventured to ask Mary for a date and after a little thought she replied "Alright then, as long as you don't get serious!" Me 'serious?' I could never be anything else! I couldn't see her home however as she had come on her bike. But we arranged to meet outside the Southend Victoria railway station, the next day I think, even so I felt I just couldn't wait. For once, this girl was sort of different, really something!

We met as arranged and I'll for ever remember how pretty she looked in her mainly reddish floral frock with its red piping and I (for a change) found making conversation easy. It was a lovely sunny day and we sauntered down the high street to the sea front's promenade and followed its course all the way along to its Chalkwell end, stopping for some repast at the little cafe there.

From then on it all went swimmingly. I'd told Valerie and now decided to tell Joan Wade that this new affair had great possibilities. I don't think she was badly shaken by the news and I suppose she was later relieved really. I do hope she found a nice husband in the end though. For now she wished me every happiness and suggested that Mary rather than herself should join me for the booked opera date.

I soon met Mary's parents at their home being the last bungalow in Feeches Road (No 171). Her mum (also a Mary) being an astute lady with strong Tory allegiance who gave me many a good political debate as time went on. She liked a joke, I remember her laughing at a quip of mine that was "Ere we go" as the earwig said when it fell off the mantel piece!" Her dad (Joe) was a French polisher, a jovial character with whom I made friends with ease. There was another daughter, some sixteen years Mary's junior and called Sallie, though really named Janice. They also had a little black and white spaniel type dog.

The family had east London origins as had Mary's grand parents nearby at No 80. These were known as 'Nanny and Pots' he was so nicknamed when hit on the head with a 'jerry' by Mary when an infant. His proper name was Syd Barnett a quite charming, kind and friendly man who had been a cobbler and with Nanny was a money lender. 'Nanny' was yet another 'Mary' and for that reason three Marys were considered too much, so that my Mary was called by her second name 'Joan' within her family. Understandably I couldn't bring myself to call her 'Joan' considering my recent traumatic years. Besides, as the George.M.Cohan song says "Mary, it's a grand old name" and who could want for a nicer name than that of the mother of the Lord Jesus.

Nanny and Pots joined us all for tea one Sunday and it was then that I first met them. "Hello Bill boy" was Nan's friendly greeting to me in her raucous cockney lingo "How yer bangin' it?" and after a big tea I expressed the fact that I was quite full up, to which she exclaimed "Ooh!-- a big turd in the morning!" and of course I felt at home straight away!

Once I was carrying records home from there one handed by bike and it hit the kerb in Ennismore Gardens. This dismounted me and my chest hit the wall of someone's front garden causing a pain that the doctor called periostitis being a sort of bruising of my ribs.

The opera date was at the Stoll theatre Kingsway and was smashing! Like most operas it's a sad tale with really lovely music and arias e.g. 'They call me Mimi--but my name is Lucia' 'Your tiny hand is frozen' etc. Until then I'd only heard Wally Laxton chortling these melodies down at the Ekco drawing office.

Soon Mary came to visit my mum and dad and we all had tea but she didn't get off to a really good start for mum had prepared one of her salads which normally were quite good but this time the lettuce although well washed as usual sadly still contained a green fly! Otherwise the visit went well I thought (especially when it turned out that Mary had gone to the same school as had mum and neighbour Mrs Hesketh). On returning home after seeing her to hers, I said to mum and dad "Well what did you think?" "Oh! I think she's LOVELY!" mum replied, and (as if I didn't already know) Dad just said "That's the one son, That's the one!".

Of course it was! but I think I must have unwittingly upset Mary a bit in those early days with too much explanation about my troubles with my ex girl friends even to the extent of showing her their photographs. However she never complained.

Among our dates was one to Ashingdon from where we walked across the fields to the River Crouch near Canewdon and here after taking a snap or two (and enjoying a cuddle or two) on the sea wall I proposed to my lovely new girl and was accepted! Surely this was Heaven on earth! We started home again across the field but here we were soon pursued by its irate farmer waving a huge stick threateningly, thus inducing us to run the rest of the way! We rested at the 'Victory Inn' after climbing up Ashingdon Hill and had a drink before going home.

So we were engaged only three weeks after my having been asked not to get serious! but as I said 'How could I be anything else?' with Mary.

Not bad going eh?

## Chapter 35

Love in full bloom 1949-1950.

As was the custom I promptly sought Mary's dad's permission to marry his daughter, he was in the kitchen drying up some crocks and in reply to the question "May I have your permission to marry Mary?" he said laughingly "I don't care what you do with her!" and so all was well.

We bought the ring, a rather pretty three stone affair at Simms jewellery shop in Southchurch Road, I seem to remember it cost 7s-10s-0d (cheap at barely a man's week's wages), so we were all set for our engagement party. Mary's mum organised it at their home and we are a bit uncertain as to who actually came but there would have been Mary's family of four, my mother and father, (Ivy then living at Wood Green couldn't make it), Mary's friend Mrs Chapman definitely came and of course Nanny and Pots and possibly nanny's friend and hubby known as Aunt Sue and Uncle Harry Prosser. They came from Sheppen Road at Dagenham, just a couple of streets away from my friends Madge and Fred (much in evidence in earlier chapters). Maybe Mary's uncle Ted and Aunt Charlotte came too.

Mary's mum knew how to put on a fine spread for eats and drinks, (indeed it was she who had earlier introduced me to pickled walnuts and to Dutch herrings). We would have had a good old music session with Mary and I playing the piano jointly, that is, she as principle and me up top doing the obligato, (two at one piano is a rare sight nowadays). She normally played from music, and very well too, but with me only playing by ear. We had spent some time getting the right chords organised and I had shown her a few effective twiddly bits so we were able to create a nice short selection of singalong tunes of that time including 'On the sunny side of the street', 'Arm in arm together', 'Down Forget-me-not Lane' and 'Who's sorry now?'. Like me, Mary did considerable concert work mainly as an accompanist but she did a good rendition of those pops of the time 'I've got a luverly bunch of coconuts!' 'That old piano roll rag' etc, she also played for her friend Millie's singing. I no doubt took and played the accordion to our party and my mum and dad probably did their party pieces too. The few uncertainties indicated I do wish we could remember.

Mum had a birthday that year and I was shocked at realising she'd reached the age of sixty, I was thereby moved to pen her birthday card with a lengthy poem on flashbacks through her life, realising that we take our loved ones lives too much for granted.

Mary and I began saving hard for our 'bottom drawer', I had made a list of our absolute minimum requirements for our marriage and first home. e.g. two knives, two forks' two chairs, one table, one bed etc. I had several items left over from the time Vera and I had intended marrying and I'd got the grand piano of course and mum and dad promised us several odd items.

Even so we still went out to enjoy ourselves. We liked 'The Mayfair' restaurant, later becoming the 'Lido' beside the 'Gaumont' cinema. We attended a piano recital at the Metropole cinema by the famous Chopin exponent Pouishnoff. At the Odeon we saw ballet excerpts performed by Anton Dolin and Alicia Markova. We saw the Coppelia ballet performed there too. We also took Mary's mum and dad one time to see the Swan Lake ballet. There was

once a symphony concert including a piano concerto played by Leslie England and on another occasion a performance of 'The Messiah' there, we were also there for a recital of arias by the operatic star Gigli and another by Luigi Infantino. All these concerts were organised by The Southend Music Club.

We liked going to 'Tomassi's' cafe for their delicious ice creams and we saw films galore, 'The Blue Lamp' with Richard Attenborough at the Ritz, 'Adam's Rib' with Spencer Tracy at the Rivoli, Gary Cooper's 'For whom the bell tolls' at the Strand, 'The Man who could work miracles' (Mascot), 'The Snake Pit' (Odeon), 'The Hasty Heart' (Rivoli), 'The Berkleys of Broadway' (Astaire and Rogers) at the Rivoli, 'No Orchids for Miss Blandish' (Strand), 'The way to the Stars' (Corona), 'The Thin Man' (Mascot), etc.

At work George Nichols pointed out to me one day that the Institution of Production Engineers were to hold their Graduateship examinations at the College near our factory and that in his view if I took the exam I would 'walk it'. It so happened that I was the only Marconi man to have a go that year (the fee was £5) and it ran for three mornings I think. The subjects as I recall were Workshop Practice & Engineering Mathematics, Tool Planning and Design, and Works Management. I came away on the last morning suddenly realising that I'd made two glaring mistakes, misunderstanding a part of the question!

Mary joined me on a couple of my gigs doing our singalong selection, one was via friend Harold Chivers at the Marconi Co's social club hall, another was at an army drill hall in Ilford, it was to entertain the troops there, Madge Thomas and Tom Wills were also engaged for the job. The army weren't ready for us on time and we eventually did our stuff an hour and a half late and we had to get a taxi home from Southend Station as we'd missed the last bus.

One morning I was awakened by dad bringing me a cup of tea with a letter he was anxious for me to open, for it was from the Institution of Production Engineers. We had a hug and he was near to weeping when I showed it to him for it indicated that I'd passed the exams. (in spite of my known errors). Like me, Dad would weep at any slightly moving event, he would cry even if he saw a line of scouts or marching soldiers! poor old lad.

As time went on I was invited to join the tool planning team at Marconi's. It was managed by a Mr French and I leapt at the chance. Here you were given a set of new drawings to analyse. First a complete assembly drawing of all the parts, for which you have to prepare a list showing the order of assembling them all, looking for problems to encounter when doing so, and suggesting ways to make assembly quicker, or easier. If necessary by altering relevant parts slightly if possible. Then each part drawing you had to assess and its method of manufacturing operations listed in order. From all this work done, the estimating department did all the costings--- I never got involved with the costing side, but we had to list the extent of the tooling required to effect the best economical set up for the quantities anticipated.

Mary and I continued our adventures and called at Mary's friends respective flats, (Mrs Chapman and Rosa Pinney) for pleasant evenings. We saw plays 'You can't take it with you' at the Municipal College, and a couple of others at Clarence Hall. Here

we encountered Valerie De Lobel's sister Pauline and mother in the audience, and Wally Laxton was nearby too. Another play we saw was 'Off the record' at the Palace theatre. We visited the London Ideal Home Exhibition, and on the same trip walked down the Ridley Road which was near where Mary used to live, I bought a Chopin Scherzo record there. Another walk was to the Rose Inn at Wakering. We visited Aunt Alma and Uncle George who gave us a celery vase being a fine piece of cut glassware. I imagine we would have gone there during a visit to Ivy and George then living fairly close by.

We took my mum and dad to the Odeon and saw Laurel and Hardy in person once during their English tour. We even saw wrestling matches at a place on the sea front called The Gliderdrome. We went one lovely day to Potash Wood and were both attacked when courting on the grass by unseen thousands of midges. Trying to work next day was nearly impossible but we got some relief from the itching with the aid of rubbed in vinegar.

Our holiday in 1949 was curtailed somewhat because of our marriage saving plan but we had trips out to Clacton for a day and others to Staines and Runnymede, Chelmsford Market, Burnham on Crouch, we cycled to Wallasey Bay and had lovely trips to peaceful Barling, Hadleigh Castle, and to Hockley Woods. At Carnival time we went to the fair at Chalkwell Park. About that time we went down to Thorpe Bay for a lecture on Love, Marriage, Divorce and Separation problems. I think we were too in love to need any education though.

When indoors at Mary's home I spent several occasions trying to teach young Sallie the piano and if Mary and I were in the front room alone. Sallie would be outside the door singing 'There they are, the two of them on their own!' We went to her school concert once but my most potent memory of her childhood was that she seemed to love dancing, and around the house could be seen prancing with grace in ballet style all over the place!

Come September Mary took me to a 'show' at Rochford hospital where Peter Casson a famous hypnotist demonstrated his strange powers even including a feature involving levitation. We could have done with him when Mary lost a treasured onyx ring. We had been looking through mum's button tin and felt it might be there but it wasn't and we hoped it might lay somewhere in the region of Feeches Road and there we searched up and down to no avail unfortunately.

Early that month I had a bit of bother, I'd endured a recurring problem of an abscess that discharged from its source above a front tooth. It would then heal O.K. but return several weeks later, but it never gave me any pain, just notification by the sense of a nasty taste in my mouth. A Chelmsford dentist xrayed the region and showed me that a large area of the bone above the tooth had rotted away and that to clear the abscess for good the tooth must be removed. It had been on the loose side for some couple of years so I made a future appointment.

Well the tooth removal was no bother because it wasn't joined to anything and the abscess rapidly drained virtually unaided but then the dentist said its sac must be completely removed to avoid the thing growing again. Can you believe two dentists got involved with it trying to gain access to cut away the sac which had become like thick leather (so they said). I was in the chair

for about two hours and was eventually left with a gaping hole there and this they had to pack tightly with wads of cotton wool to stop the bleeding.

Like a fool I returned to work having been told not to eat nor drink for as long as possible. At the drawing board however the blood was seeping into my mouth until I felt it had to be got rid of. I went into the wash room and rinsed it away with a glass of water but this released the already loosening cotton wool and the blood gushed again.

Feeling ill now I was accompanied back to the dentist who plugged it still more securely and then I went home and was given the rest of the week off. When I saw Mary on our next date I had great difficulty talking to her as you can imagine. I'm surprised she didn't laugh at my appearance! Oh yes, the bleeding had stopped but the hole?----its still there! On the 1st October I was fitted with a suitable denture---and its still going strong and that is after well over forty years!

I can't remember that Christmas but it would have been great! I've never had one that wasn't! I'm sure I would have had the big day at home because dad used to say "I don't care what you do the rest of the year but I do like my family around me on Christmas day!" Ivy, perhaps George too would have been there, maybe Aunt Edie and Uncle Billy came as was often the case or they could have come on Boxing day. Possibly Mary came to tea but it's more likely we both met up at her place for Boxing day. If so, it might have been the first time I was able to enjoy the violin playing of Mary's uncle Harry visiting with his wife Aunt Dolly.

The New year (1950) found us searching more intensely for a home to buy. We didn't fancy renting one, my parents having rented all their married life and did not even own one brick, so I didn't want to start like that. The trend to buy was anyway becoming the thing for newlyweds. We viewed all manner of places.

A tatty bungalow at Hadleigh, a tiny square box of a bungalow near the foot of Ashingdon Hill. another near Belfairs Park, one also in Westborough Road, another in Sweene Avenue and a flat at Hockley where we recall there was an old man in bed! We saw a couple of cottages in Rochford and a place in Brays Lane, another over at Eastwood etc.

Between whiles of course there were visits to make and visitors to see. I recall meeting Mary's Aunt Kit who came with her gentleman friend to her home in order to do an upholstery repair to the large settee. I also met Pots's mother, an extremely old lady at her home in Westcliff and I'm pleased to have also met Mary's Aunt Nell who also lived that way. Mary met my Aunt Emmie (mum's sister) when she called on mum and dad with her hubby Uncle Alf. She also joined me over at Aunt Edie and Uncle Billy's house to meet Edie (Servant, then Farley) with hubby Dale and their little boy. Jean and Yvonne were there and mum and dad went too, so it was a lovely family occasion like old times.

Wally Laxton liked to come to mum's place occasionally for a music session mainly by me at the piano or playing my records. Mary and I visited his home also. He came to mum's with Vi his wife once because he'd heard from somewhere of my successful exam results and suggested I return to Ekco's as Checker Draughtsman. I

told him I was too happy where I was, but as time went on he was empowered to offer me a salary of £100 more than I was getting at the Marconi Co. (£400) i.e. £2 per week was quite a rise in those days and what's more, I'd be free of all that travelling. So in the end I conceded and started there again on six months probation. That was on March sixth. The money turned out to be £400 not £500, resulting in a row between the company bosses and myself. After some weeks it was resolved O.K. in my favour although without the lost back pay.

Things had changed there a little, Ken Warwick had gone and on his board worked newcomer David Coutts a lovely bloke and friend, very clever at maths. Al Bruce had taken over 'checking' from Bill Crannis and I replaced Al so that he could follow his ambition to be a sales rep. Bob Beale was now working in the main drawing office and a charming new girl was among the tracers, she was Joan Avis, soon to marry tool-room lad Mike Robinson. Wally hadn't changed at all and still circuited the office singing his arias. I was so happy at this time and frequently sang in the office myself but mainly neapolitan songs, my pal Bob Fincher used to get me singing 'O Sole Mio' or 'Mattinata', both learned from my Gigli recordings at home. I used to embarrass Mary by singing Mattinata at full volume when we wandered down the High Street, hardly hearing her remonstration of "Shut--UP!"

The tool room was managed by a down to earth engineer being a rough diamond of a character called Freddy Yorworth. He and I became closely involved on works visits, with me to advise on proposed design and he to assess manufacturing methods and costs of the tools.

Stan Byfield from Marconi's had wanted a change so I managed to introduce him to Wally. Mary and I also arranged a foursome to include he and his wife Joan for a social evening at the sea front Mecca. He was duly employed to increase our design team. I later regretted recommending him because he took too much advantage of the free and easy atmosphere of the place by batting a ball with his Tee square about the office in Wally's absence!

I was now using the staff canteen where we sat at large hexagonal tables, I sat with Bill Crannis and others I can't remember--- except one, a pale faced soul with brass rimmed bifocal glasses, he could never keep awake poor man unless we gave him a prod every few minutes! We soon learned not to ask at the counter for a buttered roll because a hag of a woman would put a small dollop of butter on the roll and smear it all over with her thumb!

Mid morning tea was served from a trolley wheeled in by a jolly lass who was always full of the giggles encouraged mainly by Dave Coutts who would chat her up while others would put her cakes into disarray, pretend to steal them or make her overfill the tea cups etc. Dave would even lay on his back on the floor pretending to look up her skirt as she tried to escape by weaving her trolley this way and that. Secretly I think she actually enjoyed coming into our office.

Mum and dad of course were thrilled to bits at the prospect of me marrying Mary and mum asked me once if we intended to go in for a family. "We've discussed this" I replied "and have agreed not to have any babies for about five years" to which she responded

laughingly with "Well that's what I thought but I bloody soon got 'em! I 'ad four--a girl, a boy, a girl and then a boy again!"

How right she was! (apropos chapters one and three).

## Chapter 36

Towards our great future.  
1950

My old friend Joe Popham had long since honeymooned at Bettws-y-coed in North Wales and forever raved about how beautiful it was among the mountains there, so with lovely memories of the Alps earlier described we booked a summer holiday in single rooms at a little hotel there aptly named 'Summer Hill' to be the week commencing 29/7/50.

Music gigs went on as before but lessening considerably, my interest at home in that direction persisted though. I still fancied myself at serious composition and worked out another Rhapsodic piece now based on my new romance with Mary.

Some more films we had been to see were, 'It's not Cricket' (Ritz), 'The Swiss Family Robinson' (Civic), 'Hatter's Castle' (Garon's), 'King Kong' (Strand), 'Obsession' (Odeon), 'Thief of Bagdad' (Civic), 'Arsenic and Old Lace' (Corona), 'The Forsyte Saga' (Rivoli), 'Blithe Spirit' (Ritz), 'The Inspector General' (Gaumont).

You'll understand that television in those times had yet to reach the masses so the cinema was generally the place to go, but on Saturday evenings the best attraction was to stay indoors to listen to the radio's Charlie Kunz piano programme and the very popular Variety Band Box show mentioned earlier, alternating comedians Derek Roy weekly with the rising star Frankie Howerd. On 23rd April Mary and I had been courting a year, I dont know of any particular celebration but I recall sending her some flowers.

One trip out we had was with all the Ekco lads and a few of their ladies to a very interesting tour around, of all places, the Howards Dairies Plant then up at Hadleigh. We used to visit the occasional pub too, the Anne Boleyn (once with Mary's family), the Sutton Arms, the Half way house all come to mind but we mainly favoured The Victoria, a rather more sedate place on the south east corner of Victoria Circus.

About then we struck lucky! we found a house up Ashingdon Road (No 497). It was called 'Shawnigan'. The plot was two hundred feet by thirty. The lower floor of the house consisted of a sixteen feet square lounge with a stylish mottled grey tiled fire place. The dining room was about thirteen feet by eleven, its fireside alcoves had dresser cupboards above, and one had two drawers with meter cupboards underneath. It had French doors leading to a lean-to glazed conservatory, housing a huge grape vine and a bright-scarlet, roof height geranium. The kitchen was eight feet square with a butler sink, a small cupboard, gas stove and a slab of marble for a working top.

There was an outside bathroom with cast iron bath, and beyond this a separate outside toilet and a like sized coal cupboard. The hall led straight to the kitchen with a larder cupboard adjacent. Beside the street door and to its left rose the stairs to three bed rooms. One sixteen feet square with wardrobe, fireplace and a window seat filling the bay window. The second bed room was about thirteen feet square, also with a wardrobe and fireplace but with an ordinary sash type window.

The third bed room was eight feet square with a smaller sash window . There was a fourth room on that floor which had been merely used for cloaks, it being only five feet square plus a short entrance-way, (the room later to become our photographic dark room). Some vital walls were full of cracks! some quite worrying. Mrs Weight the owner said they were due to bomb damage during the war but we knew of no bombs in that vicinity, it seems they were the result of subsidence.

Dad came over to assess the situation and felt it was worth the gamble to buy it as the price was only £1400 pounds which we managed to get reduced to £1300. My trade union (Amalgamated Engineering Union) then allowed members to buy their homes on mortgage with 10% deposit and three and a half % interest over twenty five years, so we saw the local convenor and he organised the survey and the mortgage, then after paying the legal fees (£51-10-6d) we were IN!

Mrs Weight said we would find it a happy house (in fact it really was, and we eventually stayed there for seven years). Dad came over and cured some dry rot under the hall floor. This must have troubled him greatly for he was sort of allergic to creosote with its smell pervading the atmosphere there for several days. We filled up the lesser cracks and my favourite magazine Practical Mechanics sent me a formula for dealing with the dodgy ones which when once applied we were raring to go!

Then there soon came quite a blow to us all. Dad after considerable exhaustion and breathlessness saw the local doctor (May 1st) who diagnosed his complaint as arterio sclerosis, but after innumerable tests later on (14th June) at Lancaster House in Sutton Road, T.B. was established (having no doubt been in his lung for years they said) and bronchitis also. T.B. meant that the patient must be confined to bed as complete rest was then the only hope for patients. Worse, it is highly infectious and it was this aspect that I'm afraid completely upset things at Mary's home and from then on I could tell I was not nearly so welcome. After all, I'd be worried myself if one of my children were to associate with anyone in severe danger of infection.

There were pleas for Mary to give me up which I'm pleased to say she wouldn't do. This was really an awful time for every one compared with how lovely everything had been for us both until then.

Mary was then threatened with expulsion and it seems that Nanny and Pots were so much on our side that they offered to take her in, I'm eternally grateful to them for that, and it probably settled the issue, because Mary did not actually leave home.

Here (with her permission) Mary describes her own trauma best, being extracts from her diary for that year. I didn't realise how deep was her heart-ache at that time until she showed it to me recently (January 1993) it reads as follows :-

14/6/50 "Bill's father learnt today that he has T.B. in one lung and Bronchitis in the other----". And on 16/6/50"----When Bill had gone, mummy told me she and daddy had decided I had got to give Bill up----because of us bringing infection in the home---I told her quite definitely I would not give him up and promised to

leave home tomorrow". 17/6/50 "Called into Nanny's on way to meet Bill. I wasn't going to tell her about it now but I started to cry and had to tell her, so she said I must come and live with her. Met Bill and told him about it and he was very upset but said I'm quite free to break it off if I wish---"

Reading this after all these years I am very moved with memories of it all as I'm sure you'll understand.

Dr Sita Lumsden who diagnosed dad's affliction ordered screening for my mum, Mary and myself. It was agonising waiting for the results but when they were known we were all so relieved to be declared free of infection. A particular relief for both mums and dads of course.

It happens that the general panic then naturally subsided somehow in that I was able to court Mary as much as before, both in her home and out. My mum and dad had of course also been in a state about it all, poor old dad realising helplessly that he was the actual cause of the bother. Poor old lad, for apart from this blow, he had suffered for years with haemorrhoid trouble. Further, being now confined to bed he would get most depressed (as he'd always done) if ever indoors without mum, but she had to go out sometimes of course. Fortunately, he did get frequent visitors apart from the doctor etc. e.g. His sister Lil, Mum's sister Edie, Mrs Hesketh and strangely Maureen (aunt Lil's youngest daughter who came often and took great interest in dad, maybe because her future was to be in nursing.)

Soon after dad's bad news I went down to his firm (Stanton Rolls Ltd) to explain his predicament and to collect his tools, but they'd been stolen! (or at least could not be found).

Mary and I now spent much of our time over at the (497) house, neighbours Mr and Mrs Wiskin gave us tea and biscuits on our first encounter with them. Mary soon got busy cleaning all round the place, making and hanging curtains etc. We'd bought these and lots of lino at Rayleigh. (As a souvenir I kept a curtain ring on my key ring for twenty odd years thereafter until it wore through). For me it was the odd repairs and a bit of gardening--Gosh! that ground was like concrete! I dug a couple of flower beds and planted some Gaillardia seeds I recall, but they never came to anything. The grass was high and I spent ages hacking it down with a small sickle. We were so very happy though and developed soppy sayings that have stayed in repetition with us ever since like 'How's my darling', 'Gairn!' and 'Donarf luv you' etc.

Then Mary had a bit of a shock discovering that her engagement ring was missing! She thought she'd left it in the hospital wash room. Searching high and low did not reveal it so the catering officer called in the police, they came to the hospital and questioned her fellow employees----but then it turned up safe and sound where she had left it! (over at the house during the course of the many jobs she was doing there).

Mum and dad gave us the bits and pieces they'd promised that included a rickety meal table dad had made, a couple of Edwardian chairs, they'd bought us a double bed for our wedding present, gave us a host of old knives and forks and the little stool from their first home (see chapter three). Madge and Fred gave us a Victorian lustre vase they had treasured. Most of the things were

brought over with my grand piano and the ironing board I'd long since made.

We found time between the jobs to respond to considerable temptation and enjoy some very passionate moments of complete abandon in each others arms, until we were frightened out of our wits one afternoon when there came a rat-tat-tat on the street door! A swift glance out of the top window revealed the threat of disaster in the form of NANNY AND POTS!!---Those who know Mary also know how fast she can work---but no where near as fast as she moved that afternoon as we raced to let them both in!

We put up the banns at All Saints Church, Sutton Road, on July 1st, at St Laurence Church, Eastwoodbury Lane (3rd July), and saw the Rev Byrne at his home on the tenth. Here Mary told him that she didn't want the vow to obey me included, this was O.K. until I said

"and how can I vow to love and honour her? I have no idea how she's going to turn out!" "I think you'd better be sure what you're doing!" he replied "and I command you to read and learn the gospels!" Well religion (though among my many interests in those days as much as now) was not among my priorities and it had seemed quite a logical query to me.

We had to call there again on the 19th and he greeted me with "Now Mr Huskisson I trust you have read your gospels?" "No" I said, "I've been laying lino!"----I don't think he took to me all that much! Well I suppose he was only doing his job. Our wedding was set for 28/7/50 the eve of our North Wales booked holiday, it now to become our honeymoon! (by the way, my old mate and cousin, Gordon beat us to it, marrying one of his cousins, Vera on the first of April that eventful year, and we hadn't known of it).

With our wedding date known we were lucky enough to get our honeymoon room changed to a double (it had been booked as two singles at first). We were able to book seats at His Majesty's Theatre for their 'Brigadoon' show, dad had influenced me a little on this choice having explained the story of it, how he knew all about it we don't know but it must have fitted into his past sometime or other.

Our wedding presents included a mangle from Mary's mum and dad, a ground glass fruit set from doctors at Rochford hospital for whom Mary worked, a Lloyd Loom chair from the office staff there, a fireside rug from the Ekco gang, a dinner service from Ivy and George, a tea service from Mary's Aunt Kit, some money from her Uncle Harry and Aunt Dolly, and a huge, red trimmed lamp shade with artificial roses inset into windowed compartments around its base from Aunt Alma and Uncle George.

Sadly, trouble flared up again because we'd chosen to have a very small wedding, partly to keep costs to a minimum, thinking the likely honeymoon would be a more practical expense, and anyway we'd spent most of our saving on getting the house and because we didn't fancy all the pomp and ceremony anyway. So no cars were booked for the guests. There was no eve of wedding booze up with the lads, (I didn't even know it was the custom, so lord knows what they thought of me). Likewise there was no hen night celebration for Mary. Furthermore and unfortunately, Mary's dad had hoped for us to have a big affair and I suppose felt put out. In fact he couldn't bring himself to attend the wedding so dear

old Pots agreed to give Mary away. My close friend Bob Beale had kindly accepted the job of best man. (and photographer!).

We registered our baggage to Bettws-y-coed for a few shillings a couple of days before departure, and booked reserved seats on the relevant trains, to be from Southend to Fenchurch Street, and from Euston (via changing at Crewe) for Bettws-y-coed. That done now, everything was 'all systems go'.

During the night preceding the wedding I was sick about four times and thought I was going to be too ill for it all! However I was as right as rain on the morrow and can only assume it was caused by some form of nervous disorder even though I was conscious of only jubilation and no fears whatever.

So in addition to Bob and I, both mums came to the church as did Nanny and Pots, Sallie, Ivy, Uncle Billy and Aunt Edie, Aunt Hettie, and Mrs Hesketh with a wee lad she was minding. For their different reasons neither of our dads came of course.

Bob and I arrived at the church rather early and sat outside in the heat of the sun that lovely day. We became thirsty and were glad to stop a passing milkman there to buy a pint of milk and quench our thirst while awaiting everyone.

Mum had prepared a spread for us at my home leaving dad to look after things and add the final touches while she with Mrs Hesketh made for the church a couple of bus rides away. Ivy arrived at the house a bit later and in response to dad's remark of "They've gone off to the church mate!" caught a bus to Cuckoo Corner and walked the rest of the way to the church a good mile or so away.

I think it was a verger who (while we listened to an organ's strains of 'Moonlight and Roses') told us that the organist had arrived and asked if we'd like a couple of hymns and it would cost another 7/6d (35p today).

Mary was more than beautiful in her dress of navy blue with polka dots and matching woven hat as she entered the church on Pots's arm after everyone was seated. She had bought the dress at the Richards shop in the High Street for 52/8d, (that's all of £2.63) The service was lovely (although the Rev Byrne made a few snide remarks about my earlier attitude) during his sermon. Then it was to the vestry for the signing, then outside for Bob's photos including the traditional one for that church I think, where the groom carries his bride over the low wall adjacent to the lych gate.

Thereafter we returned to mum and dad's home for our mini-reception meal and immediately after had to make for Southend East Station, and this involved a hurried walk down Bournemouth Park Road, then going up and over the railway bridge of Southchurch Avenue, then turning left for the last lap along to the station to be in time to get to London for the 'Brigadoon' show. I had asked those at home to listen for the whistle of our departing train. So at the station I told the engine driver we'd just married and asked him if he'd kindly give a blast on the engine's whistle as we depart---He did better than that bless him! he summoned the guard to lock us in our empty compartment!

Finally with a resounding PHwooo-EEE- P! from the engine's whistle we were on our way to what became a marriage of wonderful years sort of hovering in a kind of limbo that has bordered on the very edge of paradise!

Yep! I'd recommend it to everyone---and we did it OUR way!

CODA

Three score years-and then!

Well that's about it really, I've brought you through roughly sixty years (if you've stayed with the story this far), even so, at the time of my marriage my own story covered just over twenty seven years, our marriage being forty odd years ago!

It so happens that I finish this work beyond the end of my own 'three score years and ten' and I'm reminded of Jazz man Duke Ellington's retirement speech wherein he gave thanks to and named the folk who he felt had influenced his life the most. I feel therefore that I'd like to do the same. They are:-

My wife Mary, my mum, dad and sister Ivy,  
Grannies Binks and Huskisson.  
Aunts Grace, Alma, Edie, Alice, Lil, Lily. Dolly, Hettie.  
Great aunt Edie and Great uncle Jack.  
Uncles Billy, Cyril, Charley, Albert, Alf and Fred.  
Teachers Misses Sturrock and Page, Messrs 'Chopper' Hacket,  
Woolley, Ward, Bailey and Breilly.  
Cousins Lil, May, Edie, Peg, Joan, Jean, Yvonne, Clara, Bert  
Gordon, Georgie and Jack.  
Friends Teddy and Peggy Reynolds, Charlie, Cyril, Georges  
Lake and Nichols, Alf, Jimmy, Ted, Joe, Johnnies  
Harris, Kerby and Stanhope, Bills Zolowski, Watling  
and Crannis, Bobs Beale and Fincher, Madge and Fred,  
Wally.  
The girl friends Vera, Barbara, Joan, Isobel and Valerie.

Incidentally, all the other folk mentioned in the foregoing story but also of course all the lovely people since. Everyone in their way guiding me this way and that, subconsciously but gradually, building my outlook and general character with helpful remarks like "Don't go by that road Wilf, this is the way", "Mind that sharp edge, this is the way to hold the work so that both your hands are behind the tool" "Give up smoking NOW Wilf, before it's too late" "Treat every woman as you would treat your own sister" etc. etc.

There's so much I could tell you of our marriage years of course, but perhaps it should be left to someone else, and where I've stopped seems appropriate and should have shown just how and why I became the bloke I am, and that was the main purpose of the exercise and the following notes have considerable bearing on that aspect:-

Did things go strictly according to my ideas for a successful marriage, (listed in chapter thirty four)? and did everything work out as anticipated?

Well 'No' actually, some did in part, some completely but some not at all! I hasten to add this though---the compensations for our shortfall were enormous!

One soon becomes quite a different person after marriage due to life's responsibilities being considerably altered and perhaps because financial commitments, in our case anyway were more traumatic. In particular I found politics and religion became quite strongly interwoven with ones problems. My political bent

(much indicated in my earlier chapters) had until marriage been concerned with theories and other peoples sufferings to wit my mum and dad's struggles, the wars in Ethiopia, Spain, China and of course World Wars One and Two.

These thoughts although intense were more or less superficial. Once you are 'your own boss' as it were, you, your spouse and your children have to fit within the ways of your own country's idiosyncrasies, so it's constantly a much closer and sometimes deeper thing to be concerned about.

On the credit side the post war Labour government of 1945 had achieved a system of social security and a national health service that was the envy of the world. However, much of its health service resources were drained by the cost of free prescriptions, the people claimed for minimal complaints such as a common cold, a small cut or graze etc. Also partaking of too frequent eye tests and dental checks, all freely available in those early days as were the health care and numerous other hand outs (all at the tax payers expense). All this also given to ANY foreigner who happened to enter the country.

Of these, however, the populace tended to criticise only those who happened to have a coloured skin even though most of those were proven to have British entitlements. Another heavy charge on the tax payer has been the cost of hospital meals for in-patients when a small charge for these would compensate for the food cost they would have spent at home. Their visitors and the out patients complain if charged for parking their cars in the hospital grounds, thus showing no regard for the poorer carless ones who without complaint have to find the necessary bus, taxi or train fares.

Trade unionism that is normally such a benefit to the down trodden became very strong but began to give credence to the old adage 'The biggest enemy of the working class is the working class' for they used the 'strike' weapon not just for urgent causes but more and more for increasingly silly purposes, e.g. an electrician helping a mechanic lift something heavy was regarded as doing another mechanic out of a job! I recall also the engineers seeking a shorter working week that would abolish Saturday morning work without loss of wages. This we gratefully achieved but the union reps immediately sought to get Saturday working re-introduced at overtime rates! I always thought it wrong too for men to fight for continued overtime working when their unemployed colleagues were on the dole during hard times.

Many of these unemployed were not blameless either! for they would think nothing of staying on the dole (or claiming sickness benefit) while doing tax free work on the side, some even claiming child benefit for non-existent children etc. Much of all this shows why I'm not at all proud of the British nor moved at all by our so called British heritage. Believe me, we are all incessantly conned throughout our lives into imagining that we are the nicest people in the world. Of course I imagine most foreign countries have similar problems but are surely no worse than ourselves.

Many of the above mentioned anomalies could be tolerated by much higher taxation (which doesn't win votes) or by sorting the wheat from the chaff (which does) but clearly illustrate the growing in-built greed of the people at the expense of their fellow men and

the weak and still weaker laws that have allowed its creeping progression since the start.

Such is the greed inherent in everyone, for we've all been dragged along almost compelled to join in the scheming just so one isn't left at the wayside. This easy greed has encouraged the incessant growth of capitalism and the slow demise of the true socialism once the backbone of the Labour party which allows greed and capitalism but tries to help the resulting poor, and the Communist party whose rules are very rigid and would ban the profit motive entirely and ensure fair shares for all. Greed however would take centuries to eradicate and was the main cause in the late eighties of the demise of the eastern bloc countries and the former Soviet Union, but all (as I write) are now slowly showing signs of a wish for a return to fair shares and the policy of jobs and homes for all that was the accepted norm.

Since our marriage, old style disciplines have declined in the home with many parents fooling themselves that they're kindly, never having heard the old saying about it being 'cruel to be kind' and others practically ignoring their children, virtually allowing them to bring themselves up! Discipline in schools became almost non existent. The old fashioned cane and the clip around the ear were banned. Police being seldom seen on the beat, the kids often drifting from early child-like devilmint into juvenile crime and their later development into hardened criminals. At the present time (1994) parents are still not responsible in law for their children's misdemeanours!

A rampant crime increase seems to have been the result with minimal prison sentences meted out or perhaps a paltry fine. Those in prison may be confined but have trendy living standards (including T.V. and videos etc) enjoying far better amenities than those of most pensioners.

People with means (rather than join the fight to retain all the good aspects of equal schooling opportunities for all) frequently opt for private education of their children as though there is some God given right for their kids to be better educated than anyone else! They are the kind who also think that paying for private health care plans should entitle them to jump hospital queues or have a more specialised treatment. That these options are permitted I find frankly immoral. It amazes me that many teachers and even doctors go along with it allowing one law for the rich and another for the poor thus lining their pockets more readily.----So much for the Hippocratic oath.

Do you wonder why some oldies talk about 'The good old days'? They are wrong of course. I've tried to tell you about all of my good times but have been careful to point out those that were bad as well. I've asked my children from time to time to notice that although much of life is very bad indeed, more days are good than bad, that living is a great deal easier than it used to be, science bringing more and more for us to lessen the struggle to live. So the world is in general a much better place than it was in my day. Remember that life for the poor, even a hundred years or so ago was dreadful indeed, as any Dickens novel will indicate. Even with things so much better now, the worst aspects of modern living indicated above are really quite easy to put right if people would just apply a little thought, compassion and a bit of action.

The blessings of science are true enough but not of course the atom bomb and other weaponry and I never cease to wonder what kind of people are willing to work in factories that make it all, and worse still are willing to see it sold to countries abroad. This shows clearly the type of people we live amongst.

I therefore fear the prospect of future wars. You see it's not just the major powers we have had to fear but little nations too have more and more acquired the wherewithal to blow the world to bits! So somehow we must find a way to stop wars ever starting or are you one of those who say "There will always be wars"? ---- Well I don't think there has to be. Not if we strive to keep the United Nations Organisation going, but some major changes to it wouldn't go amiss:-

Imagine a branch of The United Nations Organisation being a large and well equipped armed force having more than enough teeth for entering a country to quickly put down any invasion, coup, uprising, riot, revolution etc. Then to organise and oversee a democratic election according to a U.N accepted procedure and remain in control until a properly elected basic government is up and running.

The administration of the force could itself be changed periodically perhaps by some voting scheme. Thus obviating any feelings of it having become a form of world government.

Following a few warlike acts it would be apparent that no success could come from violence or territorial aims, so such attempts would naturally lessen and eventually stop---for ever!

This fighting force would thereby become the accepted protector of all its member states.

This means those countries prepared to commit their authority in respect of armed forces to the U.N. thus preventing any plans of expansionism to develop.

However, mixed contingents of these new forces could be stationed in each member state to a size and in strategic positions as desired by its own government but always large enough for the job in hand. Contributed personnel and equipment costs to the U.N. being in proportion to a members means as agreed by the other participating member states.

Imagine it! Peace for always, throughout the world. Well why not?

In fact, already having the U.N. we already have the germ of the idea that could, with a bit of push, easily cause it to rapidly grow. but its present forces would no longer have to serve in a mere buffer capacity but would utilise its own army as described above when full military action is required.

Nevertheless the size of the total forces available would have to be retained substantially larger than any remaining nation's own force or alliance of non-participating countries.

The system could start slowly by those agreeing to certain basic principles without interfering with the present arrangements so

that it could be tried and gradually modified where found wanting and permitted to grow with the addition of new members.

Compare the above idea with the present one that not only permits any member nation to have its own individual forces but actually allows it to form huge alliances (supposedly to aid the keeping of the peace) though in fact posing a threat to other nations at any time, that allows members to compete with each other in the design and manufacture of weapons of death and actually permits competition in their sale to other countries. Don't you think that's all pretty disgusting ? (it even purports to be in the name of peace!).

Please don't throw up your arms in horror at the alternative idea above. Are your country's own forces really required as a separate entity? If so why? Just ask yourself "What's really wrong with them being permanently part of and managed by the United Nations.?"

Just debating its virtues or feasibility would at least be a start, shouldn't we then do something to get the idea or something very like it off the ground?

Half the wars have been, and still are the result of religious argument and that's a shame because it seems that all religions teach right from wrong, its the other bits that cause the trouble. Many are said to accept only one God but we Christians include Jesus, that is, as part of God and we include the Holy Spirit hence the so called 'Trinity' because we count them all three as one.

Oops! Not me though! and its as well that you know where I stand. Through the years I've read a lot of religious literature and much of the Bible, most of the latter is a book of beauty but it is interspersed with innumerable contradictions, and many fairy-tale like impossibilities---quite nice as mere stories to guide children, so for that reason I would not like them deleted.

I find it irritating however that so many folk take the view that 'If it's in the Bible, it must be true!' because by dismissing all that fantasy stuff, the rest is easier to understand anyway! I've found it best to assess it all by the view that 'If a Bible story is feasible, there is no harm in accepting what it says'.

You may not agree with me and I'm not asking you to, I merely want to express why my own brand of religion works for ME. but I do actually include myself among Christians. Christianity is the world's biggest religion having numerous branches, and hundreds of groups all varying their interpretation of it! so why cannot I include mine? At best there can be only one that has actually got it right!

So it's pretty obvious that nobody has! In my case I worship Him because he was exceptional among teachers of righteousness, his every act was an example of how we should all act, he taught the principle of sharing, the virtue of compassion, of the love of one's fellow men, and of giving. In short (as my friend Joe Popham once said) "He was the first true socialist".

However I do not believe in miracles, either His or those of the old testament. So I dont believe He walked on the water (whatever

for?), Or turned water into wine, (for that you need grapes and a fermentation period don't you? ) or fed the multitude with only five fishes, or ascended bodily into heaven, or was resurrected in bodily form (He wasn't recognised at first when he appeared in the garden anyway). I don't believe He put those demons into the pigs who'd done nothing to deserve them. (The Jesus I revere would not do that to harmless animals). Nor do I believe in the virgin birth story, surely Jesus was Joseph's (or another man's) son? (or why didn't God make him out of the soil, like Adam?). Do you really think Joseph was gullible enough to believe such a tale? So for me God was not his father, and incidentally the star that moved along until it stopped over the stable did what all stars do (due to their vast distance away from us) i.e. try walking a mile or two at night and see that the same stars are in the same place as you saw them when you first set off and are incidentally in the same place for someone as far away as in the U.S.A!

However I do not seek to put you off, but if He was really the son of God surely the entire populace would have been keen to watch every aspect of His childhood, but in fact it hardly gets a mention. I feel that like other thinking boys he developed a gradual realisation of the gross injustices in the world and with maturity decided to do something about it.

I can just about accept that he was so good at it that God then found him to be something really special and maybe brought about the events and His ultimate crucifixion so that the world might thereafter regret its past and become as a result a much better place.

Frankly I can't for the life of me accept that He died for MY sins! I've made many mistakes but I'm tired of being told that I'm a sinner, often by those who (maybe unknowingly) have jolly well sinned against me.

Theres no real evidence at all that Jesus ever even existed, except, just a small sentence in the writings of a Roman dignatory who refers to a trouble maker known as 'Jesus'. I feel sure He DID exist but like many do-gooders today had too little written about Him, outside of the Bible. I feel I do have to accept Christianity though, after all it has survived for two thousand years! There surely must be something in it if we could only get rid of the cobwebs.

Then again I'm not at all sure about God. He's a bit hard to take in you know. He surely didn't make the world, all living things, the sun, sea and sky. All the planets too and the stars! Most of them millions of light-years away. Whatever would he want them for? From where did he get the materials for these and all the rest? I do tend to have a belief in something God like, but I can't seem to accept his opponent the Devil's existence except as some comic figure. Funny that. I suppose I should really, if I'm accepting a God.

All this, like much of the old testament is too hard for me to swallow, such as God compelling that snake to slide on the ground, did it first have legs then? and what of all the other snake breeds wouldn't they still have their legs? and to procreate did the first humans practise incest? Would you really believe that Lot's wife was turned into salt? What of the Jonah and the Whale story? or the tale of the twelve plagues?----they get funnier and

funnier as you read through them! and so it goes on. I acknowledge that a lot of folk feel the need for a bit of magic in their lives, if it's not clairvoyance, fortune telling by astrology etc. it's Bible tales like these I'm sure.

ME? I can't go for all that stuff, I don't think there ever was a beginning unless there really was the 'big bang' that some astronomers believe. I reckon that there is just an 'always' with everything being, created, existing for a time and then dying, then it all happening again. So perhaps there is a form of reincarnation, or maybe what we call 'God' is really a grand mixture of all the souls of everyone (and everything?) that has lived and died.

I'm convinced we each have a soul, you can practically feel it inside you, it sort of declares that it's YOU, that it is your eternal self---well I see it that way, and one thing I know is that if I feel the need to contact my mother or father in heaven I have merely to clasp my hands in a certain way and am convinced of their presence. To some extent it applies also to other relatives and close friends that have passed on.

Likewise in prayer to Jesus or God (I can't tell who) I just feel that He is actually there and listening to me. He does not verbally reply as many say he does to them. nor does he give me direct verbal messages as some would claim, but good or bad I sure get results!

You will have noticed that mass prayer in churches or even across the entire world just doesn't seem to work. Paradoxically though in my case individual prayer nearly always does! That is to say, if I have an insurmountable problem I have only to pray for a solution and generally the prayer is answered, but I'm careful to avoid praying for things or solutions to problems that I should be able to solve for myself.

If you find my own Christianity laughable well so be it, but do believe that for me it works! That God or something like it does exist but can do nothing to stop terrible accidents, famine, the death of little babies, prevent pain, stop earthquakes and other natural phenomena. etc. etc.

'Faith will move mountains' they say and I'm all for it but what I cannot abide is BLIND faith which is quite a different thing! THAT is the blind leading the blind, with no effort at all to seek the real truth yet it's TRUTH that really matters. Jehovah's Witnesses are typical of these and their reluctance to bend even slightly is the cause of so many family break ups, but they'll quickly change the rules whenever their American leaders say so! Catholics too are among these groups for if the Pope says "Black is White" they will promptly believe it! To me you are holding back knowledge and real progress in the world if you are that gullible. Blind faith (in any branch of religion) is a curse! However, let me close this work with that lovely prose read to us many years ago by King George VI.:-

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,  
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown"  
And he replied "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into  
the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and  
safer than a known way!"

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Questions like whether or not God made the world we can argue for ever. First though one should notice just what a beautiful place it is, well isn't it?

So for His and everyone else's sake, including you and your descendants, DO LOOK AFTER IT!----PLEASE !

ADIEU.