

GROWING
UP IN PEACE
AND WAR
1927-1946



STELLA ELAINE
PALMER

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Early memories around Newcastle, then London

I was born in Monkseaton, a suburb of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on the



12th April 1927, second daughter of William and Edith Waldron (pictured here in the mid-1920s). They had bought a bungalow three years previously. The confinement was at home, with a doctor and nurse in attendance. Apparently I was a relatively contented baby, but subject to fits of temper when thwarted. An incident related to me, told of the time when as usual my Mother put me in the high chair, in the bay window, to watch for Dad to come home. On this occasion something had upset me and I rocked my chair backwards and forwards, ultimately going backwards through the window. Never been the same since, some would say.

Dad was a Ship Surveyor, working then for the Board of Trade headquarters in London. He and Mother originated from Portsmouth, in Hampshire. Having started work as a shipwright in the dockyard, Dad had ambitions to better himself. He was the only son, and

youngest, of nine children, only four of whom had survived when I was old enough to be aware of them. He attended the Polytechnic evening classes, trained to be a draftsman, and eventually worked in the drawing office of the dockyard. Further training, and lots of hard work, enabled him to pass the examination for Ship Surveyors. On qualifying he was posted to London.



Stella in 1930

He had met my Mother through belonging to the Methodist Church, and they both attended the Central Hall meetings. Mother was a well-brought up young lady, and had trained as a tailorress. They became engaged in 1917, and married on 4th July 1918. Although it was American Independence Day, Dad said he promptly lost his!

Their first home was near Tooting Beck Common, South London, where they rented a flat. My sister, Rita, was born there in 1923. She was a bonny child, but nery, and cried a lot. They had to tie up the door knocker with a cloth, for fear she

was disturbed. Many sleepless nights were suffered. However, she grew into a beautiful child, and later became placid and delightful. Dad was still studying at night, to become a Member of the Institute of Naval Architects, and broken nights did not help him. He once went to have a bath, after studying, and went to sleep. Mother woke him up, and he was stiff and cold. Another bath had to be run to warm him up, but no harm came to him, fortunately.

In 1926, Dad was posted to Newcastle, and soon afterwards I was born, and our family was complete. We moved later to Denton Burn, another suburb of Newcastle, to a semi-detached house. Amongst their friends were a couple of similar age, with a son called Ronnie. He was a little older than myself and I am told he teased me, so I hit him over the head with a wooden spoon. I was severely chastised for this unladylike behaviour.



Rita, Stella and Ronnie

I have few memories of this time except that when we travelled on the bus, the conductor used to call out 'Fox and Hounds', and then we got off.

My first real memory was moving to London in 1932 where Dad had been transferred. We travelled down by car, and arrived at the house of my Mother's sister, Auntie Ettie, late at night. She and Uncle Harold lived in Wallington, Surrey, close to Croydon Aerodrome. Uncle Harold was also a Ship Surveyor. The families had been good friends since childhood. Auntie had put two camp beds up with Mother's and Dad's bed, in her back bedroom, where I awoke early, and was filled with a sense of adventure. Auntie and Uncle had two girls, Eileen and Pamela; one a little older than Rita, and Pamela was a little younger than me.

A house nearby had been rented to accommodate us until permanent accommodation could be found. I liked the place because it was leafy and the garden was wild. There always seemed to be a smell of flowering privet. There was a window seat in the bay, where I could store my toys underneath; it was a magical place for me. I still had not started school, but my freedom was shortlived.

New houses were being built nearby, on a rather exclusive estate, adjacent to Croydon Aerodrome. Dad bought one for £900. Some were more expensive, but the builder had gone bankrupt and ours was not quite finished, so the bank sold it for less than the usual price. Dad had other builders complete it to his specification. It was detached, with three bedrooms, large round bays to the upstairs and downstairs windows, with lattice glazing. A detached garage, in which rested an Austin tourer car, the whole plot comprising of one-eighth of an acre. No public transport or shops were allowed on this hallowed soil, but all local traders called for orders twice a week, and delivered as arranged. United Dairies' milk floats, with large, quiet, shire horses, deposited milk,



Rothbury – the new home in Wallington

and coal carriers brought fuel for the open fires and Ideal boiler. We had an outside coal house next to a toilet, leading from the kitchen. A dining room with French doors to the garden, a large lounge with a modern gas fire, good sized hall, with stained glass windows and a wide curving staircase. On the landing was a large airing cupboard, separate toilet and a bathroom, as well as three bedrooms. It was carefully furnished according to my Mother's ideas, which were very tasteful. The whole aspect was light and airy, and from the front bedroom window we could clearly see the Crystal Palace on the skyline.

I started at the local school with my sister holding my hand. It was a walk of about half a mile. I do not remember any particular trauma, and I settled in quickly. I was not clever but kept up with the middle stream, finding arithmetic difficult and the arts easy. The school had Junior and Senior sections on the same campus. We had very basic classrooms,



School photo of Stella

with a stove in the middle of the room, which exuded coke fumes right through the winter. The toilets in the playground were to be avoided at all costs, and I only remember using them once.

The teachers I remember as kindly women, but the Headmistress was holy! She had her own room, and the ultimate punishment was to be sent to her. It happened to me once. I cannot recall the misdemeanour I had committed, but I was 'spoken to' and told to sit on the floor until playtime. The floorboards were bare and dusty and my white knickers were grey when I stood up, which distressed me because I had to explain to Mother what had caused it. My only distinction at that school was my handwriting, which won a competition, the prize being a Conway Stewart pen and pencil set in

a presentation case. It arrived at home and I could not wait to show it to everyone at school. So I ran all the way, tripped on something and chipped the Bakelite pen holder. Tears of frustration flooded forth, but they were all very sympathetic. My teacher told me I should curb my impetuous nature, which at 66 years old, I still cannot do.

My education proceeded on basic lines. Numbers were taught by a series of dots, made by dipping a cork into red ink, and pressing it on to a card, which were added or subtracted as required. Our writing was with pen and ink, and mastered quickly. We were taught history, from cavemen to Elizabethan ladies, in a graphic way. I loved making the drawings and maps of all kinds of geography. Crafts were taught with wool and tapestry cloth, with which we made purses etc, to take home as presents.

Empire Day was celebrated with a pageant, in which we all dressed up in costume and sang Welsh, Scottish and English traditional songs, then we were given the rest of the day off. We also attended Church on special days. It was a mixed school, but we girls kept our distance from the boys. One boy whose name I have forgotten (maybe Peter Hay), was a wonderful story teller, and even at that early age could hold us spellbound. I had several special friends with whom I mixed out of school. Parties were quite frequent and Mother would make us lovely dresses for these events. Once I went to an 'Ovaltine' party at Kennards, a large departmental store in Croydon. The day was memorable in two ways. Firstly, I wore a beautiful, long velvet cloak, black on the outside and green on the inner side. There were entertainers and wonderful tea, and Dad was coming to meet me afterwards in the car. He didn't arrive and I was panicky, but soon our neighbour, Mr Gould, came along telling me that Dad had been working under the car, and his back had locked so he could not drive. So, that was the second reason I remember it.

Daily life

Some winters seemed excessively cold, and I remember wearing a liberty bodice and vest under my gym-slip, navy blue knickers, thick black stockings and leather leggings which buttoned right up to the knee. Navy blue reefer coat, and a black velour hat with elastic under the chin completed the outfit. Scarves and gloves were also worn, but despite this, I still felt cold. Sometimes Mother would have a mustard foot bath ready to warm us up. Mother ran a loving, orderly and comfortable home. Good home baked food was always available. She cared for us in every way, and her prowess with a needle, clothed us beautifully. The house shone with her efforts. She did occasionally

have help with the chores, but not regularly. Washing day on Monday must have been hard. She had a galvanised bath which Dad used to lift onto the gas stove, in which she boiled all the whites, the rest she washed by hand. Dad's stiff collars had to be scrubbed separately. Then she put all the washing through a mangle, which was set up at the end of the garage.

Dad was quite a keen gardener, and the plot was very attractive with rustic arches around the lower lawn near the house, up which roses and honeysuckle

grew. A rockery divided the lower from the upper lawns, and a concrete path ran between, where a long clothes line was positioned, for the inevitable washing. The higher part of the garden was grassed, and there



were fruit trees, and Dad made us a lovely swing. The vegetables were grown at the far end. The front garden rose quite steeply from the road, and it was a menace on the driveway when icy. Dad had standard roses up the path to the front door, and they made a lovely show in the summer. He often recounted the tale about some men who came round the estate shortly after we moved in. They had a van full of young trees, describing them from their labels as flowering cherry, pink almond and laburnum. Like other folk, Dad bought some and planted them with care. Next summer, they all turned out to be plane trees (sycamore), and so to this day there are a lot of them around. Dad was not amused!

We always had cold meat on Mondays, with nice fresh vegetables, though Mother would sometimes make lovely hot soup with dumplings. We always came home to lunch, so Mother did not have a lot of time to spare. A nice tea was always waiting after school, and it was obligatory to change out of our uniforms as soon as we arrived home. We would often listen to 'Children's Hours', with Uncle Mac and Uncle David on the wireless, and then practice netball through a hoop Dad had rigged up outside on the wall. Summer evenings, of course, we often went out to play. We also had some favourite

radio programmes, such as 'In Town Tonight', 'Monday Night at Eight o'clock' with Ronnie Waldman, Paul Temple, and Charles Groves with his orchestras. The wireless took up a whole corner of the room, encased in a large well-made walnut cabinet.

When I was about eight year's old, I had to have my tonsils removed, and I was taken to Carshalton Cottage Hospital. My predominant memory is of waking up to find a rubber cloth covering my pillow, which was covered in blood. However, a great fuss was made of me when I returned home. I was put to bed and had some new books to read, with a lovely fire burning in the grate.

There were plenty of young folk in the neighbourhood, and we would play together, either in each other's homes, or in the Roundshaw Park, across the way, and adjacent to the aerodrome. In the park was a spinney, landscaped with bridges and paths. There were also tennis courts and a putting green, and a large grassy area. It was quite safe to play there and the park-keeper became a good friend, and he would let us sit in the pavilion when it was wet. The trees were very mature, and we would play 'Statues' or 'Cowboys and Indians' around the place. I was rather a tomboy I believe, and despite Mother's efforts to keep me clean, I was always climbing trees and racing around, so getting my clothes grubby. Conversely, Rita was always clean and tidy, and I was compared unfavourably with her. When I was in real trouble with Mother, and she said: 'Wait until I tell your father' – I would try to meet him on the way home, and he always knew I was trying to soften the punishment. My Mother's worst expostulation was 'botheration!', and when I heard that I used to make myself scarce.

Dad liked to go in the garden some summer evenings to cut the lawns, and probably it was a relaxation after city life. On one such evening I wanted to join him, but had been naughty and sent to my room. Rebelliously, I climbed out of the dormer window, slid down the slate roof and then down the drainpipe. Dad was waiting at the bottom. I am sure that the relief he felt at my safe arrival, lessened the trouble I found myself in, but needless to say, I ended up back in my room.

Senior School and our lives and times in the 1930s

Soon I went up to the Senior School, and there was a distinct improvement in the buildings. Some of the teachers were men and we were very shy of them, but I particularly liked the music master who ran the choir, as I loved singing. The Headmaster was an ex-Army

Major, and he drove around in an open tourer car. He occasionally let me ride with him, and he took me to meet his wife, who was a shrivelled up little lady, with a great personality. Sometimes he would let me go to his office where the stationery cupboard was situated. I loved this, and really enjoyed tidying it up, and the smell of new paper and print is still with me. On one occasion, I actually won a prize, and was given a copy of Louisa M. Allcott's 'Little Women', and I was inordinately proud of this.

On our way to school, the road forked and created a small triangle of grass, on which there was a wooden seat. A man often sat there, entirely dressed in brown paper tied with string. He was a big man, with a beard, and we called him 'Paper Jack'. We were strictly forbidden to talk to him, but of course we all did, and he was a kind and gentle man, although a tramp. I have since heard that he was killed early in the war. Around the corner from the school were some shops, and in particular a grocers. The counter was fronted by biscuit tins with glass tops, and for one penny we could buy a bag of broken biscuits, which we could eat with our bottle of milk at playtime.

In the last year at Senior School, we sat an entrance examination for Wallington County School. It was fee-paying and Rita was already there. It was a modern school building, long, and with two storeys. There were good facilities for gymnastics and all academic pursuits, and it was set in grounds with tennis courts, netball and cricket. I passed when I was eleven years old and joined my sister. It was about three miles away, and we either walked all the way, or caught a trolley bus, which reduced the journey. We had a separate boys' school in Wallington, but there was little contact. Our Headmistress, Miss Bull, was a great sportswoman, ex-Roedean. We were taught to play cricket as well as the usual sports, and it was a very disciplined regime. Girls who failed to wear their hats to and from home, were severely reprimanded and punished.

Mother made our summer dresses, which were dark blue with cream collars and cuffs, and I remember feeling quite resentful when I had to wear my sister's dress which she had outgrown. We used to hold a fete every year in aid of Dr Barnardo's schools, and it was an occasion when we could dress up. We also used to give to Hoxton House children and they visited our school sometimes. I remember Rita had a lovely suit one year, made of yellow silk, top and trousers edged in black, rather like a Mandarin's outfit. We belonged to the League of Nations and were encouraged to have pen pals in other countries. Rita had one in Tasmania and one in Denmark. Rita also

belonged to the League of Health and Beauty, and one summer she spent a week in Sturry, near Canterbury, doing displays and physical movement. We were taught the usual subjects, including needlework by Miss Nichol. She was a terror and we were forced to make voluminous bloomers and aprons with tiny stitches, and run and fell seams.

About this time in the 1930s, there were alarming and serious happenings. The silver wedding anniversary of George V and Queen Mary was celebrated by a day off from school and a commemoration mug. Then later, I recall listening to news of his death, and then we all looked forward to the Coronation of Edward VIII. He was very popular and quite a dandy. We girls secretly admired Mrs Wallis Simpson for her fashion sense. Princess Marina, the Duchess of Kent, was also a great heroine. Then we listened to the abdication speech from Edward VIII, and the Coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth, which also allowed us a day off from school. We were all given a silver tea spoon with the royal crest, and I still have mine. Great excitement was created by the Boat Race every year. We would choose our team and wear either light or dark blue rosettes, and feel very happy if our team won.

I mentioned earlier that we had a clear view of the Crystal Palace from our bedroom, and we visited it several times, to see a circus and wonderful horticulture. One evening someone noticed a large red glow in the sky, and we realised that the Palace was on fire. It was a horrendous sight.

Dad was very musical and could play the piano by ear. I believe in his youth he would accompany music hall turns, to earn a few pennies. We had many musical evenings and various friends and relations would sing popular ballads, such as, 'I Passed by Your Window', 'Because' and 'Nirvana'. I loved these times and was always glad when Dad sat down at the piano.

Sometimes at parties we would play Musical Chairs or Musical Hats. Rita had piano lessons, but I was too young, but eventually I did learn to read music and to play by ear in a very limited way. We were always kept abreast of old and new musical comedies and played a lot of records on the gramophone; a wind-up one, of course, I think we were taken to every Ivor Novello show over the years, and the original 'Me and My Girl' with Sally Grey and Lupino Lane. Other shows were also visited. Each Christmas we went to see the pantomime at the Lyceum. We made a day of it, and met Dad at his

office in Great George Street, off Whitehall, and would have lunch at one of the Lyons' Corner House restaurants. We were on our best behaviour, of course. Then we went to the matinee performance. George Jackly and Eddie Gray were top billing in those days, and I would sing loudly in the chorus lines. Coming home in the car – we now had a Humber saloon – we sometimes had to contend with thick pea soup fog. It was quite frightening. One of us would have to walk in front of the car, holding a white handkerchief to show the way. It really choked you and was very sooty.

Grandparents in Portsmouth

We always went on summer holidays and had outings in evenings and weekends. Both grandparents lived in the Portsmouth area. Mother's parents lived in a house with a conservatory and I loved to play out there. Grandpa had been a Chief Petty Officer electrician on the Royal yacht, 'Victoria and Albert'. Mother told us that when a baby, she was taken on board and left on Victoria's bed to sleep. She was proud of that. Grandpa was a strict disciplinarian but kindly too. After Grandma died in the mid-thirties, he lived with each of his two sons and two daughters for limited periods. Although he was sweet, he inflicted his life-style on each family, and when he stayed with us, because of his rigid religious beliefs, we were not allowed to knit or sew, or read newspapers on Sundays. At least two church attendances were expected, and if we went for walks, he often prodded us in the middle of the back and told us to stand up straight.

When I was a teenager, and he was staying with us, a boy came to call for me to go out, and Grandpa asked him if he was my 'beloved'. It was most embarrassing.

Dad's parents lived in Southsea, the first house of bay and forecourt premises, in a long terraced row. I believe when Grandma was younger she ran a small sweet shop near Fratton station. As the family grew they needed larger premises and I was told these houses were being built about the turn of the century. They were £100 each. The builder offered her one house at this price, or ten houses £10 down on each. She opted to buy just the one, and lived there until she died in her late nineties. Grandpa had been a joiner in the Naval Dockyard, but was now retired. His great interest was Pompey (Portsmouth) Football Club. Living near Fratton Park football ground, he always attended 'The Match'. His mood was conditioned by whether they won or lost. He was very kind and loving and would sit me on his knee and call me the fairy on top of the Christmas tree. There were several aunts and uncles and cousins in the vicinity,

and Dad's sister, Auntie Violet remained home to look after the old folk. She was a spinster all her life, but had a very happy and kindly disposition.

Grandma was a small, fiery little lady who was blind in one eye. She always wore a clean handkerchief cornerwise across this eye, though apparently she did not miss much of what was going on. She had a sharp tongue, but had a kind heart. There were two large padded leather chairs on either side of the fireplace in the front room, with a rag rug, which she had made, between them. One chair would often be moved into the bay window, by the aspidistra, where Grandma would sit and watch the comings and goings up and down the road. Grandma ruled supreme and we were all in awe of her. We usually spent Easter there and always enacted the same ritual. On one shelf of a large dresser there was a line of egg cups. Each one had a special content, the coal money, milk money or insurance money. From one of these cups she would produce a sixpence each for Rita and me. Around the corner was a sweet shop. The proprietor would display all the Easter eggs in his back parlour. It was a wonderful sight, and Rita and I would wander around for ages, choosing our favourite egg, and they were glorious. Dad would take us out in the car to all local places of interest. We would listen to the Royal Marine Band at the bandstand on Southsea Common, or go to service at the Garrison Church, or watch the drilling at the Royal Marine Barracks. Sometimes there was a musical production on one of the piers, such as 'No, No Nannette', or 'Our Miss Gibbs' and he would take us to see them. In the summer we would swim in the sea, and occasionally visit Billy Manning's Fairground. All his life Dad sent money home to his parents, and they achieved their Diamond Wedding Anniversary before the war, with a letter from the King, and both grandparents were in their late nineties when they died

Play and holidays before stormclouds over Europe

Due to Dad's work with ships, we were closely associated with them during our childhood. We always attended the Fleet Review, travelling around in a barge. The battleships like the 'Iron Duke' were really enormous and all the ships were dressed overall, and that made the sight quite memorable. We were taken over the 'Queen Mary', which was really interesting, her decor was burgundy red and gold, and she had a fascinating map on the wall in the dining room which showed the position of the ship on her voyage.

At home, weekends were always busy in good weather when picnics were planned and beauty spots visited. Many Saturdays, Dad would



Stella and Rita on the beach at Angmering

arrive home from work, at lunch time, and afterwards we would be off into the country. The local Surrey countryside was very varied, and Box Hill, Leith Hill and Chipstead Downs, and all the villages in between, were visited. Box Hill was a favourite place for me, for there were slopes to slide down and bushes

which stopped me from falling too far. We often took a ball, or would just walk around. There was a steep hill up to the top, called Pebble Coombe, where an AA box was positioned at the apex. The cars in those days had great difficulty in climbing up, overheating being the main problem, and so the AA had many calls. We used to dare Dad to go that way, and he sometimes obliged. Fortunately, we always made a successful ascent. Leith Hill was equally beautiful, more wooded, and very scenic. I kept close to Mother and Dad after Rita told me that the Teddy Bears had their picnics there, and I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to meet them on my own.

On Sundays we often went down to Worthing to bathe in the sea. Our car was spacious, dark blue, with lighter blue vertical grids on the radiator and wheel spokes. A spare tyre was attached to one of the doors. The leather upholstery smelled lovely, but was cold in winter. Foot stools and little tables pulled own from the back of the front seat. At the rear of the car there was a chromium grid on which was lashed a big, black wooden box. Inside this was a kettle, a primus stove, water and all the ingredients for a picnic. We would go to Angmering-on-Sea, on the Sussex coast, take the car over the grass to the edge of the sea. An awning would be spread out from the car doors, under which we would change into our swimming costumes and hats, and a spare inner tube was available to help us swim. After our swim, Mother would produce a lovely meal and then we would play games. On the way home we would often stop at a farmhouse and buy new-laid eggs, or have a glass of milk straight from the cow.

Our aunt and uncle who lived close by also had a car, and we would join forces on outings to the country. A cafe at Buxted, in East Sussex had been found where they had tennis courts, and these would be

booked in advance and we would have several games, and then partake of a good tea. The country around was heathland and we children would explore. Sometimes we would play in the stream, and sometimes we would find wild strawberries.

The festivities at Christmas were the absolute highlight of the year. As well as Mother's sister and family nearby, there were two brothers in the vicinity. Uncle Will and Auntie May lived in Norwood and had one son called Ken, who was about twelve years older than me. Uncle was an officer in the NSPCC. Auntie Lily and Uncle Harry lived at Forest Hill, and had two daughters, Muriel and Doreen, similar ages to us. Both uncles were lay preachers in the Methodist Church. At Christmas, the four families would take turns in entertaining each other, and the parties were fun-filled, with food-laden tables. Alcohol was never served, but there was plenty of ginger cordial.

When our turn came, we would put the full-size table tennis top over the dining room table, to accommodate all the guests. When this was covered with pure white damask tablecloths and the best glass and cutlery, the effect was magnificent. Dad would organise a treasure hunt, with fiendish clues, and other games, like Bagatelle and Beetle drives. Mother's culinary efforts were very special and a sweet she excelled in was lime jelly, topped with half bananas, then a mushroom-like meringue set on top. She grated chocolate over this and served with cream. It was delicious. One Christmas it snowed, and it was the first time I wore a full-length party dress, made of lovely pink taffeta, with a frill around the hem. My cousin Ken, whom I worshipped, was in Oxford Bags, decided to make a snowman in the garden. Of course, I was the first to join in the escapade. Not until the job was completed did I realise that my dress was all wet and dirty around the bottom. Recriminations were severe, but I survived. In the garage Dad sometimes set up a large screen and we had a magic lantern show.

Presents were often home-made, like new dresses for our dolls, or handkerchief sachets, or Dad would make a doll's cot. All these were greatly appreciated. One year I really wanted a Teddy Bear. On Christmas Eve, Rita and I would sleep together, and our pillow cases were left at the foot of the bed, to be opened at first light. During the night I awoke and put out my hand to the table next to my bed I felt something soft, but heard a terrible growl. It thoroughly frightened me. Next morning I found the precious bear which I had knocked over during the night.

Holidays were always taken in August, during the school holidays. A range of venues were chosen. Memorable times were spent at Diddlesfold Farm, near Haslemere in Surrey. There was a large farmhouse with attics, and a huge stone-floored kitchen with a cellar. There were barns and horses and two cottages for the two sons. A brother and sister, Bunty and Donald, were often there at the same time as us and we were similar ages. Once, we children slept in the attics, but I guess we played around too much and had little sleep, so after that we slept in the cottage belonging to Uncle Jack and Auntie Fanny. They had no children and loved having us. The harvest was the climax, when we would be involved in taking flasks to the men in the fields. We would watch the cutters cut the corn from side to middle of the field leaving a circle in the middle. They would send in the terriers to catch the rabbits and rats. The thresher then took the corn and made it into sheaves. It was a noisy monster, but quite fascinating.

We would collect the eggs from the hens who foraged all over the farmyard, and found the most unlikely places to lay. The smell from the cellar still haunts

me. A mixture of elderberry wine and game and cheese.

The wine was stacked on shelves, and hanging on hooks would be rabbits, hares and pigeons. The local village was North Chapel. A parade of shops, under iron canopies, were all run by ladies in

black bonnets and gowns. They were part of a religious sect called the 'Peculiars'. They rejoiced at funerals and cried at weddings. The surrounding countryside was beautiful and we walked for miles under the brooding hill called Blackdown, where I believe there was a house which was once owned by Lord Tennyson.



Diddlesfold Farm in 1934

Uncle Jack used to catch rabbits with his ferrets and a little terrier dog. He sometimes took me with him, and would give a nature lesson. I found it absorbing, and once we found a whole, dead skin discarded by a snake, and I kept that for years. One less pleasant

episode happened when we went to Shillingly Park, the home of Earl Winterton. We went to see a fox hunt. Just as we arrived the huntsmen were gathering, and the Earl asked me to hold his mare, Rosemary. This I did and we chatted for a while. We followed the hunt and arrived at the kill. Unfortunately, the Earl remembered me and insisted that I was 'blooded'. It was horrible, and has put me off hunting ever since.

Some young folk, older than us, would sometimes visit the farm at weekends, and we would play cricket in the meadow. One fellow, who must have been a bit thick, was always fielding near the duck pond, and inevitably had to retrieve the ball from the pond. The poor fellow always came out smelling disgustingly, but it all ended in a lot of fun. Another man and his wife used to come quite often. He was Commander Sansford, ex-Navy, and he spent most of his time with a lump of wood on top of a pole which was stuck in the ground. Eventually, he had carved a beautiful wooden pigeon. He was a specialist at this and was a keen bird-watcher. On occasions, he would take me in the wood and show me the Jays, and their lovely, iridescent, blue wing feathers. We would also fish for minnows in the stream and put the poor things into a jam jar. I can't think what happened to them afterwards.

Another holiday venue was Brixham, in Devon. Uncle Harold, who lived near us, had relatives there, and one was a trawler owner. He and his wife had a house way up on the hill, overlooking the harbour and we stayed there. We would pack up the car (by 1938, a Humber)



and be ready at 6 am, and make for Stonehenge, where we would have breakfast. At that time we would sit amongst the stones, and there were no fences. It was heaven. Dad, Rita and I would go down the stone steps to the harbour in Brixham, and then go to the fishing quay to buy straight from the fishermen. Then we would go back up the steps and cook the fish for breakfast. There was a swimming pool built in the rocks where we would often swim, and then eat ice creams. The countryside was very pretty and we visited many lovely places. Buckfast Abbey was in the process of being built, and for sixpence you could buy a brick, put on the mortar and place the brick on the wall. We would then go to the refectory and have food.

Yew Tree Farm was just outside Canterbury, at Blean, on the Whitstable road. Mr and Mrs Buesdon bought it when their clothing business had failed during the slump. It consisted of a farmhouse, on to which they had built two bungalows. A cottage for their parents was also built. A large wooden dining room outside accommodated all the guests, and a games room, with billiards and table tennis was also available. The farm had an orchard of greengages and plums and was surrounded by the Blean woods, where hazel nuts were harvested each year. They kept pigs and goats, rabbits and ducks. There were four bedrooms and a bathroom and large lounge in the main house, and a lovely grand piano. The two toilets were down the garden!

It was well situated for exploring Kent and we visited Fordwich, on the River Stour, where one of the oldest town halls is situated, with a ducking stool for nagging wives! We travelled on the Dymchurch to Hythe railway, and visited Dover Castle. Going north, we swam at Herne Bay and Tankerton, where a raft was anchored about



Yew Tree Farm in 1937

50 yards out to sea, and gave us plenty of practice for swimming and diving. Places like Penshurst Place, Sissinghurst and Leeds

Castle were also visited. The little local church was picturesque and the vicar, Dr Wilson, had been Mayor of Canterbury at one time. Archbishop Temple stayed at the vicarage; when he preached at the Cathedral. Of course, Canterbury was very interesting and had shops full of exciting gifts. In the evenings at the farm, someone would play the piano and it was a most informal and free and easy time. Many friends were made of all ages.

When not out in the car at weekends, we regularly attended the Methodist Church at Wallington. Mr Bodgener was the Minister and he made it all very interesting. We also used to attend the churches where my uncles were preaching, especially Norwood Hill. Life for me was cruising along happily, nearly completing my first year at school and making new friends. My sister had a bicycle and by agreement I was allowed to use it, and it was safe to cycle around alone, or with others, wherever the fancy took us. Within a few miles was Epsom Downs, where the Derby was run every year. As a family, we never attended race meetings, but we often passed it by. There was an enormous hoarding at the side of the course, stating 'Duggie Never Owes'. Obviously, it advertised a bookmaker, but I never received a satisfactory answer when I asked what it meant. Nearby was a large derelict house, set in lovely wooded grounds, called 'The Oaks'. I believe it was owned by Lord Derby. However, children found it a wonderful place for exploring. There did not seem to be anyone around to stop us, and we spent many wonderful days there.

Living adjacent to the aerodrome I saw many changes in aviation and some historic landings. Amy Johnson used it quite often and I can recall her crashing on one occasion. Fortunately, she was not hurt. One of the first four-engine aircraft landed there. I believe it was German, but many of the locals went to see it land. The control tower, hotel and administrative buildings were on the opposite side of the airfield from us, and next to them quite a large industrial estate, with factories owned by a rubber company, Bourjois Perfume and several others making items connected to the aircraft industry.

Mail planes and passenger planes flew daily to the Continent, the Channel Islands and further afield, and we could almost set our watches by them. Imperial Airways started running daily services with their new fleet of large passenger planes, with names like Hanna, Heracles, Hengist, Horatious, Hadrian, Hannibal and Helena. They were the centre of the air-mail post as well, and around the City were blue post boxes, especially for air-mail. 'Par Avion' was stamped on the envelope and a fourpenny stamp was issued. The planes were

graceful and elegant to watch and had GAA on the side. When they took off there were no runways and they were directed by hand signals and flashing lights to clear the way. You could go on the hotel roof and watch them. Lufthansa also flew services from the 'drome', and quite a few of the families of the pilots lived near us, which looking to the future gave them quite an advantage when the war came. I spent a lot of time in the park on my own or with friends, and we found a place where the railings were bent, and we climbed through on to the perimeter of the field and picked lovely mushrooms.

About this time, the family with whom we had been friendly in Newcastle, and the boy I hit over the head, came to Wallington to live, and we saw quite a lot of them. Ronnie and I had quite a lot in common, as we both liked drawing, and we would take our sketch books out around the area. The two mothers also enjoyed each other's company, and Dad and the father travelled to town together.

Gradually, I became aware of a feeling of unease amongst the adults, and radio news programmes were listened to with serious faces. In the course of his job Dad was travelling a lot to the Continent and Scandinavian countries. After one trip to Hamburg, he tried to tell me how worried he was about the Nazis regime growing there, and he explained that his associates were very wary of making any political comments. He thought that trouble was brewing.

We always had plenty of books to read, a set of Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopaedia, and a lot of books about the First World War and contemporary happenings. Dad always subscribed to the National Geographic Society magazines, and other natural history books. We did not have a great deal of fiction, but he had a lovely set of Myths and Legends. I well remember going to a large bookcase in my bedroom and looking through a commemorative book on the Great War and feeling horrified that hostilities might start again.

One of the jobs Dad did regularly was to survey the whaling ships in the Scandinavian countries. On one occasion he was sent to Denmark and stayed in a hotel in Frederickstaad. The hotel was the usual construction of wood, two storeys high, the windows were double thickness to keep out the cold, and the whole heated by a stove in the cellar. It was his practice when away to put his wallet in his pyjama pocket when going to bed. One night he awoke, hearing crackling, and on opening his bedroom door found the whole place on fire. He found his briefcase and tried to break the window. Eventually he managed to do this and climbed onto the sill, then cautiously

climbed along two more and slid down the drain pipe, with the flames singeing his clothing. Landing on the ground in two feet of snow many people came forward to help and, retrieving his briefcase, he was taken to a house where two ladies provided warmth and hot drinks. He then realised that he had no clothes! A colleague called the next morning and went shopping for him and brought him a newspaper with the headline, 'Englishman loses the seat of his pants'. Three people died that night. He sent a telegram to Mother, saying, 'Hotel fire, I am OK', thinking it might have been reported in our press. A very strange-looking father arrived home safely, in completely new clothes of a different fashion. He subsequently had nightmares for months.

Evacuation to Kent and farm life in wartime Britain

In June 1939, Dad was informed that he was being sent to Newcastle to mastermind the transfer of some of the Merchant Navy fleet to troop carriers and hospital ships. His knowledge of that area was crucial and his territory was Berwick-on-Tweed to the Wash. My Uncle Harold was similarly despatched to Southampton, leaving both mothers alone with their children. The impact of impending war was immediate, and both families felt the separation greatly.

The usual holiday at Yew Tree Farm had been booked and Dad came home to take us down there in the middle of August. He could not stay with us, but obviously discussed with Mother our future movements, and they decided that if war was declared, the house would be closed up and Mother, Rita and I would evacuate to the farm. The proximity of the aerodrome was the deciding factor. We heard the announcement at 11 am on 3th September, that we were now at war with Germany and almost immediately the sirens went. We all sat outside the farmhouse in a state of shock and wondered how soon the battle would commence. I thought the Germans were already invading and was very relieved when the 'All Clear' was sounded.

We lived in the farmhouse with Mr and Mrs Buesdon and their only daughter, Marjorie. We three shared a bedroom, which was quite spacious, with a communal potty under the bed. We were fed by Mrs Buesdon, who was a Jewess, and very soon several of her relatives were evacuated to the farm. At least two mothers and their children lived in the bungalows, but did not eat with us. Dr Wilson found the Vicarage too large and cold, and he came into the farmhouse. His son, Neil, was Head Boy at King's School, and he spent some time there too. So, quite soon the farm was full of people, still with only two

toilets in the garden! Two local ladies used to come in to clean, and they were always very kind.

The subject of schooling was high priority, and Rita and I were transferred to Simon Langton School in Canterbury. It was a very old building, and I can't say that I settled there very well, but I suppose I continued to increase my learning.

There was a long drive from the road to the farm and they built a pill-box and posted army guards there. The other side of the gate was a small sweet shop. Across the road was a milking parlour for the cows and at the front was a tower, with a clock. It was quite a landmark. (In 1985 I took a sentimental journey back there. The farm was a housing estate, the clock tower had vanished, but the clock was the central feature of a parade of shops they had since built). There were only a few houses nearby, and down past the cowshed was a pub, then a railway halt, with crossing gates.

The winter of 1939 was particularly severe, and soon we were completely snowed in. I recall how we sat over a small fire, burning our legs, whilst our backs froze. The poor soldiers out in the weather were given hot drinks and soup whenever possible. We only went down to the toilets when we were desperate.

No enemy activity was evident then but our armies were retreating from the Maginot and Siegfried lines towards the east coast, and Dover was coming under shell fire. My memory is a bit hazy about certain events, but I do remember we pupils from the school had to have some lessons in the St Martin's Hall, or in the cloisters of the Cathedral, where the Red Dean (Hewlett Johnson) was often seen, his black cloak billowing out behind

As children we did not go to the cinema, but in Canterbury, Mother would often meet us from school and take us. The films were contemporary, and Robert Young, Walter Pidgeon and Greer Garson were providing great propaganda films. One night we had to leave, due to an air raid, and sat in a shelter until it was over. My most vivid memory is leaving school one afternoon to catch the bus home from the bus station. When I arrived there the place was full of stretchers with wounded servicemen, having been evacuated from France. I was horrified at the sight, and have never forgotten it.

The friends of Mr and Mrs Buesdon who came to live on the farm were very nice friendly people. There were two children of one family,

the Silvermans. Sidney was about seven years old and Yvonne may have been five. Sidney loved the farm and spent a lot of time amongst the trees and animals. Yvonne was round-faced and chubby, with a mass of golden curls. The other family had a young baby, whom I loved to hold, and that was the first time I had seen a Mother feed her baby, which intrigued me.

During my stay on the farm I caught measles and was quite poorly. The doctor was called, but I was hating being in bed, so I sneaked outside and got the twin goat kids, Buttercup and Daisy, and took them into the bedroom. Mother was horrified when she brought the doctor in to see me, and quickly banished them from the room.

One of the Silverman family was a doctor and they had friends in Whitstable. They took me with them one day, and I had great fun with the other children who came. Oysters, a local delicacy, were served at the meal, and although I didn't want to eat them, I overcame this to be polite. Later, I found myself feeling ill, and a rash appeared. They took me to the local hospital, where it was discovered that I had an allergy to shellfish, and I still suffer from the complaint. It was always exciting when the fathers visited and especially when it was mine. At Christmas, Dad managed a couple of days and it was wonderful to be a family again. It was a long way for him to travel, but we all felt it was worth it.

During the winter, Mother, Rita and I did a lot of knitting in the evenings and listened to the wireless, but it was a far cry from our former home. I remember that on Mondays, when Mrs Buesdon did the washing, we would have eggs and chips for lunch. I loved it but Mother was not of the opinion that it was good for us. One thing I found interesting was that all the curtains were made of pure silk, in lovely pastel shades. I found out that when their business failed, they brought bales of cloth with them and used them around the house. Of course, now they were all lined with black-out material, but I always thought they looked very beautiful. A pastime when I came home from school, and weekends, would be to go over to the cowshed, and help Joe with the milking. They were all hand-milked and were so docile, and their soft fur was comforting to lay my head upon. I became quite skilled and Joe would sometimes give me sixpence, which I promptly spent at the sweet shop on the way home.

Rita, by this time, was nearly 16 years old, and she made quite a few friends with boys and girls living in Canterbury. I recall they all went out carol singing at Christmas. My preference was for the animals

and I became very interested in them. The rabbit house held about 40 lovely bunnies, who were reared for their pelts. I knew them all by name and spent hours with them. My heartbreak was all the more poignant when arriving home from school one day, they had all gone to market. It hadn't occurred to me that was why they were reared. My pet kids, Buttercup and Daisy, I hand fed with a bottle, as I did with Harold and Rosemary, two little piglets. I enjoyed looking after the pigs, and would collect up all the spare cuttings from the vegetables and take them down with the swill. I collected duck's eggs and became an amateur farm-hand. Mr Buesdon was a man of few words, but I found him kind and I was always comfortable with him. Mother was not so keen when I came in dirty from the yard, but I think she understood that I enjoyed it.



Stella and Rita at Yew Tree Farm

I remember there was a moment of scandal. The daughter, Marjorie, was in her late twenties, and Neil, the Vicar's son, was only about nineteen. They had formed a relationship and when Neil was called up for military service, they went off together and got married. It was not a union that was blessed and caused a great stir.

1940, a return to London and air-raids

As 1940 progressed, no real air attacks had reached London, and at the end of the summer term, Mother and Dad felt it would be safe to return to Wallington. It was great to be back home again, although of

course Dad was still away. We did not have an air-raid shelter, but the cupboard under the stairs was cleared and reinforced to provide a measure of safety, should the need arise. Auntie Ettie, down the road, conversely had a super shelter, built at the end of their garden about one hundred feet from the house. It was built with a door at each end, a larder, lights and benches along each side which could be adjusted to be laid across the middle to make beds.

It was a beautiful summer. There were Hurricanes positioned all around the perimeter of the aerodrome, and many servicemen in evidence. On the afternoon of 15th August, about 6.15 pm, I was in the garden, when I heard a lot of aircraft overhead. This was not unusual because the squadron were mustering constantly on their way to intercept enemy planes around the coast. Whilst watching, I saw 'sticks' falling, and ran into Mother. She shepherded Rita and me under the stairs, and we experienced the thudding of bombs exploding and aircraft strafing. We were unhurt, but the aerodrome buildings were on fire and the factories too were in flames. The gun emplacements around the aerodrome were blasting everything they could see. The German planes were a mixture of what we believed to be Heinkel 113s (which I later learned had actually never existed, and were part of the German disinformation strategy. The planes would have been He 100s) and ME 109s, and they had dropped high explosive bombs and incendiaries. The stench of burning rubber and Bourjois perfume was indescribable and remained for days. The aerodrome buildings and cookhouse were badly damaged and there were many killed and wounded. Unable to feed the airmen properly, the local householders were asked to feed the crews nearest to them.

About this time, an aircraft taking off crashed through a house on the edge of the aerodrome and landed on the garage of the house across the road, where Rita's best friend lived. These were the first householders killed, but Rita's friends were not badly hurt, although the young son, Geoff was so shaken that his hair turned white overnight.

The raids now became a daily occurrence, with Germans coming over in droves, and our aircraft were going up continuously to intercept them. Squadrons 111 and 501 started off, but were joined later by others, as the pilots were killed. They suffered many losses and hardships, and yet their morale was very high. The aerial battles overhead were constant, the blue skies streaked with tracers and the noise was terrific. During one raid I was sitting in the pantry on the floor. Mother had made some raspberry jelly and put it into

little aluminium moulds on the top shelf. The shuddering of bombs exploding tipped them over and some of the jelly ran over me. Mother thought it was blood and was so concerned, but we had a good laugh afterwards.

Meanwhile, Rita had left school and taken a job in London, whilst I continued on vacation. The raids went through into September. The Germans were suffering tremendous losses and so were our boys, and interspersed with the bombing they were strafing the aerodrome with bullets, trying to kill the crews around the perimeter. We had to go out sometimes, and one day Mother and I were walking down to Auntie Ettie's and when the 'planes came over we were caught in the open. Mother said to me – 'Run on' – and I did. Suddenly, I felt so guilty that I went back for her. I really felt awful about it. Anyway, we arrived safely. My aunt felt that she was indestructible and did not like her routine upset. She was in the habit of having afternoon tea at about 4 pm, and on this day we were all down in the shelter during a raid. Auntie decided that she would go down to the house to make tea, and as she was carrying the tray up the garden a bomber was strafing, and the bullet cartridges followed her up the lawn. I picked them up afterwards and kept them for many years.

Back to school in 'strange times'

At this time, Rita had met an airman called Bill, who was an armourer in 111 Squadron, and they fell in love.



Rita in 1942

He was at least ten years older than her, and this was considered to be an undesirable liaison. He was sent away soon afterwards, first to North Africa, and then to Italy, and they lost touch with each other.

I also made friends in a childlike way with a fitter in 501 Squadron. This happened because Mother used to send us over to the railings, (particularly the bent one), with cakes and sweetmeats for the men. Ginger was a good-looking sergeant, who came from Bristol. We corresponded most of the period of the war, met up again once, but no romance. He was a good friend, and I used to knit pullovers and mittens for him. He never went abroad, but must have done yeoman

work. His hometown was Filton and I think pre-war he had worked in the aircraft industry.

Eventually, I started back at Wallington County School. The raids were still going on and the whole school curriculum was upset. Shelters had been constructed in the grounds and we spent a lot of time in them. Trying to carry books and gas masks down there when the siren went was no easy task. Blackboards had been erected at one end, and it was expected that lessons could still be carried on. As autumn came along, the Germans changed tactics, and started night raids with heavy bombers. The last daylight raid was on 18th October, and we had won the 'Battle of Britain'. Mother and Auntie Ettie decided that it would be safer if we all stayed at her house, and slept in the shelter. The raids usually started at dusk, and Rita and Eileen had to travel home from the City each evening, which was a great worry. My younger cousin, Pamela, and I had to try and get home before the siren went, because if we were out when the siren went, we were taken by Air Raid Wardens down the nearest shelter, and it worried the mothers, not knowing where we were. The school then arranged for lessons to start earlier, and we worked through, with a packed lunch, until about 2.30 pm, then went home.

The pattern of life was very strange. When the siren went, we trooped down to the shelter, night attire under our top clothes, to read and play games until we went to bed. Then the forms would be placed across the benches, and we would sleep top to toe. On one of his rare visits, Dad started to sing an old Northumbrian song, 'Keep your feet still, Geordie Henny, and be happy through the night', because if we moved, we kicked each other in the face. The raids would often go on all night and were very noisy. Not only the sound of the 'planes overhead, bombs and shell fire, but there were many anti-aircraft guns, mounted on lorries, that chased around the roads, and would shatter your ear drums if they stopped outside. Somehow we got through that winter, but our house had some superficial damage. Dad decided that we would be better off joining him in Newcastle. He lodged with Mr and Mrs Liddle in Fenham, a suburb to the north of Newcastle. They agreed to let us have a bedroom and a lounge. At the end of the school year 1941, we packed up as much as we could, and moved up there. The Air Force rented our house for service personnel, and patched up the defects.

Heaven in Newcastle

Rita and Mother slept in a double bed, I had a little single one, and Dad slept in another small room. It was heaven. Up until then there

had been few raids on the North East Coast and most nights we slept soundly. If there was a raid, they lit the smoke lamps alongside the River Tyne, and sent up a smoke screen which smelled awful, but obscured the view from above. I felt very vulnerable if I heard 'planes overhead, but fortunately no bombs fell near us.

Once again I started a new school. It was Dame Allen's Grammar School and was a two storeyed building. The boys' school was some distance away and had been closed for other purposes. Due to the hostilities, the authorities decided to evacuate the pupils who wished to go, to a school at Wigtown, near Ambleside in the Lake District. Consequently, they combined both sexes of those who wished to stay, in the girls' school. Originally there was a squash court, with swimming pool underneath, a good kitchen for Domestic Science, and a good Science Laboratory, but all were closed due to lack of fuel. I suppose there were about 200 pupils left, a Headmistress and Deputy Headmaster, and various teachers, not of calling-up age, and several who had been called back from retirement. It was as educationally good as they could make it, but it was a strange regime once again. I settled in very quickly, and although constantly teased about my Southern accent, found many new and good friends, and very hospitable people. Having boys in the class was a new experience for me, and I think it was good for me too. At lunch times, in the Assembly Hall, we were allowed, after eating our sandwiches, to play records on the gramophone (still wind-up) and learn ballroom dancing. Not all the boys came along, but enough of them to make it interesting! We managed some drama, and I remember playing Miss Prism in 'The Importance of Being Ernest'. We also scripted our own plays. Games and physical education were much encouraged and we had strong hockey and netball teams, and I also played a lot of tennis. I became Games Secretary and we played a lot of matches with other schools, particularly our other half at Wigtown. The Deputy Headmaster taught mathematics and I guess he had some physical fault excluding him from active service, for he was only young middle-age. He had a very short fuse on tolerance and if the boys aggravated him, he was known to throw the hard-backed board rubber at them. I don't remember anyone being scarred. The games master was considered very good-looking and we girls were always around to hand out drinks to the rugby players during matches. So, I was growing up, and aware of the opposite sex.

Going into the sixth form in 1942 to take the General School Certificate of Education was an experience in itself. We were a small class and due to the shortage of fuel, many classrooms were closed,

so a lot of our learning was self-study in the library. One night a week, two of us had to fire-watch. The staff room was requisitioned, and two camp beds were put up. We would take turns to watch and sleep, one teacher and one pupil at a time. I had a boyfriend now called Des, and we would go to the pictures sometimes, or visit each other's homes. Older than me, he was going to Durham University, and joining the Air Cadet Force, as were several others. Several of his friends and mine went around together, and we had an end-of-year dance, where I received my first kiss!

I kept an autograph book in those days, and some very interesting pieces were written in there, showing the gravity of our thoughts at that time. I include some inserts, which might be of interest.

'This England, never did
Nor ever shall
Lie at the foot
Of a conqueror'.

Anthony Brazil, University College, Durham. 18.4.43.

'When all the world is dreary
And gladness hides its light
Sweet memories cast a dariance
Like stars that gleam at nights'.

Gwen Olphin, DAGGS. 5.2.42

'Never has so much
Been owed by so many to so few'.

Mary Haswell, DAGGS, 19.2.42.

'When pictures look alive, with gestures free
When ships like fish, swim beneath the sea
When men outrivalling birds, fly in the sky
Then half the world, deep drenched in blood will lie'.

Helen Marr, DAGGS. January 1943

'Je suis ce que je suis
Et je ne suis pas ce que je suis
Si j'étais ce que je suis
Je ne serais pas ce que je suis

Growing up in Peace and War

Qui suis-je?
Bonne Chance! Petite Etoile!'

Christopher Bailey, University College, Durham. 5th July 1942

The Book of Life

'We may write our name in albums
We may trace them in the sand
We may chisel them in marble
With a firm and skilful hand

But the pages soon are sullied
Soon, the tracing fades away
And monuments will crumble
As all earthly things decay

But there is another album
With leaves of snowy white
Where no name is ever tarnished
But forever, pure and bright

In this 'Book of Life', God's Album
May you write your name with care
And may all who here have written
Write their names forever there'.

Vic Bailey, University College, Durham. 21.4.43.

In a lighter vein:

'Now Stella; because of the war
Was brought to Dame Allen's door
And there poor Stella has stayed
Wondering a lot at their ways

But when, my dear Stella, when
Will you ever learn to ken
That Tyneside which is all to us
Can be spoken without such a fuss'.

Audrey Brown, DAGGS. 9th February 1941

Life in the North-East

My memories of these people are fond, and grateful for their friendship during a trying time in my life.

A sad and worrying time occurred when one day Dad's driver brought him home in a collapsed state. The doctor came and pronounced him a hospital case. He certainly looked dreadful and was in considerable pain. At the hospital he was diagnosed as having a perforated duodenal ulcer and was operated on immediately. Of course, he had been working long hours, with infrequent meals and no holidays. He was seriously ill for some time, and his recuperation was slow. During the past years we had occasionally rented a chalet about five miles from Newcastle, at Ponteland. It was situated in lovely country. The farmer supplied milk and eggs. The chalet had been built by a shipbuilder and had two rooms, and a kitchen and bathroom, but the furniture opened out to become beds, and the tables extended easily. Early morning mushrooms were a special treat. Dad would come there for a day or two, but we stayed longer.



Dad slowly recovered and, when stronger, we went to a hotel at Seahouses called the 'Dunes' (pictured above in 2010 – it's now self-catering flats). It was a small fishing village on the North-East coast, just south of Bamburgh. The hotel was run by a father, mother and their daughter, Wendy, and it provided peace and quiet and



everything Dad needed. The beach was white sand, with dunes covered in thrift, but was mined all the way along, as I discovered to my cost, when I started to venture down there and soldiers turned me back. Later on, we went back there several times and it never failed to refresh us. Some RAF men were stationed at a radar station nearby and they came along some evenings for a sing-song. I well remember Wendy playing the piano and singing songs from 'New Moon'.

Fortunately, Dad recovered well enough to resume work and Mother had teeth trouble. It was apparently necessary for her to have all her teeth out. The method they chose was for the doctor and dentist to come to the house, where they laid Mother on the dining room table, and administered to her an anaesthetic and removed all her teeth. When I came home from school she was still there and certainly suffered agonies when she came round. Her false sets were put in a few days later, but she never forgot the episode, and neither did I!

Shortly afterwards, Rita and I both caught chicken pox and were bathed from head to toe in vinegar to counteract the itching, then covered in calamine lotion to cool us down.

We had our first permanent waves in a hairdresser's shop nearby. It was a long and tedious business, which required a large mobile stand being brought to the chair, on which hung numerous heaters. Papers would be put over the hair, which had been soaked in some ammonia solution; and the strands would be strung up on the heaters. After due time, the heat was turned off, the hair unwound, and we came out of the shop with a frizz of curls, quite satisfied, strangely enough.

The hair, however, suffered severely. Some evenings and weekends, I regularly attended St Peter's Church, and joined the Bible Fellowship. I met a lot of nice people there, and there were regular dances at the church hall. By coincidence, we again met Commander Sansford from the farm, who had re-enlisted into the Navy, and had been sent to Newcastle, and lived quite close.

The studying went on piecemeal, and I was not confident about passing my exams. French was a particular problem. Attending different schools meant different curriculums. Some taught German, some Latin and this one, French. The teacher was a very nice lady, whose husband I learned was a prisoner of war. She tried hard with me, but suggested I should have private tuition. An ex-French teacher who had lived next door to us when I was born, was asked if she would oblige. She readily agreed, but said I would have to go to her at weekends, at Whitley Bay, north of Cullercoats Bay and Tynemouth, and stay, as the distance was quite considerable. One weekend, when I was staying there in her spacious bungalow, there was an air raid. Apparently the Germans were dropping mines on parachutes, and these were quite lethal, for the blast was lateral and very devastating. The Warden came to the door, saying we had to move out of the house because there was an unexploded mine around the corner, which was to be detonated. Miss Buxton and I were in our night clothes, but we had to go, and she put on her tin hat. As she was as broad as she was tall, she was quite a sight to behold. I did not have a tin hat, which worried her, but hanging on the wall in her hall was a lovely copper warming pan. She insisted that I put it over my head, and so we proceeded to the shelter. What a strange pair we must have been! Afterwards, she gave me the warming pan, proclaiming that it saved my life. I still have it hanging on my wall.

Life after school – dances and working life

I did not distinguish myself in the exams, but managed passes even in French, and I was given a distinction in Art. This I wanted to make my career, but the only time Dad thwarted me was then. He pronounced that I was not good enough and could not make a living from Art. He was right, of course, but I bitterly resented it.

Now that I was about to leave school, Dad and Mother decided there was no need to stay in the vicinity of the school, and found a house to rent in Jesmond, nearer to town. After two years restricted to two rooms, a whole house was wonderful. The dining-room table was a steel shelter, under which was a made-up bed, which we often slept in when we had visitors. Mother and Dad had an open house

and encouraged our friends to come. Dad bought a small piano, and we tried to save enough coal to light a fire in the lounge on Sunday afternoons and have a sing-song once again.

Rita was working in the Mercantile Marine Office, and she had a wide circle of friends in the Merchant Navy. There was a club, called the Merchant Venturers, for officers, in some upstairs rooms over the shops in the city. We often went to help there, and played Monopoly and other board games, and it was a sanctuary for the men between ships. I met a lot of these young, brave men who came. Some were on tankers and some on ships bringing goods and food. They waited in port between voyages, or a replacement ship, if theirs had been torpedoed. I knew one young man, 24 years old, one of the youngest Captains of his day, who had been torpedoed three times, and he still went back for more. At a later date he took me on his ship, and let me stand on the bridge with him, while he took the ship down to dry dock. It was very interesting. His name was Peter Patterson and he came from Whitby. A lot of these men grew beards, to disguise their age. Two brothers became good friends of ours, and although they were local lads, they spent a lot of time in the club. We organised dances at the Assembly Rooms. It was a lovely old building, with a large dance floor and several ante-rooms. For the dances, we tried to wear nice dresses, but for the Balls, full evening dress was worn, by both men and women. I was most friendly with the younger brother, Harold, and we became close. At one Ball in particular, it was arranged that 12 dancers would put on an exhibition dance during the interval. The girls were to wear long, full, white dresses, with a red sash. This was difficult, for we had few coupons. Dear Mother said: 'Don't worry', and she cut up a white sheet for the underskirt and bought dozens of yards of white net, which was free from coupons, and created a gown of beauty, with a voluminous skirt. Harold bought me a corsage of red carnations, and I certainly felt one of the belles of the Ball when we danced to Strauss's 'Tales from the Vienna Woods'. I could not have been happier.

By this time, Mother and Dad had opened up socially and we often went down to the Central Hotel at the Station in the evening. It was quite elegant, with lovely period furniture and we would have dinner and drinks. We were also entertained on board some of the ships in port which Dad had worked on, so our narrow pre-war life had extended, not that they ever became big drinkers. The Captain's table on some of these ships belied belief considering the rations we had to endure. In 1943, it was Mother and Dad's Silver Wedding Anniversary and we planned a party. One of the Ship's Captains sent

up the most wonderful gateaux, decorated with butter icing, and other delicacies, which surely made the party extra special. The co-owner of the shipping line became a great friend of my parents, and we all liked him.

My dancing friend, Harold, and I had some lovely times together and when he was home we had many trips out. I remember going to Morpeth one day, and walking along the river bank. It was so peaceful and quiet. A happy memory. On his return to port one day, the River Police rang me up and said there was a message for me. Harold was singing, 'If I had My Way', on the ship-to-shore radio.

Meanwhile, I had found a clerical job at the Tyne Improvement Commission, who owned the rights of the Tyne. They were paid dues from the staithes and wharves, and employed the dock labour. I earned 17 old shillings and two old pence per week, less sixpence for NALGO Union dues. This Company also had close ties with the River Police, who had several launches which patrolled the river. I worked in the Ledger Department with two elderly ladies, who had been there for many years. They were very old-fashioned, with their hair in buns, and they wore dark blue or green overalls. Miss Smith and Miss Holt did everything by routine, even their visits to the toilet could be expected. My rebellious nature was curbed by their supervision, but I was not unhappy. There was a Mr Dodds in the Department, who spent his time working on parchment, recording the minutes of Boardroom meetings, in a superb copper-plate hand. He occasionally allowed me to make an entry, which was the highest accolade. These sheets were eventually bound in leather, and stacked on shelves in the Boardroom. Lunchtimes, and some evenings, I would help on the switchboard, which was a complicated mass of switches and plugs. The building was large and imposing, I think about eight floors high, opposite the Central Station. There was a wrought iron lift to all floors, and Arthur, an ex-soldier, who knew everything that went on in the building, was in charge of this. He also knew when oranges might be queued for at the greengrocers, or, Dolcis had a consignment of shoes arriving, and so he was a really useful man to know.

Art classes, the theatre, more dances and Rita joins the ATS

My social life was good and I had joined evening classes at the King Edward VII School of Art, which was affiliated to Durham University. Still wanting to learn and prove that Dad was wrong about his decision to stop me working in this field, I threw myself into making a varied portfolio. The tutor, Mr Patterson, took me under his wing and gave me a lot of extra tuition. Sometimes at weekends, I went

to Durham University for extra lessons, and when finished, I would meet up with some of my old school friends, now in the Cadet Force, and soon to join the RAF. I regret that some of them were killed and sorely missed. The Castle rooms were their dormitories – vast, cold, but companionable – where we would talk, sometimes of politics, until the early hours. We would skate on the ice rink, but not for long, because they turned off the electricity, and we found we were skating on inches of water. Sometimes we would go to the river, and I did my share of rowing. My art did improve, and I studied Geometric Design, Still Life and Manuscript Writing, but I began to realise that although I loved it, Dad was right. I was not exceptional and the art world needed that. I did not give up art for pleasure, and I still enjoy it, but I realised that it could not be my career.

About this time, Rita was called up for the Services. She had been reserved for two years, but now she was due to go to Dalkeith, in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS). We were all very worried for her, because she was a very sensitive girl, with a delightful personality, but still had a nervous disposition. However, a tearful Mother and Dad and me waved her good-bye from Newcastle Station one morning, and off she went. She certainly suffered a lot in those first few weeks doing all sorts of manual jobs, from peeling potatoes to cleaning latrines. On her first leave, she had chilblains all up her legs and hands, but had made good friends, and was determined to make a good show. Later on, she was drafted to the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) in Edinburgh, domiciled in the Carlton Hotel, and she rose to Sergeant, and was awarded a Merit at the end of the war. It was the making of her character, and I do not think she has ever been afraid again.

Shortly after this we moved into a bigger house, also in Jesmond. It was very comfortable and nicely furnished. On the wall in the kitchen was a box containing many bells. It was quite a deep house, and a long way from the kitchen to the front door. Sometimes, if I felt particularly wicked, I would ring a bell from an upstairs room, knowing that Mother would not look to see which one was ringing, and she would trot to the front door, wondering who it could be. When she heard my giggles, she realised that I had been up to my old tricks again, and most times she joined in the mirth.

I now joined the Newcastle Playhouse, an amateur theatrical society, in Heaton. My best friend from work belonged, and so I went along. I could never go on the stage alone, but sometimes played in crowd scenes, and helped with the scenery. We were given complimentary

tickets for the big shows occasionally, and once had a hilarious evening after the Bill Cotton Bandshow at the Hippodrome. We all did individual renderings of popular songs, and I sang with Alan Breeze. One year, the Theatre Royal put on 'Babes in the Wood' at Christmas, with Nervo and Knox as the Badmen, and the Monk twins as the Babes. At the end of the show, we went to a party at their hotel and it was really fabulous.

One evening, when my dancing friends were home, they had tickets for a Ball at the Rex, at Whitley Bay. It was a crisp and cold evening, and at Tynemouth we were turned out of the taxi because it was a restricted area. It was a long walk to the hotel along the sea-front, and we started off in our finery quite happily. The pavement was uneven and I turned my ankle, I didn't hurt myself but pulled off the heel of my shoe. So there I was, going to a dance, with one high and one low heel. We were passing a searchlight battery, and my friends called out to them asking for a hammer. They not only had one but repaired my shoe for me. Due to the shortage of drinks, the bar would often close early, so it had become our practice to take some drinks of our own. We knew at the Rex, there were ante-rooms, so we set up a 'bar' on the mantelpiece. Of course, one of us had to stay behind all the time to guard it. I do not remember anyone ever being drunk on these occasions, so we obviously didn't over-indulge. Anyway, we had a good evening, and arrived home safely.

Sometimes, on a Wednesday afternoon, I would go dancing with my friends to the Tea Dance at the Oxford Galleries. It happened that my Company paid the dockers every Thursday and some of the staff were asked to help make up the wages. This was done in the Boardroom by about 20 of us, on Wednesday evening. The money and pay-slips were brought in, and then we were locked in and not allowed out again until we have completed the task and balanced the money. This evening work, allowed us the afternoon off and I made good use of it.

Finding and losing love

About this time, Dad had a friend who ran a guest house, and she phoned up one day, asking if I would join a party going to a local RAF dance. The group comprised of several Canadian Air Force lads, and I duly joined them. They were stationed at Silloth Coastal Command, 22 miles west of Carlisle. Dick and Pete were French speaking, and belonged to the Demon Squadron (RCAF 407 Coastal Fighter Squadron). They had a little dog called Demon, who accompanied them on their flights. They both spoke perfect English, and Dick and

I fell in love. It was an idyllic time, and we saw each other whenever possible. Of course, I had to tell my friend, Harold, that I had met someone else – not easy to do. I went to Carlisle to spend the day with Dick and we had a wonderful day. We used to play ‘Lilli Marlene’ every night at nine o’clock, just to feel close.

We spent as much time as possible together, wrote regularly, and ‘phoned, but soon his squadron was moved to Chivenor in Devon. I tried to join the Land Army down there, to be near him, but was rejected on medical grounds. I was so lonely. The D-Day landings were not far away, and because he spoke fluent French, I was later told that he had been dropped in France, to precede the landings. At any rate, I never heard from him again. I was broken-hearted. My parents were supportive, but I became ill and had shingles all over my face. Dad used to lace every drink I had with rum, to make me get better, and eventually this happened. I still cannot stand the smell of rum.

Sometimes I would go to Edinburgh for the weekend, to spend time with Rita, and we had a close bond. I loved the granite city, and still do.

One day when I was home ill, the front door bell rang, and on answering the door, I found Bill, Rita’s boyfriend from the RAF at Wallington. He had returned to find her, found her gone and traced her to Newcastle. We were all pleased to see him again and gave him Rita’s address. He met her in Edinburgh, and not long afterwards they became engaged. They later married in 1948, but unfortunately Bill died suddenly when only 49 years old, leaving Rita with two young daughters to bring up on her own, and she has done a wonderful job.

Towards war’s end and working for Billy Butlin

The run up to D-Day was frenetic, even around Newcastle, and we manned our telephone exchange for 72 hours non-stop. The success of the landings was hailed as a turning point in the war, although there was still a lot of fighting to come.

During the years in Newcastle, we sometimes accompanied Dad on his trips to Headquarters, now in Berkeley Square in London. The travelling was tiring and hazardous, due to black-outs and extremely busy trains. We were often held up for hours if there was an air raid. We stayed either in the Regent Palace, or Strand Palace, and it was luxury after the plain diet we were used to. We would try to see a show whilst in London and they were always good.

Late in 1944, the RAF wrote to my father, advising him that they were vacating our house in Wallington, and the war damage repairs had been completed. Of course, Mother wanted to go home, and I was asked to go with her. I did not mind too much, and the time came for me to leave my job. I really missed Paddy, my friend, and she will always be a very happy memory for me, for we lost touch with each other sometime after the war.

Mother, Dad and I travelled back to Wallington. Mother's elation was soon deflated by the state of the house. The RAF personnel had more or less wrecked it, and all our toys and books had gone, even my prized stamp collection. However, we overcame these difficulties and Mother and I did what we could to make it more like home.

The family we knew earlier in Newcastle were still in Wallington, and Ronnie was in the RAF stationed locally, and we met sometimes and went to concerts. He loved the violin and I loved the piano, so there was usually an argument about where we went.

Other family friends were still around and one of them, whom we called Uncle Bill, arranged an interview for me at Butlin's Head Office in Oxford Street, opposite Selfridges. I was engaged as a clerk and worked with an interesting group of people. Billy Butlin was frequently there, and he and his family had a flat behind Selfridges. Soon after I started there, the Germans introduced the V-1 rockets. These flying bombs, 'Doodle Bugs', as we called them, often slipped in without warning and were quite terrifying. All the time you heard the engine you were confident they would pass over, but if the engine stopped they dropped immediately, causing considerable damage. They arrived anytime, day or night, their tails blazing, and started a new phase of the war. Uncle Bill was the Manager of Dunhills, in Duke Street, off Piccadilly. One lunch time I went to see him, and a rocket had dropped on the back of the shop, completely devastating it. He was so upset at the loss of his unique merchandise, but no-one had been badly hurt. Another morning, I arrived at work where dreadful damage had been caused along Oxford Street. There were shoes and clothes and other goods in heaps everywhere.

I used to catch the train from Wallington to Victoria Station, then walk up through Green Park, to Piccadilly, Bond Street and Oxford Street, and reverse the pattern to go home at night. It was safe to walk alone in those days, even with the blackout, and I do not recall ever hearing of a mugging. One evening, returning home on the train, we halted on a viaduct bridge, all lights were turned off as there was an air

raid. We just sat there, and one bomb dropped one side of us, then another the other side. Miraculously, the bridge and the train were not damaged, but it was a close call.

At the office, I was making friends with the other staff and I found them very helpful. As the junior, I did everything from making tea to typing invoices, for £2.05 shillings a week. Two of the women appeared to me to be very worldly-wise, and they were always very smartly dressed. One day, one of them said to me, 'Would you like a key?' Mystified, I asked what it was for. 'Oh, it opens the door to a block of flats around the corner, occupied by American Army Officers. They will be very good to you!' Politely, I declined the offer! One afternoon, an air raid siren sounded, and almost immediately there was a terrific explosion and debris broke our windows and the building shook. Collecting ourselves together, we saw that Selfridges had been hit and there was fire and damage everywhere around. The windows were hanging by sticky tape that was used for that purpose. Billy Butlin was frantic about his family, and we all rushed round to the flat, but fortunately found them to be alright.

Soon after Christmas 1944, Billy Butlin came into the office one day with the news that the War Department was releasing his camp at Filey, in Yorkshire. The Services had been using it during the war as a transit camp, and now it was to be returned for civilian use. He asked around the office if anyone would be willing to go there, to organise the transfer to a holiday camp. I was rather struck with the idea. When I mentioned it at home, there was great resistance, but in the end Mother and Dad agreed that I could go. Since our return to Wallington, I had renewed my friendships with old pals, and had a fairly busy social life. We often went to the Albert Hall 'Proms', sitting up on the cold steps in the 'gods', and occasionally we would go to the cinema. Mother too, had re-opened old acquaintanceships and was living a more normal life. Dad would come home on leave, or business, now and again.

The Filey Butlin's camp and the end of the war

In January 1945 I travelled with one lady and two men to Hull, and then on to Filey. I experienced my first bout of home-sickness on that train, but being obstinate would not admit it. I recall one of the men, Mr Wheeler, a kindly soul, probably saw through my bravado. When we reached the camp, it was a complete shambles. There were nearly a thousand men on the site, some airmen, some army, and some Merchant sailors, between postings, as well as quite a lot of civilian labourers. Together, this mass of humanity was busy trying

to restore the camp to pre-war standards. The other lady and I were the only females. The chalets were cold, dirty and most important, without locks! Mr Wheeler found a large cupboard to put in my room, and I used to push it against the door at night. I saw the first and last bugs in my life on the walls of that chalet. Anyway, it wasn't long before I had scrubbed it out, and disinfected everything and felt more comfortable.



Mr Wheeler was in charge of catering and in the morning at 6 am, he took me to the workmen's canteen, where I issued and checked all the meal tickets. About 9 am, I would have breakfast and then go down to the main office. Some bookings were coming in, and we aimed to open in May. We would do the clerical work, and at lunch, tea and supper times I would go back to the canteen, to deal with the tickets and hopefully finish about 9 pm. It was a rigorous routine, and tiring, but I was enjoying my independence. Mr Wheeler kept a very close eye on me, and was as good as a father. Soon afterwards, a very nice girl from Hull arrived. She was an ex-nurse, who had suffered a nervous breakdown, and we palled-up immediately, and

decided to share a chalet, which made me feel much safer. Gradually, the work on the camp was showing signs of improvement and it was taking shape. My friend and I had little time off, but we found a house opposite the camp gate where a homely couple would cook us poached eggs on toast, and let us sit for a while and we thoroughly enjoyed the home comforts. We did go into Scarborough on the camp transport sometimes, when goods had to be bought, and although cold and bleak, found it a very pleasant place, and we felt refreshed by our outings.

Some entertainers arrived and a lot of personnel for specialised jobs, and there was great activity all around. There were some really nice people amongst the new staff and although still maintaining marathon hours, it was quite a happy time. The camp opened in May 1945, just after VE Day, and the euphoria of peace made people ready to have a fling. A well-known lyricist, I believe it was Michael Carr, opened the camp amongst great celebrations, and he gave us many renderings on the piano with the band boys. Not that there were many off duty hours to appreciate the fun, for I was still doing the canteen work and the office, and now was expected to mix with the dancers until 'Goodnight Sweethearts' was played at midnight. If the weather was clear and bright after that, some of us would walk along the lovely beach and enjoy the fresh air, and unwind

The work continued apace and I was getting very tired. On one of his visits to Hull on business, Dad came to see me. He obviously noticed the fatigue on my countenance and gave me a £5 note, saying that if I wanted to leave at any time, I could join him in Newcastle! Some time passed and my friend and I decided we had had enough, and gave notice that we were leaving. We packed our bags and went into Filey and booked B & B for a couple of nights, then she went back to Hull, and I joined Dad in Newcastle at his hotel. I spent a few days with him, and then went back to Mother in Wallington. No-one said, 'I told you so', but it was an episode of my life which was an unusual experience.

Back in London

It was time to look for another job, and Uncle Bill once again found me an interview, and this time it was Dunlops, in St James's Street. I was accepted as a typist at £3 per week, and my particular job was to read Hansard every day and record anything that had passed in the House of Commons concerning rubber. Sometimes there were many references, and other days very little, and then I would help in the typing pool. I saw a lot of Uncle Bill at Dunhills in those days, and

he would take me over to Fortnum and Masons for an ice cream, a very special treat in those austerity days. Dad would come down to Head Office in Berkeley Square sometimes, and we would meet at lunch-time, and then take a walk. Pimms No 1 was a favourite drink of mine, and now and again he would take me to Selfridges bar, and buy me one. Once he took me to the Ritz Hotel, which was a great thrill, but the tea was insubstantial. If he was in the mood he would buy me some luxury whilst we were walking around. He had a vast knowledge of London and would recount the history of the buildings, and indicate the occupiers of the tombs in Westminster Abbey, or take me round Brewer Street Market in Soho.



Stella in 1945

About that time in 1945, Rita was posted to London, billeted in Sloane Square, and she was able to come home quite often. It was good to have her around again, and Bill joined her when he could. One weekend, when she was home, she was expecting a visit from an old friend, who had been a prisoner-of-war. He was an air gunner on Lancaster bombers, shot down in March 1944 while on a bombing mission to Stuttgart. He bailed out and ended up with his parachute tangled in a tree. He was interrogated at Dulug Luft, Oberursel (North-West of Frankfurt-am-Main) where bomber crew were kept for lengthy periods in solitary confinement. 29,000 POWs passed through this interrogation/evaluation centre in 1944. He was then interned in the most northerly of the German Prisoner of War camps (L6/357, known as Stalug Luft 6, Heydekrug in Lithuania). The camp was closed by the Germans in July 1944 as the Russians advanced,



Maurice

the winter months of 1944. It seems likely that he was moved at some point in cattle trucks to Fallingbostal Camp in Central Germany before being released early in May 1945.

Back in England, he was stationed at Sunninghill Park, near Ascot, at a rehabilitation camp. He was due to arrive on a Sunday. Mother had gone down to Auntie Ettie's and I should have gone too, but I had had dental treatment, and was in some distress, so I stayed upstairs. He duly arrived, and he and Rita had tea and chatted, and then, feeling better, I went down to join them. He was a Warrant Officer, and seemed to have recovered physically, but in due time I was to learn that, mentally, he was in a very unstable state. He had

plenty of time off and asked if I would like to accompany him to 'The Stage Door' Canteen where the American troops spent their leisure time. His family had a restaurant and guest house in Selsey, Sussex, and a lot of the Americans were billeted there before D-Day. Learning that they had a son, a prisoner, they arranged for food parcels to be sent to him through the Red Cross. After his return he had contacted them – hence the invitation to the Club.

We had a good time together, and Maurice, as he was called, often met me from work, and we would go to a show or the cinema. I met his crew, who were all in London, waiting to go home, but we were still at war with Japan, and no servicemen were being released at that time. I found him good to be with, but very volatile and temperamental. They played hard and tried to make up for their internment and loss of their youth. All were under 25 years old, and had experienced great strain and horror. On VJ Day, I think the 18th August, he proposed to me and I accepted, and I had hopes that he would improve in his mental state. Dad was in Sweden at the time, and Uncle Bill officiated for him at our engagement party. We made preparations to be married on my 19th birthday, 12th April 1946, and were going to live in Selsey, and help his parents in their restaurant.

We were married on that day and that is another story.

Growing up in Peace and War

1927-1946

Stella Elaine Palmer

This is a story of a young girl growing up in a middle class family in middle England. Stella's adventures took place in the years leading up to, and during, the Second World War.

Stella's family lived first on the outskirts of Newcastle, then Wallington, outside of London, and then back to the North-East. It is a quintessentially English tale of simple pleasures – school-friends, picnics, daily routines, a number of house moves, holidays, and a fairly strict Methodist upbringing – what they used to call being, 'prim and proper'.



For the early war years, she and her sister, Rita, were evacuated to Yew Tree Farm, near Canterbury in Kent. Her father was a Ship Surveyor, deeply involved in the war effort and rarely at home for a number of years. Life for Stella changed with the family home being requisitioned by the Air Force. This was closely followed by the blitz, her first Forces' boy friends, air-raids, and the transition from school to work. After office-based work in central London, January 1945 found her travelling to Filey, to help in the re-establishment of Billy Butlin's camp on the North-East coast. Later that year at 18, she was engaged to be married.

It was a time of hope, some naivety, and aspirations in adversity.

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