

CHAPTER 1

My story starts back in the 19 hundreds in London’s Custom House, West Ham. This was the poorer part of London; the East End as it is known today. At 249 Victoria Dock lived Minnie Monk and Ted and they are the start of my story. Year after year Minnie had children — first born was Fred named after his Father and nick named “Pebby”, next came Minnie who is the main character in this story which is all true as told to me being the youngest daughter of Minnie. There were ten children altogether in the Monk family: Pebby, Minnie, Fred (nick named “Nicker”), Joe, Lily and Rose (twins), Edie, Grace (who is still living), Len and Harry.

My Gran carried a huge bundle of second hand clothes on her back to her stall in Rathbone Street six days a week — she paid a lady a bit of money to keep her eye on the children. Her stall was kept in a garage so after carrying her bundle for a mile or two she would put up her stall and sell all day to get money for food for her 10 children. One twin, (Rose) was so small, born through my Gran carrying such heavy loads, at the age of 2 she died of smallpox. My Gran caught smallpox and was blind for 3 weeks, I remember brushing her hair and seeing all the big dips in her head, she told me her children were going hungry when she could not work.

My Grandfather was a docker and when there was not work he would go and beg for work. This one time he was lucky and they gave him one week’s work unloading tins of fruit. The story goes like this; he put a few tins in a bag and hung them over the side of the ship hoping to find a way of getting them. Dockers were searched at night. One dark night he got in the water a bit away from the ship and swam to the ship. He managed to get the bag down then thought how am I going to swim? He put it on the back of his neck and nearly drowned himself. His children were afraid of him but it shows what a man will do to feed his children, he got home with his prize and the children lived like Lords for a few days.

The depression went on and the men turned on the Government and marched in London. Not only did the police charge them on horseback they hit them with truncheons. My Grandfather said he ran like mad and pushed his head in someone’s door and the policeman gave him a good whack on his bum, but he did not mind as that was better than his head. My Gran got better and her sight came back.

The man as we always called him, started to bring better clothes to my Gran, seconds from a factory. Things were just beginning to pick up when war broke out. Pebby and Joe joined up, Pebby was sent to France and was there for 2 years before being sent home. Joe joined up and don’t remember hearing about him. Nicker was 16 and he put his age on to 18 they said he could help with the soldiers that were hurt.

My Mother was 19 and could play the piano, also she had a very good voice. Most of the family could play the piano, and she had won competitions in West Ham. An American talent scout heard her sing and asked for her name and address. He wanted to see if her Mother would let her go to America, went to see my Gran and the answer was “No”, as there is a war on and she was needed here so no it was. As my story goes on my Mother would have been safer there than what was to happen

My Grandfather opened the door one day and the police wanted to see him, he ran indoors the children all crying, it took 6 of them to frog—march him to the cop shop I never heard why — his part in the march I think, not for pinching the tins of fruit, they did not keep him long.

## CHAPTER 2

September 1917: Minnie worked in a factory making golf balls. She had hurried home because Peppy was home on leave he had shrapnel wounds in his back. They had sat around talking about the war Peppy telling them how awful it was in the trenches his stories went on quite late when Minnie said work in the morning I am off to bed kissed her brother goodnight not knowing that would be the last kiss she would ever give him. Minnie was woken by a terrible noise jumped out of bed put a fur coat over her nightie (all clothes from the second hand bundle), ran downstairs followed by Peppy then her Father. Mr. O'Brien had rented the attic from my Gran also his three children. As Minnie opened the door there was an almighty bang lights flashing everywhere, all six were blown from the front door to the back. Minnie standing in the front put her arms up to protect her face, a big piece of shrapnel tore part of her right side of her body away, also the ribs smashed her right knee cap. Blood seemed to be flowing everywhere. They were blown out in the back yard and Minnie heard Peppy groan. She dragged him up to a wall not knowing the piece of shrapnel that had cut through her side had also cut her beloved Peppy's heart in two he was killed instantly. Minnie did not know he was dead at that time just thought he was hurt like her. Her Father had shrapnel in his leg. Mr. O'Brien who had just rented the attic was also killed as a piece of the shrapnel had gone into his temple. Two deaths and four injured.

Minnie remembered coming to and everything going black. Two men carried her to a doctor's surgery that was just down the road. They laid her on a stretcher the doctor stopped the bleeding as much as he could. Minnie heard him say there is nothing I can do for she has lost too much blood. There was a stretcher on wheels, Minnie was put on it and wheeled through the streets of London. All she can remember is hearing bells ringing, the noise of the wheels, nothing but blackness coming and going.

Minnie woke up in a bed in London Hospital, the surgeon standing by Minnie's bed said you are awake at last. Minnie said who are you? I am your doctor we have left you for two days you were too weak to do anything for you, your strength is coming back so I have decided to operate on you but I am afraid you will have your leg amputated, oh no said Minnie I would rather die than have my leg off, I love singing and dancing was hoping to go on the stage, please don't take my leg off. We will see what you are like in the morning. That night Minnie prayed like she had never prayed before, oh God please don't let me have my leg off. A voice spoke to Minnie in a dream, you Minnie will see a beautiful garden all along the path there will be lovely flowers follow that path and you will always see flowers. There is another garden to begin with the flowers look lovely but follow that path and you will see how all the flowers are dying. Minnie said to the voice I will follow the right path.

Morning came, Minnie felt in her bed and was so worried that her bed was wet she called the nurse to say how sorry she was for wetting the bed. The nurse danced round her bed saying it is a miracle the bottom part of Minnie's leg had opened up itself and all the puss and poison that had built up in the leg. They called the doctor he came and said Minnie your leg has been saved now we will start on our operations. Ten operations and a year later Minnie was able to walk on one stiff leg, two inches shorter than the other.

On one of the visits of her Mother she asked what had happened was it the gas mains that had blown up? No said her Mother, that night the Zeppelin' flew over very low and our guns from the Woolwich arsenal had fired on the Zeppelin, but there had not been enough TNT to take the shell up to it the shell had hit a railway arm signal and bounced off right in front of our house just as you opened the door. It then hit the gas mains. The ten pieces of shrapnel they have taken out of you came from the shell, you were to ill for us to worry you, now you are getting better. they are making a case against the Germans. Never mind about that how is Peppy getting on? We had tried to keep it from you but Peppy died the same night as you were hurt. Mr. O'Brien also died, your Father hurt his foot and a few small injuries. The house is a mess we had to move down the road to number 255 Victoria Dock Road. There is a big front room which will make into a shop.

A nurse came to Minnie and said now Minnie the King and Queen Mary are coming to the Hospital today and they want to meet. Oh no I can't let them see me like this Minnie had no hair or eyebrows the shock

had made all her hair fall out and Minnie's face was covered in small bits of shrapnel. The nurse said never mind we are going to trim you up they put a mob cap on her head. Minnie said thank you with all this trimming me up, all I hope is they pass me by. Deep down she thought it would be nice to see the King and Queen. Queen Mary came to my bed and said how sorry she was that a lovely young girl had been so injured. The Queen said your family were the only civilians injured in that way.

Minnie was determined to walk again, day after day she would try. Eighteen months passed in hospital and one wonderful day the doctor told her she could go home. In a wheelchair her brothers Joe and Nicker came to get her. The doctor said to Minnie you have been through so much that enough shrapnel was taken out of you to have killed 10 soldiers if it had hit them in the right place. You have been given a second chance so make the best of it and good luck. Minnie thanked him for all he had done for her. Her next big worry was how was she was going to pay her hospital bill and if she would ever get a job again she would have to wait and see, god she thought had intended her to live so she must try her best.

Her Mother had made room for her wheelchair in a downstairs room, also the boys had got her a bed in that room, now Minnie was worried that she would be a burden to her family. They were wonderful to her helping as much as they could. Minnie would help get the children to school, those who still went to school and did things like cooking. Sometimes when she thought no one was looking she would try her crutches bit by bit she would take a few more steps.

A letter came for her saying she must attend a court. A private meeting had been arranged for her as the German government had agreed to pay compensation to her. Dreading the day to come when she had to go but knowing that she must as the hospital was pressing for their money, and her Mother had been keeping her for months. Minnie arrived at the court rooms, they took her to a big room seated around a big table were 6 men they asked all sorts of questions can you walk? yes, sir, with my crutches I can walk a bit, but not very far. Well you might be able to get a job so out of the £1,500 the German government had given Minnie all she ever had was £500 the rest was put in trust until such times as Minnie was in need, which were many to come. The hospital bill was £300 pounds the rest was given to her Mother to help keep her.

Time went by, Minnie was feeling stronger and she applied for a job sorting eggs. Explaining that she was in a wheelchair but was very willing to work if she could sit down. A letter came back to say if she could get there they would give her a trial. This meant a short train ride every day, how was she going to manage, most mornings someone would help her put her wheelchair on to the parcel carriage. Her determined character saying to herself I did not ask to be a cripple. This is how Minnie thought of herself now, a cripple who nobody would want to love or want. I will have to struggle as best I can.

One morning trying to get her wheelchair on the train a nice young man asked if he could help. Minnie gave in as the train was about to leave, said yes please feeling cross with herself for accepting help knowing there would be times when she would have to ask for help. Every Monday to Friday the same young man was on hand to help her. So Minnie was able to keep her job giving her a bit of independence. One day the shy young man asked her name; my name is Harry, mine is Minnie, funny name isn't it, no said Harry, it is a nice name. From then on they chatted quite a bit and Minnie found out that Harry had been training as a tailor. A great morning arrived when Minnie got to the train on her crutches. Harry was so pleased to see her trying so hard to be independent held the door open for her. Harry asked Minnie if she would go to the pictures with him Minnie said no if I ever manage to walk without my crutches you may ask t again.

War had been over some time, life seemed to be going back to normal. Minnie never got over Peppy's death, to think she had propped him up against the wall not knowing he was dead. Joe and Nicker were married and moved in houses not far away both started to have children. Grace, Lily, Len all out to work. The three children that were living in the attic when their Father, Mr. O'Brien, was killed on the same night stayed with Minnie's Mother, Charlie, Tom, Lizy. Tom went in the Navy, Charley got married to Alma and moved away never saw much of them after.



## CHAPTER 3

Minnie's family all seemed to be leaving home and having children of their own and she often wondered if she would have children. One day no one was home and she tried taking a few steps without the aid of her crutches; yes oh yes about 3 steps - so every day when no one was around she was determined to try a few more, Harry her youngest brother came in just as she was walking, he was so pleased to see what she had achieved all by herself he gave her a big hug; you are so brave I feel so proud of you. Every evening Harry would help her walk. A few more steps every day and I will play the piano with you.

Harry could play, he played by ear and had one piano lesson but the teacher said she could not teach him anything as he was too clever playing by ear. Minnie could play, but not as good as her brother. One day Harry started working on the docks, he was about 14. His brothers Len also Joe worked on the docks. His pocket money every week was going towards buying a piano-accordion. He was so proud the day he had paid for it. When Minnie came home walking without her stick she had gone from wheelchair to crutches to walkingstick now all on her own. There would always be a limp as one leg was shorter than the other, no matter she was walking by herself. Harry waited for her to come home for before uncovering his wonderful surprise; want to learn this with me Minnie? Oh yes please I would love to. Harry was so good for her and she loved him dearly. Night after night they would sit together, one playing the piano and one playing the accordion. Sometimes Grace and Lizzy would join in. Minnie's confidence grew and grew, her walking got better. One day waiting for her train to go to work along came the nice young man who used to help her when she was in her wheelchair; hello I see you are now walking, you would not go out with me before so now you can walk I will ask you once again, will you go to the park with me in yours dinner time so we can talk? Minnie agreed as he seemed very nice.

When they met in the park, which was close to Minnie's work, he was waiting for her on a park bench. Minnie felt too shy to eat her sandwiches. My name is Harry and I have been watching you for a long time struggling everyday knowing you would not go out with me until you could walk unaided. Now you have no excuse, please tell me your name. It is Minnie Monk, don't you dare say Monkey, they both laughed together Minnie thought to herself, yes he is nice.

Weeks went by and Minnie was seeing quite a bit of Harry liking him more and more. Her brother Harry pulled her leg saying, well when are we going to meet this other Harry he has got my name sake let us see if he lives up to it. What did you say his other name was, he was only fishing as he did not want his sister hurt as he knew she had been through enough. Minnie thought for a moment, do you know he has not said what his surname is perhaps it is a funny name and he did not want to tell me. Dismissing this from her mind the next time they met she asked Harry if he would like to meet her family, there are a lot of them some still at home and a few of them married. On a Sunday Harry came round to meet the family, he was well spoken and everyone seemed to like him. Mrs. Monk asked where he lived Plaistow and she then asked him his surname, perhaps she knew his family before he answered there was an awkward silence. Then quietly Harry said Fillman. Minnie's mother looked at her a bit funny but said nothing. They all had a cup of tea and a chat then Harry went home telling Minnie it was her turn next to meet his family.

Minnie asked her mother why she had looked at her funny when Harry said what his name was; I remembered something in the papers about a name like that but perhaps I had it wrong. She did not want to worry Minnie as this was the first boyfriend Minnie had and she liked him all she would say was we can't help our families it is what we are that counts and I like Harry very much. Minnie did not know what to make of that, but she would soon find out for herself as Harry had said it would be her turn next to meet his family. Sunday came round quicker than she wanted, her mother would say no more about it, told her to wait and see. Harry would tell her when he was ready. Sunday morning Minnie woke wondering what was in store for her that day, nothing could be worse than what she had already been through and the waiting not knowing was worse. Harry could not call for her that Sunday, she was to meet him at his house. Should she go or not? Once again she asked her mother to tell her what she knew about Harry. Go along and meet them, you are worrying too much about it, go and find out. She liked Harry so much so off she went not knowing what to expect.



## CHAPTER 4

Knocking on Harry's door, it was opened by a very big burly man very short cut hair. He spoke in a broken English tongue. Minnie was cross to think Harry had let her come on her own to meet his family; is Harry in please he was supposed to meet me? You had better come in he will not be long. Minnie was shown into a sitting room, a young girl a bit younger than her came in shook hands with her and said "you are Minnie, Harry has told me a lot about you, I am sorry to hear about your injury you must have been in a lot of pain". With that Harry came in with his brother Len, sorry I am late got held up. Harry called his Mother to come and meet Minnie, Harry's mother was very prim and asked lots of questions about her family and injuries. How did it happen? As soon as Minnie said it's the Germans fault I am crippled; if they had not been flying their Zeppelin over here this would not have happened and my beloved brother would still be alive.

One look at their faces told her she had said the wrong thing but what had she said that had upset them, Harry's Father got up and walked out of the room and his Mother followed him. His Sister said you had better tell Minnie why. Please Harry what is going on? what have I said to upset everyone? Harry said, let us go for a walk and I will try to explain. Our surname is Fillmann, we left off the last n because my Father is German. He was to be a monk but when his papers came for his two year's conscription he would not go as he felt he could not kill. He was thrown out of Germany. Working his way on a boat he came to England found work met my mother and married. My Mother was trained as a tailoress, they opened a business making men's suits the small factory was doing well until the war then everything went wrong. My brother Len, my sister Edie and myself all worked in the factory and we trained as tailors and Edie as a tailoress.

When war started my Father was put in prison for the duration of the war so my poor Mother had to close the factory. Our windows were all smashed with people throwing stones and bricks through the windows, my Mother was very frightened every time she went out the people called her names and threatened her. We moved twice but because it was put in the papers it always seemed to be found out. Many times I felt like running away myself, but what good would that do we still had to live. I am very sorry Minnie you had to find out like this but I was afraid you would not like me any more hoping you would like me enough to overlook me being part German. I was born in England and we don't choose our parents, that is something I am unable to change you must ask yourself if you like me enough to overlook all this and let us get on with our lives. I know I think enough of you to try. Minnie sat quiet listening to all Harry had to say tears rolling down her face. I don't know Harry how can I face your family after I said all those awful things and how can I still like you knowing it was your people who killed my brother and made me a cripple for the rest of my life. No I don't think I can, leave me alone I must have time to think don't try to get in touch with me again, give me time to think.

Days went by and Minnie was very upset, she cried herself to sleep night after night thinking she had made a big mistake in letting Harry go. Who would want her as she was. Harry, her younger brother and Tom O'Brien who were all so fond of her, Tom's Father was killed when Minnie was hurt and because he lived with them he seemed like a brother to her. Time went by Minnie met Harry again on the station. He held the door open for her, got into the same carriage and sat looking at her. Well Minnie have you had time to think about us, I know how I feel about you and if you can forgive me for being the son of a German I would like us to see each other again, do you like me enough to give it a try? My parents said to tell you there are no hard feelings because of what you said, they understood how you felt. My sister Edie liked you a lot and asked when were you coming round again? I can't bring myself to come round to your house but give me time and perhaps I will see you again I have missed you very much. Now I have had time to think it was our own shell that caused all the trouble.

After work Minnie was talking to Harry and Tom telling them all about Harry and what he had said. Tom advised Minnie to think about it as her happiness depended on if she could get over her hatred for the Germans. Tom did not want Minnie to go out with Harry he always hoped she would love him in time. Tom got Minnie on her own determined to tell her how he felt about her never before had he ever said anything to her, now he was afraid of losing her to Harry. You have always treated me as a brother but I

feel more for you than that I can't stand by and see you with another man so please tell me if you intend going back to Harry, if your answer is yes then I have made up my mind to join the Merchant Navy so please Minnie give me an answer as soon as you can. Oh dear now what do I do? two men in love with me and I was thinking no-one would ever want me being a cripple. Life is never quite as bad as you think it is going to be. Because Tom declared his love for her it convinced her she would never like anyone as much as she liked Harry, so given time perhaps it was meant to be. Sadly, Tom joined the Merchant Navy and the family all got together and gave him a little party.

When the family got together, it was lovely it was like having a band playing in the room; four could play the piano. Minnie's Mother never took any notice of the noise ten children (three adopted) she was quite used to it. The boys shook hands with Tom and wished him luck in his chosen career, most of them did not know it was because of his feeling for Minnie. He was very glad she had not told them about how he felt. The next day Tom had to join his ship it was so painful to say goodbye. Late that night putting his bits and pieces together was trying to creep out not to wake anyone up could not bring himself to say goodbye to Minnie. Twisting and turning for most of the night Minnie had not slept, what had she done telling Tom she did not love him now he was going away because of her, was she making a big mistake again in her life? She asked for help and it came to her, on hearing a noise she went downstairs just as Tom was leaving. You would not go without saying good bye would you? yes Minnie I would, it would be too painful to say goodbye to you. I will leave you with this thought if you ever need me I will be there if it is humanly possible, I wish you all the good luck in the world and hope you have made the right decision. We have never kissed each other properly, a peck at Christmas or if we said goodbye that was all. Minnie put her arms around him and said "OkTom, I am so sorry you being Catholic and me Church of England, I never gave love a thought, you were my brother and as a brother I loved you". They kissed, then Tom was gone.

The rest of the family could not understand why he had left like that. Minnie's sister Grace had guessed why and said to Minnie "I know why he was upset he was in love with you". Minnie was to upset to answer her, as Grace was years younger than her and would only pull her leg about it her head was in enough turmoil as it was without putting up with her sister pulling her leg. Minnie went to her bedroom, not very often could she be alone with three of them sleeping in the same room, so the tears flowed she felt better after and decided to let fate decide what was to happen. As if to answer her question her Mother called up the stairs Minnie there is someone here to see you, coming downstairs eyes all red and puffy there was Harry; what is the matter? why have you been crying? I was a bit upset about Tom going away but he will be alright a strong young man like him will do well in the Navy. I tried to get into the Navy but this weak chest of mine they would not take me, she had noticed that his breathing was not very good; why, what is the matter with your chest? It's a long story we will go for a walk in the park and you can tell me all about it , off they went.

Harry said his Sister Edie, his Brother Len were made to help in the factory sewing and pressing suits. They were young but their Father made them work to get the business going. Steam from the ironing and fumes from the cleaning fluid got on their chests and they all had asthma, so after the factory closed down we all seemed a lot better and our health improved. Minnie felt her heart go out to him and she knew then and there that she had picked the right man. Straight away she knew she would never ever like his Dad but that did not matter, Harry was going to be her partner for life.

Harry went on working in the West End cutting out suits for a big tailoring factory, while Minnie worked testing eggs. They saved a bit of money because Harry had asked her to marry him and her answer had been yes. It will take a long time for us to save as Harry used to get one farthing for every five suits he cut out. Never mind, we have plenty of time before us. Minnie would try not to go to Harry's house if she knew his Father was there. She got to like Edie and Len very much,



## Chapter 5

Arrangements were made for a quiet little wedding at St. Luke's Church the following year in June. There were quite a few weddings being arranged for that year; Harry's sister Edie - they were making a great fuss over her wedding, a white wedding two months before Minnie's. At home Lizzy was also planning a white wedding, Minnie wondered if Tom would try to get home for his sister's wedding, that would be held in the Catholic church and her name O'Brien would then be Lizzy Plunket, how funny to have to get used to a different name. I don't really want to change my name do you? she asked her adopted sister. Lizzy said I had not thought much about that as long as I love my Fred the only thing is he will be away a lot he was also in the Merchant Navy.

I heard from Tom, he asked about you he said if he can he would try and get home for the wedding Minnie felt herself blush a little wondering how she would feel when she saw him again. Christmas came and went had a small party at home as everyone seemed to be saving their money for the weddings. January was a very cold month, Harry caught a very bad cold they brought him home from work coughing up blood. Minnie went round to his house to see what was wrong, he did not meet her when he said he would. It is nothing for you to worry about it is just a bad cold I have been coughing too hard. Minnie asked what the doctor had said? We have not had the doctor, they charge 2 shillings and six pence to come to the house and we have got the wedding to pay for; this wedding is more important to you than your son's health, again she had said the wrong thing but they were so mean to the boys. Minnie went for the doctor, he came and said Harry's chest was very weak he would have to stay in bed and he advised him to give up anything to do with pressing and steam. Now what were they going to do? that was the only job he knew how to do, but if they were to be married he must try something else. It took a long time for Harry's cough to get better and he was out of work for a long time. It was said he should have a test for TB again, but this cost money and they did not have any to spare. Harry looked everywhere for other jobs but could not find any so went back to the one he knew although he knew it was not good for him. Edie's wedding came and it was a lovely day her name was now changed to Edie Rogers. Minnie thought that's better than Fillman, but knew she was to get used to it if and when they got married.

The sun was shining on 10th June and Minnie's wedding day had arrived. A quiet wedding it was if it could be with all her family standing by to make sure it was a good day. Her mother had put a few things together at her house and once they all got together the music began the singing. Harry relaxed for the first time that day put his arms round Minnie and said not too bad being Mrs. Fillman is it and she agreed with him. What a difference when they were in her house all the laughing family around her. She dreaded the time when they had to go back to Harry's house. There was little room in the Monk's house so back they had to go to Harry's house. Lizzy's wedding was put off as Fred's ship had been held up for repairs. Lizzy gave Minnie a kiss saying it's good to see you happy don't forget my turn next, we are hoping to get a flat. Minnie thought, lucky thing we have got to live with my in-laws, not for long if I can help it. She knew money was very tight and Harry was in and out of work with his bad chest. Sister-in-law Edie told her parents she was expecting Oh what a fuss they made. Mrs. Fillman, Alice was her name, was buying all sorts of things for her daughter. A baby's cot and pram, nappy nighties, and knitting all sorts of things. Harry lost his job, he lost so much time he seemed to be getting weaker every day. Minnie's small wage did not go very far every week money had to be paid to live.

Harry was always needing medicine. Often she would borrow money from her Mother or Brother Len. Then what should have been a wonderful thing in her life frightened her, yes she was having a baby however would she manage with Harry out of work her bit of money not enough to cover their needs, she would go on working as long as she could. What was more worrying was what effect all this would have on her bad leg? There was no knee cap and her leg was much shorter than the other standing all day with extra weight and the big dent in her side where the shrapnel went through and the removed three ribs. How would this stand up to all that stretching. Come on Minnie this is not like you looking for trouble,

before its here. She decided not to tell anyone yet she did not want to worry any more than she need. Standing every day at her job and not eating properly soon took their toll.

One evening Harry said you are not looking very well was anything wrong? No I am just worried about you. Edie got Minnie on her own she asked her if she was pregnant, living in a house all together its hard to keep a secret. There are personal things like washing in those days, once a month there was bits of sheeting to be washed. Minnie did not know how to answer, the colour of her cheeks gave her away. Don't tell Harry yet I don't want to worry him; You want to look after yourself more you are looking very peaky. Easy for her to talk, thought Minnie, everything was going her way she never offered any of the lovely things she had for her baby and her husband had a good job so it was time to tell Harry before he heard it from anyone else. Harry had gone to bed early not feeling very well, so it was Minnie's chance to talk to him. I have something to tell you, you are going to be a Dad. The silence seemed to go on for ever then he looked at her and said well these things do happen when two people are married and love each other, but I am very pleased. Harry do you know what you are saying how on earth are we going to manage, you with no work how long can I go on working? We don't have enough money to feed us let alone a baby which by the way is as much your worry as mine. One thing led to another and they had their first quarrel. Harry's father heard this going on and knocked on the bedroom door; What is going on. It is alright Dad this is between Minnie and I, we are having a baby and Minnie is worrying how we are going to manage not only money but the room. Well I don't know what you want me to do about it you know Edie will be having her baby and staying here because her Bert is being sent abroad with his job and we will not let her be on her own. The best thing for you to do is find a place of your own, you can't expect us to keep you. No said Minnie very crossly, you never wanted us here in the first place you said I would be a burden to Harry because I was a cripple, well let me tell you this it is going to be the other way round and it will be me looking after Harry. Now she was mad you have done nothing to help your own son or me and now I don't need you or your help. Harry's Father walked out of the room I seemed to think this has happened before but it will not happen again.

Minnie put a few things in a bag, I am going back home, you know where I am if you want me. We are never going to get anywhere if we stay here. You can't go anywhere at this time of the night. You watch me I won't stay in this house a minute longer, it was getting dark and it was quite a long walk. Knocking on her mother's door, 255 Victoria Dock Road, seemed like heaven. Her Mother unlocked the shop door, who is it? Mum it's me Minnie. Whatever are you going out at this time of night and where is Harry. Before she could say anything the fears flowed, as always this called for a cup of tea a good standby when there were tears. Minnie calmed down, Mum it's been awful living in the Fillman's house, they don't care about Harry or Len it's all Edie, she is having a baby and they are doing everything for her, while we have nothing, you know Harry has been ill and out of a job and they still expected me to pay rent and keep ourselves in food out of the little bit of money I was earning. Yes and what also is wrong her Mother had 10 children of her own so it was obvious what was wrong, you are having a baby no way would you be so upset otherwise now what are we to do with you, you know what your Father is like when has had a drink? Yes, I. do, when we all hid under the bed when he came home drunk frightened he was coming in our room to beat us, you always got the worse of it Mum trying to protect us. Len and Harry, Minnie's brothers came in thank goodness if Dad started anything they would protect her, Hello, what is up is something wrong you have been crying. I am so unhappy living with my Harry's parents I will not stay there any longer, it not Harry's fault he is torn between us.

Then there was a banging at the door, it is your Father we thought he was in so bolted the shop door. You had better let him in, you know what he is like when he has been drinking. Len unbolted the door, his Father pushed passed him knocking him over; Nice when you are locked out of your own house. Harry rushed out to help Len, their Father went right into the room where Minnie and her Mother were sat. He grabbed hold of his wife and tried to push her upstairs before he could the boys came in. Don't you dare touch our mother or our sister, it was the first time they had ever stood up to their Father and even now they only got the better of him because he was drunk. They got him upstairs to bed, there was a room in

the attic one single bed. Minnie's Mother said no-one knows what I have put up with from that man, the last time he got drunk he called me a very bad name, I told him then I was finished with him and now he has turned on his own children. I will never speak to him again. Now boys bring down the double bed for Minnie and I, this will all be sorted out in the morning.

## Chapter 6

Waking up next morning after a very bad night finding herself beside her mother, Minnie wondered what she had done. Her only thoughts were to get out of her father-in-law's house. Sister Grace, the only girl left at home now, came in to see what all the fuss was last night. Nothing for you to worry about.

Minnie's mother got the two boys to help her move things around. One room downstairs was made into a bedsit. Minnie's mother had the shop, the room behind the shop was her sitting room then the back was her bedsit. Up stairs the three rooms were made into bedrooms, One for Grace, one for two brothers, the other for Minnie and Harry, if he wanted to come there to live. Your father can stay up in the attic, you can take him a bit of food if you want to, I have finished with him for ever; I will never speak to him again. Len said to Harry she really means it this time, she said for years she would, now she has done it. Wait for the fireworks, when Dad gets up we had better hang around today in case of trouble.

Harry, Minnie's husband, came round. Is Minnie here? she went off in a temper last night, thought she would come home so it was best to let her cool off. Find her upstairs, Minnie was putting a few bits of furniture in the room her mother had given her, Up and talk to her and see if you can make her see sense, you are welcome to live here if you want to. I told her place is with you, stay here if you like until you decide what you want to do. Harry went upstairs to talk to her. Minnie said she was sorry for all the trouble she had caused but no-one was going to talk her into going back. If it is all right with your mother, we will stay as long as you agree to find our own place when we can afford to, throwing her arms around Harry she gave him a big kiss; thank you my dear, I know I can cope with anything now you are here and I am happy to be home.

From upstairs came a loud voice, what is going on here, what am I doing upstairs in the attic? Where is Minnie? Minnie thinking her father meant her, went up to him shaking a bit. Since her injuries her father had been kinder to her, than any of the children, so asking her father to sit down I want to explain to you why I am here. After she told him; how unhappy she had been and wanted to come home, and I am having a baby - god knows what is in front of me. Harry is not very strong, he tries so hard but it's too much for him. He sat listening to his daughter, felt sorry for her and closer than he ever did before. Alright girl, we will give it a try, you stay here until times are better for you, now what is all this with your mother why has she pushed me up here? Dad you went out drinking again after you promised you would not, called Mum a bad name and started on the boys I think you have cooked your goose this time Mum means it, she has had enough. Give her time she will forgive me, Minnie could not believe how well he was taking all this, perhaps he was a bit more afraid of the sons now he was getting older. He let things go, stayed in his room most of the time, he had an allotment and a little hut where he would spend most of his days, no matter how hard he tried to speak to his wife there was no answer.

Now Minnie's mother got things worked out Minnie was to work on the stall in Rathbone Street, she would stay and look after the shop, and Harry could take the horse and cart morning with the bundle of clothes, when he came back see to the horse then the days he felt well enough he could make over the men's suits cleaning and pressing, they will sell much better if they look nice so the secondhand clothes started to do much better. Harry's health improved, Minnie loved working on the stall, she would sit on the corner of the stall and made lots of friends. Some she knew at school, they got to know she was honest and would tell them if there was anything wrong with the clothes. Harry was more of a gentleman, he had never had anything to do with horses, but he was determined to have a go. Out he would go early in the morning to get the horse and cart ready.

Len would go with him to help, but he soon got the hang of it for Minnie's sake as she now seemed so much happier, some evenings she would be sat at the piano other times there would be the bundle of clothes to get ready, her own little bundle was growing inside she wondered what it would be, and if she would have a bad time having the baby because of her side. Now she felt so much happier, a job she liked doing, earning a bit of money. Yes it will be alright she had faced much worse things. The time for her baby was the end of July, meanwhile Len had brought home a little dark haired girl called Gladys, they met at a dance hall always danced together and it was not long before they got engaged. Harry and Len bought an old Austin car they were determined not to let it beat them. It would be lovely to take Gladys

out in the car, also we will try and give Mum a ride, if she will ride. It took a lot of persuading to get their mother in the car but when it was ready they talking her into going in it. Off they went Len, Harry and their mother. Everything went fine, she was enjoying herself as it was her first trip in a car. They stopped by a sawmills to buy some wood for the floor, the engine was fine but the wood in the back seat was rotten. Unfortunately they stopped the car on a hill, Len and Harry went in to get the wood, their mother stayed in the car. She called out to them as the car started running backwards down the hill standing up to see if she could get out, both her feet went through the floor. All the boys could see was the car running away with her feet running like mad. Lucky for her it hit against a wall and stopped, getting her feet out and finding out she was not hurt, they all had a good laugh, that old car went on for years after that.

Harry's health was not very good so the brothers said we better sell the horse and take the bundles by car before we go to work, as it is getting too much for Harry. Harry was sorry to see the horse go as he had grown quite fond of him. Minnie's time for her baby to be born late in June. She was staying at home everything was ready the midwife who was coming to be with her said if everything goes alright well and good, if not you will have to go to hospital. I hope not.

Minnie's father had been very subdued since the quarrel, when he saw Minnie struggling up the stairs with some of her baby's things, he said I think you need to have those rooms downstairs. You tell the boys I said they are to bring their things up here, as you will need to be near the kitchen and one flight of stairs is enough for you. We don't want you going in the hospital, they kill you off in the hospital. Minnie laughed at his cockney accent, she had never known him to be so kind. So once again the bedrooms were all changed around, what a nuisance I am making of myself; Never you mind about that, you are the only one that has bothered with me, cleaning my room and finding time to give me a bit of food. I am sorry for not being a better father to you all. It is too late now I know to make amends but I will try to help you all I can. Minnie could hardly believe her ears this tough old man was being kind to her he had never been to a doctor in his life and if a tooth ever worried him, out would come his penknife. He would not stop until he had got the tooth out This man was now showing his soft side for the first time in his life. She tried to thank him, but he quickly went up to his room, any sort of kindness would have been too much for him. Minnie quickly got on with her jobs as she knew her baby would not be long now. Her mother had said she would run the stall; You can mind the shop until you get over having your baby. Not much sympathy from her mum, she had to struggle having ten children, taking on three more and an unkind husband, no wonder she had got hard.

Waking Harry up early one morning; You had better get mum also the midwife, the baby is on the way. Ten hours later Minnie was still struggling to bring her baby into the world. Having one stiff leg there was very little pushing power. At last, her baby came, it was a little girl; fair hair and blue eyes. Looking down at this lovely little girl; Well I am glad you have come at last, now what are we going to call you? Harry said a couple of names, Minnie's mother said well by tradition the first girl should be named after her mother and grandmother. Oh know we can't have three Minies in one family, well your sister Edie named her first daughter Minnie, well I think we will call her Mina, that should please everyone. So Mina it was. She was such a good baby that Harry enjoyed looking after her. She slept quite a lot and he could get on with his pressing and making over the suits. Where the knees went out of shape, he would press them back in shape, turn an overcoat into a child's hat and coat. Some days he was not very well, his breathing was very bad he was very careful not to breath over Mina when his cough was bad.

A message came one day that his sister Edie had been taken in to the TB hospital. His mother was looking after her baby, her name was Doris they said having TB she must not be with the baby. This worried Harry very much what could he do he had no choice but to look after Mina. June July August were lovely summer months so Mina. spent hours in an old big black pram out in the yard, he was always very careful not to kiss her. Harry said to Minnie one night when she came home from work, I will never forgive myself if this baby caught TB from me. Now don't go looking for trouble, it will find us soon enough. He was such a good husband, a cup of tea, was always ready for her and the baby looking after. What about the winter when I cant put her out in the air away from me? Tomorrow is

Sunday I will get Mum to have the baby and we will go to see your sister Edie, have a word with the doctor to see how infectious you are. He didn't want to go, but knew he must.

Edie was very pleased to see them, it is a good job you came today as I am going home tomorrow; Are you better? We shall never be better Harry, you Len and I have not got TB, we have got emphysema, the doctor came to tell Edie she could go home and she would be alright to look after the baby. Harry asked him if he was safe as they did not have the money to have a test and I have been so worried about my baby as well. You can have a test we will do it free. You realize your condition will get worse as emphysema damages the lung, so it causes you to get bad coughs and colds. Also a bad winter, you could get, but the good news is that it is not so contagious as TB. Harry's face was a picture, what a relief - he could go on looking after his little girl as long as he was careful and kept as well as he could. So life went on for another year working together.

## CHAPTER 7

Time passed by, life became quite liveable. Minnie going every day to her work on the stall, Harry looking after the baby and helping all he could in the shop. He also gave his Father-in-law a bit of dinner when he could. The winter months were very hard on Minnie, freezing cold sitting on her stall trying to make a living. Most of the money had to go to her Mother to pay the 'man'. He was called the man because when he came once a month, every one would get excited and wonder if there would be anything for them, sometimes there would be a little doll or something for Mina in the way of clothes. Mina had her first birthday, the year came and went, things went well in the summer time, but the winter was very bad for Harry. Every Winter he would be ill, Minnie took out a health club for him, finding it very hard to find money for doctors. Also he had tests now and then to see if his lungs were getting worse.

Mina's 2nd birthday came she was an easy little girl to look after and sister Grace would take her out and help look after her. Grace was growing up and seemed to have a few boy friends. When Mina was 3 Minnie found her self pregnant again, now what was she going to do they had only just managed to get a few bits of second hand furniture together, now this would mean another mouth to feed and could she go on working. Harry was worried as well when you can't do any more; I must try and get some work, you will stay home. Minnie would struggle on as long as she could. Mina was 4 in the June so they would take her at school, that would be a big help. This baby was not due until the winter, so no good worrying until nearer the time.

Before she knew it November was here, Harry had a very bad cough - it got worse, good job she had joined the hospital club. It was only tuppence a week, but without it there would be no doctor. So the doctor came to Harry; You have got pneumonia, so with your bad chest that means hospital. Minnie was beside herself with worry, she could not go to work with Harry being so ill and no-one to look after the baby. It would mean she would have to visit Harry in hospital and no money, she didn't have money for the bus fare. Telling her Father that she had no money to give him his bit of tea that she had been doing since he had been living in the attic; Dont worry girl, I will buy a bit of food as long as you cook it for me, not much stuff growing on the allotment at the moment there will be a few sprouts, I will pop along and get you some in the morning, that little girl needs food. Mina gets her dinner at school, they have made me give her poor man's dinners, I didn't want to because it made me feel I could not look after her, Harry has got to go into hospital so I had no choice. The ambulance came to take Harry to hospital, Minnie was glad Mina was at school before Harry went as he had a very bad haemorrhage. She was so glad to see the men come to help her. Harry was in hospital for a month, so it was a worry to visit Harry, try to work when she could, also to meet Mina when ever she could. Grace would bring her home that was a great help.

Christmas was almost here, there would be no toys or clothes for the little girl. The Church St. Lukes, where Minnie was married, had a Mother's meeting, a friend had told Minnie if she could go; they had a sale of toys for poor children, also clothes. It's the only way to get a few things for Mina's Christmas stocking. Thank goodness she went, finished work early and went to the church meeting. They had lots of toys and clothes for poor children, so her little girl would have something in her stocking at Xmas. Don't worry about Christmas Harry, then she told him all about the Church and how good they had been. This cheered Harry up. it was awful for him to know there was no way he could buy anything for his little girl. Christmas morning came Mina was looking for her toys; and in a pillow case by her bed was a DOLL THAT Minnie had dressed like a baby with wool she had got from her bundle. There was two new pennies tied in the corner of a handkerchief made out of a bit of sheeting, one apple one orange and a few nuts, her little eyes lit up when she saw the doll and asked if Father Christmas gave all little girls nuts and fruit for Christmas if they have been good, not knowing her Mother had done this to make it look more.

The weather was too cold for Minnie to go to work in January. Snow was thick, the car could not be taken out. They said Harry could come home, the house was very cold; Minnie went round the coal merchant and bought a bag of coal with a bit of money. Len and Harry, her brothers, had given her for

Xmas, no way could she let Harry come out of hospital into a cold room. The coal merchant used to sell a bag of coal as many pounds as you could carry or as much as you could afford.

A week after Harry came home, Len said he wanted to get engaged to Gladys. He would look for a flat to do up when they could afford to get married they would. Minnie did not want him to as she felt with the new baby due soon she might be pushing him out. Working on her stall for a few more weeks, it was so cold once or twice she felt like giving up but knew she must do as much as she could before the baby came. Looking at a stall near hers there was a big black pram; I could just do with a pram, how much do you want for it? Knowing Minnie she said how much can you afford? Not a lot, but I can pay you so much each week. So it was agreed for two pounds. The pram she had for Mina her sister Edie had lent her, but Edie was having her second baby so it had to go back. Thank goodness she had found one asking the stall holder if she would keep it for her until her baby was born. It was thought to be unlucky to have a pram in the house before the baby. Don't know where these old superstitions come from passed down from one generation to another.

Harry's health seemed to be a bit better, good job with another baby coming along. Before she hardly got the words out and the baby started to make it's way into the world. Another little girl arrived in the early hours of the morn, very pretty big, blue eyes and fair hair what shall we call her? Anything said Harry, not Minnie - we have got three of them already. Good job we can laugh about it, I just don't know how we are going to manage, but we will get by somehow. A week or two later Minnie was back at work selling as much as she could to make up for lost time. Having to work, Minnie could not feed her baby so Harry soon got the hang of bottle feeding and bum changing, again it was only bits of sheeting cut in squares, so washing had to be done every day. They survived another year, when Eva was 18 months old, she was called Eva short for Evelyn. Minnie found she was pregnant again Oh no I Just can't have another baby we cant feed the two we have now, telling her Mother what can I do I can't have another baby. Her Mother said well I said that after my third baby then went on until I had ten we had no choice but there are things you can get to get rid of a baby, don't ask me I would no know or else I might not have had ten.

Minnie went to her sister Edie; I don't know I wouldn't but having my third one if I knew. She tried jumping down the stairs, someone gave her tablets, one old lady said slippery elm bark, all the old things ladies would try sometimes they would work sometimes they did not. No, it was not meant to be, the new baby said; I am here to stay so, for another nine months. Minnie did not try any more - she was afraid of damaging the baby. One day she met her sister-in-law, Edie Rogers; she had one baby. Doris, how is it you don't fall for babies? It's too late now but I will help you after this baby is born. They had no choice in the old days, but things were getting a bit better. That did not help Minnie now she was going to have her third baby and that was that she made it quite clear this baby was not wanted and must be the last. The months went on,

Eva had her 2nd birthday. Harry was coping with the two children. Work was picking up a bit. Len was finding work on the docks most days. They had to report for work every day showing there dock tickets and where picked if they were needed. He went ahead and found a flat, was doing it up ready when he could afford to be married to his Gladys. Harry never had any money to go anywhere so his Mother-in-law said to Len and Harry how about treating Harry to see the Derby? It is on tomorrow June 2nd ; Minnie was not at work, too near her time. So Harry was asked if he would like to go as a treat from the brothers-in-law, asking Minnie would she mind if he went? I won't go if you are worried about the baby coming, I think there is a couple more days yet so you go. We have no money for you to bet but it will be a nice treat for you. I will ask Grace if she will take Eva out and Mina will be at school anyway. The little old black car came out and was cleaned. I hope you boys have mended the floor I don't want to run all that way, remembering the first ride she had in it. Off they went early in the morning. Harry was excited, he had never been to the Derby before. In fact it's the first time I have been in a car, giving Minnie a kiss now are you sure you feel ok? Yes, off you go you; can't help much if you are here. Minnie had plenty to do, Mina off to School, Grace took Eva out in her pram. Take her over to the park



and please keep her out as long as you can I have a lot of work to do. No sooner had she started to get down to her work when the first tummy pains started. Oh no not now, it's too early and I am all on my own. Called out to see if her father was home, but he had gone to the allotment. It might only be a tummy pain, lets hope it will go away. Got on turning her bed round the way the nurse wanted it to be, Oh dear, another pain - now I must get help.

## CHAPTER 8

No good panicking there is no-one here so get on and do a few jobs, just hope Grace comes back before anything happens. Minnie got the room straight in between pains. This baby is not going to wait, so she looked out of the window to see if she could see anyone about; no-one, when you need somebody there is no-one. The pains were coming much faster now, again looking out of the window praying for someone anyone to come along, there was a lady who lived down the road Mrs. somebody did not know her name; excuse me could you help me my baby is going to be born very soon and I have no-one here? Minnie told her where the midwife lived, not far away - she only hoped she was in. The woman said she would go and get her if she could; if not I will find somebody don't worry. Don't worry, she thought to herself, I must get down the stairs to open the door, as her Mother had locked up the shop well before going out for the day. She managed the stairs slowly unlocked the door and waited. Luck was with her because it was not long before the midwife came, helped Minnie upstairs. It was a good job I was at home, I had not long got in and this baby is in a hurry to be born. They got to the bedroom the midwife said; did you manage to do all this moving by yourself? you must be a very strong woman. Well I had to be strong, a sick husband and soon three children - I don't know how I will manage? One thing at a time Minnie, lets get this baby into the world. Less than an hour passed before there was a loud yell from the baby. This one has powerful lungs, not going to be quiet like the other two. Minnie felt a little ashamed to think that she never wanted this baby. Is it a boy? Harry would have liked a boy. No, its a lovely little girl as dark as the other two were fair, lots of long black hair, dark skin, blue eyes; very much like your husband. There is someone knocking at the shop door, that will be my sister Grace with my little girl Eva. Can you call out the window and ask her to meet Mina from school as no-one is here to meet her. This the midwife did and Grace understood what had happened.

The midwife cleaned Minnie and her baby up, put the baby in her arms. one look at her dark skin and black hair. Yes, she was like her father at least that should please him. The midwife left Minnie, showing the new baby to her sisters. Now what do you think of her? Mina though she was a pretty baby, Eva did not know, as she was only two it did not mean much to her. That sounds like your Father coming home, what a surprise he will have. Go downstairs Mina and open the door; don't say anything about the baby, let us see his face when he sees the baby.

Harry came in all excited as a horse had won that sounded something like Beno. Minnie's Mother, Harry and Len had all won money on it, not Harry he did not have any money to put on anyway. Mina said we have a big surprise for you; What is that something you have done at school? No, come and see. Alright, I will. Where is your Mum? You will see upstairs in the bedroom. Has she hurt herself? No, is she ill rushing up the stairs? He just stood there looking at his wife then the baby. Oh so upset to think Minnie had been through all this while he was out. Is it a boy? no another girl. He showed no emotion, he did not want Minnie to know how much he would have loved a son. Picking up his new daughter and giving her a long look; Do you know she looks a lot like me, the other two are like you but this one is me again, so perhaps she will be a tomboy. Everything is fine as long as you are both well, I can't tell you how sorry I am for going out at a time like this. Don't worry so, you were not to know the baby would be born today, so our third little girl was born on Derby day - that is one day I will never forget. So here I am no way was I going to be got rid of, the third baby of Minnie and Harry Fillman, the writer of this story as true as remember it being told me, as I grew up.

At three months old my Mother decided to go hop picking and take me. Dad said no she is far too young. We took the other two, yes, but they were a bit older. The weeks spent hop picking did my Father the world of good, his health was so much better that Minnie would do anything to go. My gran could never go because someone had to stay looking after the shop. So it was decided we would go to hopping. This was always at the end of August and beginning of September. Why I don't know but we always went at night. A removal van would pick all the families that were going at a point. The children were put at the top of the removal lorry with all the pillows and blankets. They need not to take lots of clothes, and pots and pans and wellington boots were left in a store room if they did not fit one child they would fit another. Everyone got on the lorry, except my mum. She waited until last because of her stiff leg, two

chairs were put on the back of the lorry, so she didn't get in anyone's way. I was cuddled up in mothers arms sound asleep, off went the lorry. On one of the lonely dark roads in Kent as there was no street lights in those country roads, our lorry went off the road and into a ditch almost overturning. My mother tried to stop herself falling out, I was flung out of her arms, no-one knew where. Everyone had to get out of the lorry. The men got it righted up, the women were looking for me, torches and matches were going looking everywhere. When at last one of the men heard a cry, it was me across the road in a bush. This story was told me time and time again, as I got older my first time at hop picking at three months old was nearly my last.

I don't know to this day how my mother managed, three children one just a baby. She had to; drag or pull a big heavy bin full of hops along the drifts as they were called, pull down a vine full of hops, sit on the side of the bin and pick all the hops off, picking out the leaves. Some families could pick as much as 30 bushels a day. We went back to Kent to the same farm every year until I was 8. I don't remember going after that. My dad was known as a poll puller. After the vines were pulled, he had to go along and get the last few hop left on the top of the wires. He had a bit extra money for doing that job and he felt so proud to be able to give Minnie a bit extra. They did not get their money until the end of the hop picking, but if money was needed for food, the tally man would give a token to spend that would be taken off at the end of the working holiday. The families would all pick hops all the morning, walking 3 miles to the hop fields. Stopping only for a sandwich and a cup of tea midday, a pot of water was boiled on a primus stove. At 5 o'clock we would hear "pull no more vines", everyone stopped and got ready for a 3 mile walk home.

Every day a cart would come round and bring two faggot of wood for the families to cook their dinner on in the cook houses. A big cooking pot was hung from an iron bar. One day if you were lucky, the farmer would have a rabbit or two. Rabbit stew was a luxury, boiled in the big pot with as many veg as mum could get. We were washed and fed with what ever mum managed to get at that time. Ready for bed, we laid on a bed of hay. The bed ticks were filled with the hay we all slept very well, never knew if it was the hay or the sulphur that was put on the hops to stop disease, put on the hops while they were growing. All I knew was I was afraid to sleep in case the earwigs got in my ears, so mum had to put cotton wool in my ears.

Before coming hop picking the first year mum's adopted brother Charlie, Tom's brother came to see the new baby. He brought with him his wife Alma. When she saw me she asked my mum if she could be my godmother, asking my dad if that was alright? He said yes, and he liked the name of Alma very much, that is why I was named Alma.

The years I remembered going hop picking were wonderful, the sounds of people singing in the fields. One would start and they would all join in, some in tune, some singing in harmony, some out of tune. All sounding very happy, it must have been very hard work for mums and dads, we children had a lovely time climbing trees, playing chase five stones was a favourite game. My cousin and I played that game for hours. The best time was Sundays, as Saturdays were busy cleaning the hut getting clothes ready for the next week, a bit of shopping. Vans used to come round with veg, all sorts of things. There was never money to spare, only for enough food for us. Sundays were lovely, Len and Harry (mum's brothers) would come for the day. Harry would bring his accordion, we would all sit round the fire singing, someone else would play the mouth organ. It was hard work but a lovely atmosphere.

As I got older we were made to pick one umbrella full of hops before we were allowed to go and play. Each year it got more and more. My sister Mina had to stay by the bin all day picking. It was a working holiday so most of the children had to do their share to help with the money. So our working holiday came to an end. The last day was lovely, all the young people were put in the bin and hops were put down their necks. Every week most people put a penny or what they could afford towards a bin's mans ball as it was called. So on the last night there, a room in a pub nearby was hired for the night. Everyone had to do a song or something. Three sisters used to sing, I could tap dance quite well so did my bit, went round with the hat for a few pennies, lots of cheek.



## CHAPTER 9

Hop picking over everyone sad to say goodbye for another year, lots of the people were related so they would be seeing each other they all lived close. So pack up and home again on that lorry and hope we all got home, safe leaving a few things there ready for the next year all being well. Home to 255 Victoria Dock Road, nothing much had changed, gran had been busy in the shop, missed the money from the stall but was glad Harry was well and earned a bit of independence for himself. The few pounds they earned at hopping made all the difference for a few weeks.

Mum was back on her stall the following Monday, Mina back at school so dad had to look after me and Eva. Christmas came and went, we had our usual one present., nuts, orange, apple, made handkerchief, a new penny, a few sweets, and was lucky to get that. June 2nd came, my second birthday, Eva had started school in the beginning of the year, they took them on their birthdays at four or very near. She was not a strong child, always getting colds. September came round again another trip to the hop fields, all went well until someone gave me a gob stopper which got stuck in my throat. Mum thought I was dead as she told me when I got older. I had turned blue in the face and Auntie Lilly had pushed her fingers down my throat just in time to draw breath. The gob stopper had gone down far enough for me to breath. You are more worry to me than the other two put together, so that was my second life gone what next?

Another two years came and went it was time for me to go to school. A few weeks before my fourth birthday Mum took me to school, put me in a class room. When I looked round mum was gone. I was told to wait for my sister to take me home, as Mina came out later than me. But I could not wait to get home, so started walking took a wrong turning instead of coming to Custom House I was on my way to Plaistow. A man asked me why I was crying? I told him I was lost; Where do you live? he asked. I told him 255 Micky Mouse Street; You mean Custom House? Oh no I don't it's 255 Micky Mouse Street. Well, I will take you to where I think it is and you can see. Holding his hand he walked me home and as soon as I saw it, I ran saying there. I told you it was Micky Mouse Street. He laughed at me waited until I went in. Another lucky day for me it turned out as he knew my dad and told him what had happened. Mum gave me a good smack for not doing as I was told. Poor Mina was looking everywhere for me, she had met Eva but I was gone. Did not do that again.

Aunt Grace had been going out with Bunny, real name was Jim; and there was talk of a wedding, Mum and Dad were busy making two bridesmaids dresses for Mina and Eva. Why not me? Because you can't do as you are told, so you can't be a bridesmaid to Aunt Grace. Aunt Grace's wedding was a pretty wedding, a few friends at home, the usual music from all the family. She moved out into a flat. We always seemed to be moving rooms, when somebody got married. Mum used to visit Aunt Grace and take me with her. I remember her crying, she did not seem very happy. I heard mum say something about a baby. When I was 5, a week after my birthday, Aunt Grace had a little girl named June. We went round to see the new baby, they were laying on a mattress on the floor as Bunny had spent their money on gambling he was not very kind to her. My mother thought how lucky she was to have a kind man, as her step sister Lizzy often came home with a black eye, and Grace was very unhappy so that's life, some good some bad.

My sister Eva started acting funny, could not keep still. We used to copy her not understanding what was wrong with her. She was taken to hospital and a big long word St. Vitus Dance. I did not know what it meant until I was older, Eva was in hospital a long time. It was nice just sleeping with Mina, we got on very well together. When Eva came out of hospital the St. Vitus Dance had affected her brain, they told my mother when she went to get her home from the hospital, that she must not be worried by school work or anything. Mina was a good quiet child, Eva got away with murder because they didn't want to worry her, so it was Alma the tomboy who was always in trouble.

My Dad's health got worse, sometimes he got very depressed and nothing I did was right. Mina had to go shopping for Gran, she had sixpence a week, also mum's shopping. Eva never did anything. I was made to go to the coal man's place most nights through the winter and carry 14 lbs of coal. It was heavy, so I used to rest it on window sills all along the road. So it was home from school, change your clothes, not

that school clothes were much better than the others. Dad would give us some bread and dripping and a drink, take turns washing up, Eva used to get out of that as well.

We were allowed out to play around the corner. We would go meet our cousins, tie a rope around the lamp post and swing round and round until somebody shouted "police". I would shin up the post get down the rope that was very precious, as we had to use it time and time again. We would have races, a game called knock down ginger, some old cans and a ball throw the ball at the cans and how many you knocked down you had to catch that many children. I feel very sorry for children today as they have so much but not half the fun. We would play out until dark or until we were called in, in we had to go.

Saturdays was a real treat, Dad would save his farthings give them to us to go up the tuppenny rush which was the picture house called the bug house, the right name was The Appollo. There was always a queue, a man would be waiting to push the children along the forms. The last child on would push the first child off the end so he had to run around and start again. How thrilling when Flash Gordon was about to be killed and we would have to wait until the next week, he was alright. By then we had peanut shell's thrown at us and our hair pulled. I always said I will tell my big sister of you and when I did if their big sister or brother was bigger still I would get the smack. If Dad had enough money we would always go. We had a cousin named Vera her nick name as Bunking because she never had any money and would try and bunk in. One day she put her coat over her head thinking no one could see her, but nine times out of ten she would get thrown out. It never stopped her trying.

Every Saturday she would be there. In the school holidays Mina would have to take us over 'the park a bottle of water and two penneth of broken biscuits to stay there all day. Don't come home until tea time. One day my sister was allowed to take us swimming in West Ham Park, she had learned to swim at school. So with a pair of knickers, no swimming costumes, off we went for the day. The swimming pool was disgusting never cleaned out. We thought it was wonderful. Mina took me on her back in to the deep end which was 6 feet, said hold on to the side, I will show you how I swim. I thought that looks easy so tried to swim. After her, got as far as the middle, went under wearing an old swimming hat that had no strap on it the hat floated off, it was the only way my sister knew I had gone under. There I was sitting on the bottom trying to shout, all I was doing was swallowing lots of dirty water. Mina pulled me up by my hair, a park attendant pumped the water out of me and got me to breath. My sister Eva was splashed in the face in the 2 feet end and she fainted. My poor sister Mina got into trouble when we got home for letting this happen. All this might make boring reading but I am trying to convey how lucky most children are today.

Back to school I had made friends with a girl named Mary; she lived round the corner from me, so I called for her to go to school most days. Mary was a weak girl, so I felt it was my job to look after her. Any bullying at school I was always there to stand up for her we were friends for 2 or 3 years. One morning I called for her and her mother came to the door to say Mary wasn't well enough to go to school and had a bad cough. A few month's later my Mother told me that Mary had died; something about TB which I did not understand. To cheer me up Mum found sixpence a week to let me go to dancing lessons which I loved.

Saturdays were the highlight of my week. 1 o'clock, I would have walked to the market. Rathbone Street market was a wonderful place, Mum's stall was in Fox Street. She would be busy selling her secondhand clothes, she would turn the clothes on to a big sack asking a price for each item making a joke about one or two things. She would see me there, waiting for my sixpence to go dancing for one hour which went much to quickly. I would learn everything they wanted to show me. I would then go back to Mum.

Some days she would take me for pie and mash, this was a luxury as we had to have poor man's dinners all the week at school. We were given a ticket in class in the dinner break, we had to go to a hut and queue up outside. When there was enough room to go in and get your dinner, if you ate it all you could have a pudding. It was awful, I would ask one of the children coming out what it was like. If they said

yuck or nasty, I would ask what it was and put my tickets down the drain. Some days I would go in and have more dinners as some wanted the pudding not the dinner. So under the table it would go, so I soon learned what to do if I did not like it. This my sound ungrateful, but the dinners were so horrible the children would have been better off with a piece of bread and dripping.

What a treat in the school holidays when Dad cooked mince meat and mash potatoes. Please dad can't we have dinners at home? they are so much nicer than our school dinners. No you cannot, we would not have enough money to feed you every day and most days I don't feel well enough to cook for you, anyway you don't eat enough to keep a sparrow alive. I dare not tell him I was not eating the dinners. Anyway he was a kind but a firm Dad, I can't ever remember him giving me a cuddle or a kiss. He would threaten us with a cane he kept hanging on the wall but never used it. He noticed that I was getting thinner and wanted to know if I was eating my school dinners, Nina thought I was but Eva told him I wasn't. We never got on very well. Uncle Nicker named me Curtain doll, because I was so small. My Granddad called me skinner blacking, I was the only dark haired, dark skinned grandchild in the family.

Saturdays I would have to take a boiled egg up to Grandad for his breakfast, as my Granmother still would not speak to him. My sisters went to the tuppenny rush, I would go to my tap dancing. On a cold day Mum would let me have a hot glass of sarsaparilla, it was lovely while I was drinking it, I would be listening to the sounds of the market. One man selling fish would say "buy my fine large shrimps my wife stinks". Over the other side of the market a man would say "buy my watercress and don't believe what he says". This kind of humour could be heard all the time.

Mina had started work we left school at 14 and she got a job in the Co-op Soap Factory, at Silver Town. Not a lot of money, but every little helped.

## CHAPTER 10

By the time I was 8 years old things got better at home there was a bit more money coming in. Gran's shop was doing better, Mum's stall was taking a bit more. The family had all got married, Harry was the only one left at home he used to tease the life out of us but we all loved him. He would come home from the docks after loading cement bags all day long, his back used to be bleeding. He would ask me to get a bowl of water to bathe his back, also to clean his shoes then he would give me a sixpence, a lot of money in those days. The old tease half the time he would go out and not give it to me, so I was up front after he had caught me twice but it was only one or two pennies. When he played the piano, I could forgive him anything.

My Gran was standing outside her shop door one day when a man went by with a greyhound puppy, he had distemper was very ill also mange. Gran said; what is the matter with the puppy? Everything, he is the runt of the litter and I am having him put to sleep he will not be any good. How much to put him to sleep? Two and sixpence I think, why? Do you want him? That will save me taking him to the vet. I will let you have the papers as his father is a good racer. He came by the next day with the papers, but you will be lucky if he lives, I gave up on him. Nan nursed him like a baby. He did get better so he was trained by Harry, Len and my Dad. In time he was put in for his first race, his racing name was Nedance Willow, Gran paid for him to go to the dogs kennels to have a bit more training, so on his first race no-one expected him to win so they never put any money on him. What a surprise they all had, he had romped home, one of the fastest times they had at Harringay Stadium. Next race was West Ham Stadium, a bit higher grade, so they kept their bets low what a surprise; he romped home again. Every race the grades got higher, but he came in first or second every time he raced. My Gran made quite a bit of money out of him. His name at home was Big Boy. He would sit on the counter of the store. Indians, we called them Jonnies I don't know why, used to wonder why they always wore their shirts outside, would come in for clothes. They came in, but Big Boy would not let them go out unless Gran was there to serve. He nipped many of their bums if they tried, what a lovely dog he was.

One race he was up against the best dogs in the country, when another dog started to fight him he was pushed against the fence and broke three toes, his racing days were over. Gran kept him for breeding and to look after the shop with the money she had won on him she bought two brindal bitches to breed with him. A kennel was built at the end of the yard we did not have a garden. It was my job for a penny to take Big Boy for a walk. My cousin Bunkin took the two puppies Diamond and Lopy, was our name for them. Out walking one day, Big Boy stopped to do his job, Bunking went on quite a way in front of us. The lead was wrapped around my arm so I could not let go. Big Boy decided to catch the others up pulling me along with him, my knees and elbows were bleeding where he was so strong. He dragged me along for yards. So I told my Gran I would not take him out any more. They all thought it was a big joke, I didn't.

Things were going along nicely, too good to be true, I was happy my tap dancing was getting good we were doing shows, pantomines at Xmas time. When a school doctor examined me. asked if my Mum or Dad could come to the school to see him. I wondered why? Well I soon knew, he told my Mum I was underweight, under sized for my age. I was always very active did not eat much. They were also worried about TB. My Dad had a test, he was cleared of TB, but because of his Emphysema the thought it would be a good idea to send me to a place called Fyfields, there was a place there for weak children for a rest and holiday. Only poor children went, why me? I was strong and healthy, what were they on about? I heard Dad say perhaps it was while she was friends with Mary my friend who died. Was I going to die like her and why? Please don't make me go I don't want to go, please Dad don't send me away I will be good and do as I am told if you will say I need not go. My pleading fell on deaf ears, it will be for your own good, a long holiday, it will only be for a few weeks, a lovely holiday in the country you are lucky to go, we will come and see you as often as we can.

Went to bed that night and cried myself to sleep. My sister Mina heard me crying and came and gave me a cuddle now don't cry, be brave its only for a couple of weeks, I can come and see you now I am working on a Sunday or Saturday. A day in March Dad took me to the clinic where we had to catch the



coach there was a lot of children waiting to get on the coach my last try; Please Dad do I have to go? Eva is not going, she said she was glad I was going, I don't like her any more, don't let her have my toys a doll I had for Xmas. No, I will not let her have your doll, be a good girl and we will see you soon, even then he did not kiss me, went away looking sad, perhaps he thought it was his fault I had to go away. I never knew why me, waved to him from the back of the coach then he was gone. As soon as we got into the place we were examined, our own clothes were taken away, we were given their clothes and school shoes, a nightdress, a pair of slippers to wear only in the dormitory, the worst thing was we were all given a number mine was 114. No name I was only known as 114 all the time I was there, never mind, Dad said only two weeks, little did I know. We went to bed at 7.00 p.m. if any of us needed to go the toilet. Please what is your number, 114, if you asked more than once there was trouble, and every time you got in trouble you were given marks on a blackboard. More than 4 you were sent to bed at 6.00 p.m. no supper, was not much anyway.

So 7.00 a.m. every morning a bell would go, up you pulled back your bed clothes folded your nighty put it in a locker with your number on. The dormitory where we all slept was open rows of beds down each side of the locker's. I am glad I will not be here in the Winter I will freeze to death,, Oh no I am going home in two weeks my Dad said so. After putting our nighties away we had to go to the ablutions but I don't remember any hot water or cleaning of teeth, that was a luxury we did not have at home so that was nothing. Before washing we had to clean our shoes, my Dad always cleaned our shoes, so I did not know where to start, the polish was in a tin we had to wet it brush it on let it dry a bit then polish it off. This sounds easy but to an 8 year old child who had not done it before I put far too much wet polish on and it would not shine, so I was late on my first day as we had to be washed, dressed, bed made, and lined up in the playground by 8.00a.m. Our hands and neck had to be clean. Arriving late with polish on my hands, the sister was not very pleased and on my first day I got 3 marks, 1 more this week and you can go to bed early and no supper. That night I had a tummy ache and asked if 114 could go to the toilet, the monitor said no, so I waited until I thought she was asleep, was creeping out when she said get back to bed a mark for you. On Friday evening we were allowed to play games, anyone with marks were called out, and if we had 4 or more we had to go to bed one week and one punishment roll on next week, what I did not know was our families were only allowed to visit once a month.

After the line up in the playground we had school of 3 hours then a lunch, again in an open dining room. No more getting rid of the food, we had to take the plates back and let them see what we had eaten, I can't remember the puddings but I suppose there was. Two weeks, I asked the sister when am I going home? When the doctor said you can, I am only here for 2 weeks. Oh yes the doctor comes once a month. When is my Mum and Dad coming? The end of the month families can visit. Who was telling me lies? Was I to believe her or my Dad? Perhaps they don't want me any more? I went in the toilet and had a good cry, I knew I was different from my sisters, being dark and they were fair, I suppose all children think like this when they are unhappy. After lunch we all had to get out a stretcher, it was one that was low down on the floor, for half an hour every weekday. We had to lay on the stretcher and try to sleep on our right sides, something to do with our hearts I suppose, never knew why. As soon as I turned over I was told off and told to turn on my right side. This was punishment to me as I was so active, it was worse than going to bed early, there was no-one there to tell you off if you wriggled about, until the others came to bed.

One Sunday in April we were told our parents were coming to see us, was I excited? I will make them take me home, I will not stay here any longer, if they don't I will run away. Saturdays and Sundays we had to lay on our stretchers for one hour, this Sunday we had to put all our stretchers away because of the visitors. At last they came, at first I cried, then I was so pleased to see Mum and Dad they gave me some sweets also some money to put in my locker. We are not allowed to have money, they take it away, we are allowed to have sixpence for sweets, they have got to last us all week. If there is no money left then we don't get any sweets. Dad caught the sister and asked her about this so I was afraid to tell Dad how unhappy I was, as the Sister stood by us telling Dad how well I was. Time for them to go. Please Mum take me home, I will be good, I hate it here. Dad said don't be silly, the nice clean air is doing you the

world of good, you have got nice rosy cheeks for the first time in you life. I did not want rosy cheeks, I wanted to go home. As soon as the Doctor says you can, we will come for you. How could they leave me there I did not want to see them go.

## CHAPTER 11

Oh what an unhappy child I was. I hated the place. I was too miserable to make friends, did not want to play, I hated laying on the stretchers every day it was making an active child go against all her normal instincts as if I was being tied down. May came, once again I had a visit from Mum and Dad and my sister Mina, she will see how unhappy I am. Please Mina, ask Mum If I can come home? Dad said only 2 weeks, its now 2 months and I am still here – why? I don't know, it's because you are small. Why don't you eat all your food then you can come home. I eat my food but don't get any bigger. The doctor is coming soon, perhaps he will let you come home, I was beginning to hate that doctor, it is his fault. I can't go home, so once more my family went home leaving me in this awful place. Going to bed that night I did not sleep much, but I did not cry I just thought of all the awful things I wanted to do to that doctor. My Birthday is in June, the doctor comes in June, he had better let me go home or else. Don't know what I will do, but I will think of something, run away. I must take notes of where we are when we go for our walks on Sundays.

June came, nothing on my birthday, only a few cards, visiting day was coming up, had a letter from Mum saying there was a surprise for me. Oh good I am going home, when they came the surprise was my doll I had for Christmas, Mum had dressed it for me in nice babies clothes, I was very pleased with it but ask why she had brought it when I was coming home this month? The day arrived for the doctor to examine us. My turn to go in the Sister took us in one by one. He said; hello Alma, how are you? I stared at him saying I am fine, nothing wrong with me and I want to go home, please let me go home. I hate it here. He tested my chest and said we will see. I was taken out of the room convinced I would be going home at the end of June I was still there. Things began to get worse.

There was a boundary around the field, we were allowed to play for an hour after tea. There was a row of wooden forms I got under to see if there was a way out. I have had enough of this place, if there is a way out I am going. One of the girls told on me so more marks. One day in our play hour I asked a girl to look after my doll as I needed to go to the toilet. It was quite a way along a corridor to some huts that were toilets. On the way back I could see this girl rocking my doll on the form. I shouted for all I was worth not to do that as she would roll off and break, too late down went the doll smashed all her head. Dolls in those days were china. You stupid thing, now look what you have done. She laughed and said; good job and it was me that told on you going under the boundary. All my frustrations came to my aid. I think I knocked ten bells out of her, an old cockney saying. Up came the Sister grabbed me off her, I was so angry I think at that time I could have killed her. Had a good hiding from the Sister. I told her I did not care what they did to me, she should not have broken my doll, to me that was all I had left, my family did not want me they will not take me home.

There was no visitors for me in July they said Dad was ill, I thought it was punishment. Bed early for a week no supper, lay out in the playground by myself on the stretcher. I did not have to mix with the other children, no sweets or playtime. This seemed to go on for ages. August came, no visitors. I began to think they had forgotten me altogether. Never mind I had paid for my crime, next we were in the dining hall when a bird a starling flew in sat up in the beams, and went to toilet right in my soup. No way was I going to eat that. By the time I took it back to tell someone, the birds mess had blended in. Don't tell lies said the cook no one has ever said that before, take it back and eat it or you will be punished. You are a trouble maker we have heard about you and your fighting. So it was back to bed for another two nights in bed. I smiled to myself, it could only happen to me why not anyone else.

September the doctor should be coming again soon now perhaps they will let me go home, I had been so naughty they will be glad to get rid of me. I had caught a bad cough and cold, had a big sore on my lip trying to eat porridge with a big spoon. It cracked this sore open and made it bleed, I told the Sister who dragged me out of the dining hall, took me to the firstaid place, a nurse said you have been picking at that sore. No, I have not. A clip round the ear for telling lies. What is the use? they will not believe me whatever I say so I shut up, more punishment but I don't care anymore. The day came to see the doctor. My turn, am I going home? no more please it doesn't do any good. No, said the doctor your family want you to stay. They have gone hop-picking without me. I don't believe you now you are telling me lies. He

went to grab hold of me. I thought he was going to hit me so I smacked his face, the Sister grabbed me pulled down my knickers and smacked my bottom. I don't think I sat down properly for one or two days.

More punishment to bed early for a week all games, sweets, laying on the stretcher for an hour while the others went for a walk. On my own I burst into tears why have they gone hop-picking without me? Don't they love me any more? The last time I went hop-picking I went to the toilet. They are huts with a strip of wood going along about four in a row we sat on the piece of wood. This day I was sat swinging my legs and fell in. Mother went mad I was put in a tin bath and scrubbed from head to foot with a scrubbing brush and Lysol disinfectant, now I remember Mum saying that is the last time you come to hop-picking with us. I am sorry I could not help falling in, so that's why they did not take me.

This year, I must try and be good and for the rest of the time at Fyfields I think I was. October came, I had a visit from Dad and Min. What a lovely day that I kept asking why I had to stay hear. November we had another visit from the doctor as everyone went home for Christmas. Thank you God, my prayers have been answered, it was the first time I had asked God to help me and he has. So I joined in the games, learned to play table-tennis, got quite good at it. We also had a Christmas play and asked if we could sing or dance for the first time in nine months I wanted to do something I enjoyed, so I did my tap dancing. The first bit of praise I had.

Being weighed before going home I had gained 2 ounces in 9 months. A child can't be that unhappy and put on weight. The doctor said you will have to come back after Christmas as you have not grown or put on weight. I thought to myself, not if I can help it I would rather die than come back here. December came we had our own clothes back, things from our locker put in a bag. On the coach I looked back, good riddance to bad rubbish - I am never coming back. Dad met me at the clinic, the Doctor said I should come back after Christmas. I told Dad what it was like and begged him not to send me back, he could see how upset I was so promised I need not go back. This was my best Christmas ever, home with my Family. Mum and Dad had made me a coat and hat by turning an old coat. Mum cut, Dad marked it, Mum sewed it. My sister Eva wasn't very kind, she was sorry I had come home as we had to sleep 3 to a bed again,

January, Dad became very ill pneumonia, pleurisy, haemorrhage. I came home from school, Dad was calling from upstairs, went up to him he was very ill, there was blood on his pillow. Alma you have got to help me, they are coming to take me to hospital. Please get me some hot water and can you wash my feet for me, also find my nail clippers cut me toe nails. As ill as he was he did not want to go to hospital without washing his feet, what a wonderful man he was. I did as he asked, he was so pleased with me. The ambulance came, two flights of stairs so they had to carry my dad down the stairs in a blanket, he said to me as he passed; be a good girl do as you are told. Keep up your dancing and your music. I had started going to music lessons, sixpence a lesson and was enjoying it until my Dad died. Yes, he was so ill this time my sister Eva and I were taken to stay with Dad's sister Aunty Edie. We called her my rich Aunty because she had marmite on her table for tea, something we never saw at home. One evening Eva and I was playing five stones, they call them Jacks today, when Aunty Edie very quietly told your Dad died this morning. Eva and I cuddled each other and cried and cried. In bed that night all I could think of was why my Dad, he was a kind man.

In the Winter when there was snow and frost, he would go out to help the poor horses that had slipped on the ice pulling big GWR lorries. He would take a bucket of ashes from our fireplace and put it by their feet to help them get a grip to stand up. In my mind he was the one who got me home from Fyfields and made a hat and coat for that Xmas. After a few days we came home, Mum did nothing but cry, we could not do any right for her she seemed to pick on my sister Mina more, she was the eldest I suppose. Night after night I could hear my sister saying please Mum come out. I knew why after, Mum would lock herself in the bathroom and always take a carving knife with her. The day of Dad's funeral I will never forget, we were dressed all in black, there was black horses with plumes on their heads Dad's coffin was put in that carriage we were in the next one. While we were waiting for the hearse to arrive, Harry,

Mum's brother, said now you are the youngest and the bravest so don't cry and upset your Mum, in the shop we waited when the shop door was opened all the neighbours were waiting outside. Oh look there is his youngest; how to stop myself crying I never knew. Going along in the carriage I waved to a friend then felt very wicked to think I could do that, good things and bad things stay in a child's mind for ever. From that day on my life changed for the worst.

## CHAPTER 12

After my Dad died my life changed we had a terrible time with my Mother. She just was not there for us for months, we were very naughty, my sister Eva and I we were fighting all the time when we came home from school. We would start fighting, my sister was much bigger than me and if I was getting the worst of it. I would climb out of the window three stories up get on to the roof drop down on to the flat roof next door. It was a jewellery shop called Jackson, and there I would stay until I saw my mum coming along and then I would get down quick or else I would be in for a good hiding. One day mum was not feeling very well and came home early, caught me on the roof legs dangling over. She called for me to come down. My grandfather came out of his bedroom said I told you not to go on that roof now your mother has caught you, good job as you will go on until you kill yourself. I was very daring so a good smack I had and my beloved sanctuary was taken away from me. From then on I played ball with my cousin Rose, anything to get away from my sister. My cousin Rose and I got on very well, if we could we would play five stones for hours and two balls up the wall. I would borrow two tennis balls out of a box in Gran's shop. One day she caught me taking two balls I did not think of them being put back dirty so she was waiting for me. One day my girl you will be going to the police station they will lock you up for taking things that don't belong to you. I was afraid she might take me to the police station so I said but gran I put them back I did not keep them, they are no good to me dirty now take the two dirty ones out and don't you dare touch them again. On second thoughts you keep the two dirty ones and play with them, I can't sell them now. Look after them and don't ever let me catch you touching anything that doesn't belong to you. Fear kept me honest for the rest of my life.

One evening after school Rose and I were playing ball had a nice big wall outside a Kellers sweet factory; sometimes we would put our hand through a small hole and some kind soul would put a few sweets in our hands, until one day one of the foremen must have heard us and put a hot wooden spoon on my hand, we did not do that again. Mum was calling me in to go to music lessons being late I rushed off did not wash my hands. I was rapped hard on the knuckles; how dare you touch my piano with hands like that. When I told Mum I did not want to go any more, told her what had happened, all she said was alright. I think she was glad not to pay out the sixpence a week. felt guilty for breaking my promise to my Dad to keep on with my piano lessons.

My tap dancing lessons I loved more than anything. On day a year or so after my dad died I went to Mum's stall to get my tap dancing money mum was talking to a man, he was sat by her stall holding her hand. Mum let go as soon as she saw me I had never seen this man before. My mum said his name was Tom her long lost step-brother, he had been away at sea. Straight away I did not like this man, how dare he hold my mother's hand, she gave me my money I went off not wanting to go, no way was he going to take my mum away from us. One night my mother and gran were going to the greyhound races, I thought she was meeting Tom, so when Mum went on I followed her until they were waiting for the bus. Mum spotted me. Go home, go home or else. No, I am going with you, what a mistake that was. Mum told gran to go on, the bus pulled up gran got on, mum started to hurry after me. When she was mad she could hurry up even though she had a bad leg, no matter where I hid she saw me. I ran home knowing I had made a big mistake. Once in the house, I crouched down not knowing what to expect. My mother got the first thing that came to hand, it was a wooden coat hanger, I was hit across my back I don't know how many times, biting my lips I was determined not to cry. After a while she stopped hitting me said get out of my sight up to bed. If I had cried I don't think mum would have hit me quite so long or so hard, I had become hard myself, I thought life was hard anyway. Mum sent me away to my Aunty Edies for a few weeks, my father's sister was very kind to me, I know it was to get me away from her for a while.

My 12th birthday came and went not much happening that was June. Tom turned up now and again when his ship was in I suppose, but I never said another word about him so long as he did not take my dad's place all was well. September now and everyone was talking about a war. I hope not, as mum had told us how awful the last one was I was feeling afraid just hearing about it. Gran, mum and I were all sitting in Gran's sitting room when on the wireless I think mum said, Lord Chamberling or something like that was going to speak, so be quiet I want to hear what he has to say. My mother's face drained of all its

colour rubbing her hands together and saying; Oh no, not again no way can I go through all that again. What is the matter mum why are you so frightened? You would not understand, my mum and my gran were both holding each other and crying, what could be worse than my dad dying I could not think.

We are at war with Germany again this time it will be much worse. That night my mother woke up screaming shouting about the Germans coming she told us she had seen the sky black with aeroplanes and all the house on fire. I don't know why she had dreamed that as we had not seen any planes until the war, but her dream did come true. Life went on as normal for a while. We all had to go to a school to pick up our gas-masks I tried mine on and thought, well I am going to be gassed as this thing is awful. I cannot breath in it and then I saw a little baby being put into a big micky-mouse one, he was put inside and fastened under his legs. There was a little place for him to look through. The mother was expected to pump an air-pump at the side of his mask, I remembered thinking, what if his mother was hurt? he would not get any air. I wondered what would happen then if no one was around to help him. For a while it was very quiet, mum still went to work, Mina was working at the Co-op soap factory, Eva had got herself a job in a fur factory. I would go to school and get some home work as we were only doing part-time schooling in case there were raids. There was no raids for a while, so at that time I could not make out what all the fuss was about. A good job I could not look into the future.

The shop window was stuck up with tape criss-cross or in squares to stop the glass from shattering. The sirens would go time after time and we were told to go down a shelter, we did not have one so mum made us go under a table or under the stairs. Then the all-clear would sound out we would all come. This happened for a long time, I was beginning to think this is nothing to worry about, I did not mind going to school. My little dog Chummy were together a lot he would meet me coming home with my homework after a half day at school, and carrying my gas-mask home, it was in a little cardboard box with string to put over my shoulder. Then I would tell him it was time to meet mum, so off he would go to meet mum coming down the road. Now Harry and Len (her two brothers) had joined the Army, the Royal Engineers, no-one could take mum to work, so her bundles of clothes had to be left with her stool and she had to catch a train. I took Chummy up once to meet her, after that he would go himself and hold her skirt at the hem so proud to bring her home.

Then it started, day after day planes coming over sirens going, bombs dropping, fires starting. A bomb dropped close to our house, the shop windows were all smashed. Gran had them all boarded up so no trade, mum was unable to get do her work. People were afraid to come out, when they did the sirens would all rush to the nearest shelter. Trade went down so bad that gran could not keep up the payments on the shop and the man that brought Gran's clothes and things stopped coming after one or two more bombs fell very close to the shop. The front of the shop was blown out and gran said enough, the shop was boarded up and the greyhounds had to be sold. The only one my gran kept was Big-boy. Mum was crying when gran told her we would all have to move, I don't want to move as I loved living in that shop the fun we had playing hide-and-seek, the day my sister Eva hid under the counter there was a tailor's dummy my gran had put there out of the way. Eva screamed and screamed, she thought it was a dead body we all had a good laugh.

The bombing got worse, we seemed to be hiding two or three times a day, Mum put most of her furniture in someone's garage. Some we took to Uncle Bunny's house. Gran took Eva and myself to go and stay at South Harrow with Mum's step-brother Charlie and Aunty, my godmother. The raids were not so bad there, Auntie Alma used to take me to work with her. She was a cook in a bottle factory some of the workers asked if I was going to be a cook, no I was going on the stage dancing and singing. They had workers play time so I was asked to sing and dance which I did willingly. They had a whip round for me and did quite well. Our troupe was booked to go abroad to France, Holland and Germany, but the war had stopped all that as our ships were being sunk every day. We stayed with Uncle Charlie for a few weeks, my Gran wanted to go home but there was no home to go to. Aunty Alma wanted me to stay but I was worried about my Mother. We went back to Bunny's house because people were down their shelters a lot, not having enough food lots of them were getting scabbies. My Auntie Grace was the first then one by one we all caught it off her. There was eight of us living in the same flat trying to sleep in one little

shelter. Night after night, they were bombing us, the noise was terrible the fires seemed to be burning everywhere. Our scabbies got worse and worse, my arm was covered with a big sceptic scab, our hands were covered in itchy blisters in the end we had to go to hospital, with no bathroom no way could Mum cure it for us. The three of us were In hospital together we had a bath every day scrubbed with a pig's hair brush, then brushed with something that burned the scabs when brushed off, didn't we yell. Every day for a week this was done and at night they put some cream on to stop the burning. My Mother was so ashamed she did not like to come and visit us. One doctor told her there was hundreds of people getting it and the clean ones seemed to get it worse. He said; don't go back to the same house or it would all start up again. We have got nowhere else to go, what am I to do?. The day before we were due to come out of hospital, Mum went to see a man about a house in Sivertown. She had to tell a lie and say her brother Len was her husband, as being a widow she would never have got a house, so Gladys (Len's wife) was said to be her daughter.

Len was in the Army and we three girls became four, luck was with her so she got a house to rent and we had somewhere to live again, the sad bit was they said no animals. Oh no, I am not going if my Chummy can't come, Mum tried to find him a home. One lady had him for a while but he kept coming home so that was no good. So before we moved to Sivertown, my Mum made me take Chummy to the vets. She put his lead on, gave me two and sixpence we called it half a crown, to take him. Please Mum, don't make me take him, I was crying and sobbing. This hurt worse than the hiding she had given me with the coat hanger, there was no changing her mind so crying all the way there

Chummy was pulling on his lead as if he sensed what was happening to him, knocking on the door a man came and said; Yes what do you want? Please can you put my dog to sleep? I don't think he understood me as I was crying too much. What did you say? Please, we can't keep my dog. Can you put him to sleep? Where is your Dads or Mums note ? I can't do anything without that. I stopped crying and ran all the way home, thinking my Mum will not send me back again but she would not be as cruel as that. The world had made my Mother hard, sorry but he has to go, if you want somewhere to live. I thought my heart would break, people were looking at me walking along crying and talking to my dog. We got to the Vets door. Chummy was pulling on his lead, I did not know what to do, pushed him in, gave the note to him and ran all the way home thinking how cruel my Mum was to make me do that.



## CHAPTER 13

We moved to Kenard St, Silver Town very near a Tate and Lyle sugar factory, I had no friends there and was on my own quite a bit. The school I had to go to was over the road, a Catholic school so every morning I went over sat in a room with two little children who lived at the end of our street. We sat reading books as we were not allowed to join in their prayers, then we were given homework to take home. My school work went to pot, I was 12 years old forgetting all I had been taught in the past. We shared a shelter with the people next door. Took out panels from the fence, night after night the sirens would sound. We would grab a blanket a torch if it had any batteries in it, things were very hard to get. I seemed to spend all day queuing up for things, brown bread at the bakers, etc. Rationing came in, we had ration books with tickets for meat, cheese, sweets, sugar, tea - if it was a family they could just manage, for one or two people on their own it was very hard. One day I asked jf I could go and see my Gran? I longed to see my Uncle Harry, he was home on leave for a few days. He was having a cup of tea, I wondered why he was so dirty his uniform was covered in dust and dirt, I heard him say it was terrible. He said a torpedo had hit Fredrick Road school, there was a hundred women and children waiting to be evacuated and nearly all of them were killed. He had helped to get some out, was finding arms and legs. With this he ran out, I think he was being sick. My school gone, perhaps lots of my friends. Mum was saying I was going to be evacuated, a good job I was not waiting in my old school. I was telling my Mum all about it when the siren went. Go and get in the shelter I will wait for Mina and Eva to come home from work. In the shelter by myself for the first time I felt very frightened, the noise of the bombs falling. Crouching in the corner of the shelter I thought why am I in here on my own when I go out what if I cant find anyone? Poking my head out, there was fire and smoke everywhere then I heard my Mum call. Alma, try and help me I am stuck, it was the first time Mum had been in this shelter and the wooden panels that had been taken out to let us through was not big enough for Mum and she was stuck in between. I started to pull one side my sisters had come home from work and was trying to push the other side, but Mum would not budge. The all-clear went so we had to take another panel out, we were all laughing. Mum thought it was funny and said if jerry had dropped a bomb any closer it would have blown her out. There was a funny side to things, but most of us was frightened, the raids got worse, we spent a lot of time in the shelter night and day sometimes, the shelter would be full of water, it had to be bailed out before we could sleep in it.

Mum got fed up with taking me out of bed rapped in a blanket so she said you are going to be evacuated. Why me? it is always me why can't Mina and Eva come as well? It is only for school children and you will be safe in the country. I don't want to be safe in the country, I want to stay with my family. You always send me away. If anything happens to you I will be all on my own. Mum said; I don't want to hear any more about it, you are going and that is that. So the day came when lots of children made their way to a meeting place, the nit nurse looked in our heads with her usual knitting needle, the doctor had a quick look and listen to our chest, mine was ok Mum was given a ticket to tie on my coat, it had a stamp on it to say I was fit and clean and was to catch a train the next day. With a small case and a few sandwiches I was taken to the station there was lots of other children all standing in rows. Some were crying. The man who lived at the bottom of our road asked me if I would look after his two children, a girl and a boy, they were crying, so I had to be brave as they were much younger than me, I said I would. It made me feel better to have someone to look after. It was a long journey lots of stops, children were being got off, we were going to Cornwall to a place called Perranporth. I had never heard of it, and thought we are never going to get there, the two children were with me in a carriage, so after eating our sandwiches, I told them my name was Alma and I would look after them. Her name was Rosy and her brother was called Tim. She was crying a lot, only 5. I gave her a cuddle and she went to sleep. We arrived in Perranporth about 4.00 pm, we were taken in to a hall, given a cup of tea then we were divided up in two and three's. People would come along and say if they wanted one or two or more, the children seemed to go slowly we were three and no one wanted three. Then two ladies named Miss Hawton said they would take a lot of us, they had a big hotel called Shy-an Bray, why I don't know but I always thought there was 24 of us, somehow I don't think that it was possible that two old maids could look after 24 children, perhaps it was because I was not used to living with so many children. Rosy and Tim came

with me, we had a bedroom to ourselves one double bed and one single. Some of the other rooms had a lot more beds in them. At first it was nice going on the beach each day going for walks, one of the teachers used to take us for nature walks. They only had two small schools in Perranporth, so we could not all attend school. We had an empty hotel room to sit in so the teacher could talk to us, he would tell us about the war and the bombing in London and the big towns, I used to feel very frightened wondering if my family were ok, as we did not get any letters. People found it a job to write letters in the dark, in the shelters they only had candles and if they were lucky to get a battery for their torch which was not very often.

One morning the postman came to the house with a letter for me I was so excited I had a job to open it quick enough. Mina had wrote to me saying she had saved some money and was coming to see how I was getting on and could I book her bed and breakfast near. Miss Hawton said; try the bungalow next door as they did bed and breakfast. I got my sister fixed up and could not wait for the weekend to come. Saturday came I was waiting on the station hours before the train was due and asked the station master why the train was late. Well me dear the trains are all being bombed they have to wait until the raids stop before they can move as jerry is bombing trains. Oh my god please don't let anything happen to my sister because she is coming to see me it would be my fault. Just then I heard the sounds of a train, my fears turned to joy when I saw a hand waving at me out of a window yes it was my sister at last. We cuddled each other and cried walking back to the bungalow she had so much to tell me and I had so much to tell her. We chatted away Mina telling me now bad it was in London the German planes were coming over every night, bombing the houses all down to the ground fires burning everywhere. I don't think Mum can stand it any longer, her nerves is going after being injured in the first War. So all my worries and sadness was not important anymore, I must not let my sister tell my Mother how unhappy I was as they had enough to get on with.

We got to the bungalow where my Sister was staying, it was lovely to think she was next door. I took her in to meet the two Miss Hawtons, my sister asked if it was alright to spend as much time with me as she could, it was only a short stay as she was going back Sunday evening. Oh not as soon as that, why can't you stay longer? Now be grateful for the day we will spend together, it was a lovely day we went swimming again. My Sister saved me from drowning, I forgot to tell her how the ground would suddenly fall away, when I could not feel the bottom a big wave came over me. My sister saw I was in difficulties, swam and pushed me up then got me out. I was so unhappy to think of my Sister going home without me, I did not care If I had drowned at that time. Time came for her train, the tears flowed I tried not to cry but in vain.

Going home to Shy-an Bray the greeting I had was; dont be such a baby, you will upset the other children. They did not need upsetting by me, I don't think there was a day passed unless one or the other were crying, we would sit on the stairs and listen to the news if London had been bombed or if we heard "White Cliffs of Dover" on the wireless the bit that hurt us all the most was "and Johnny will go to sleep in his own little room again" was all we needed to set us all off. Miss Hawton used to get very cross with me and said I made the little ones worse, perhaps I did but no one knew how afraid I was that my family might all be killed and I would be all alone.

Things started to go wrong from then on. I noticed a few of the children were scratching their heads so being me I said to Miss Hawton about it. I think some of the children had got fleas. Well, I thought she was going to explode, she went very red and said well you children must have had dirty heads when you came here. Well I wasn't going to have that. Oh no we did not, my ticket had a clean mark on it when I came from London. It's upstairs, if you don't believe me. A wrong thing to say, I thought she was going to hit me so I got out of the way. Don't know what all the fuss was about as I told her she could get things from the chemist such as Sassafras or Durback soap, hoping I had got the names right as Mum was always cleaning my sister's Eva head. She said mine was alright, you must be poison as they don't like you. Very well Miss know it all you go to the Chemist shop and ask for the soap as I would not. When you come home, the three eldest of you can wash all the children's hair but leave yours to me. I will make sure yours is clean. One by one Vera and Mary helped me wash and clean the heads. Then came

my turn. A very thick head of hair I had, Miss Hawton made sure I would never complain about dirty heads again. I had in my eyes, ears and everywhere else this lot will be cut off if I hear any more about it. Thank goodness there wasn't any need for more treatment again. A few weeks went by when I had a parcel from home a nice pink dress and shoes to match a handbag. The parcel was all undone so were all our letters. Well now you have got something decent to wear you and Tim and Rosy can go to Church on Sunday, the other children were Catholics so just us three had to go to Church of England church. Sunday came I thought I was dressed up like a dog's dinner, all in my pink my Sister must have told my Mum how I had grown and did not have any clothes to fit me. I enjoyed going to Church with my two little charges but on the way the local boys were waiting for us I think there were four or five.

## CHAPTER 14

Take no notice of them. I tried to look brave as Rosy was crying. Stay by me, don't be afraid I will not let them hurt you. We walked passed, one boy grabbed hold of Tim and pulled him down. That did it, my temper came up. You dirty London kids we dont want you here. Well they knew they had got me to deal with. I landed up in the little river that runs through the middle of Perranporth, with two of the boys with me. Tim was having a go with another one, they ran off leaving me wet and dirty one shoe missing. Oh dear, now we are in trouble when we get home. Miss Hawton took one look at me, before I could explain; Up to the bathroom and straight to bed, how dare you come home in this mess and on a Sunday? Tim tried to tell her what had happened, but she was not listening to any excuses.

The next day we went to our empty schoolroom to sit and listen to the teacher just talking, saying things like we should be grateful for being here and safe while people in the big towns were being bombed every night. On the way home from school there was a Cornish man sat by the river, I went up to him and asked which road leads to London please Mr? Why, that one me dear, it's a long way to go. So it might be a long way I don't care, I had not heard from home in a long while and was wondering if anything had happened to them. That night I put the few clothes, I had in a bundle, waited until all was quiet, the children were asleep. I crept out of bed, opened the window as quiet as I could, it was very dark just as I got my leg out of the window an owl hooted right outside in a tree just down the road coming from London. I don't think I had ever heard an owl before. I thought it was a ghost coming after me for all the naughty thing I had done. I was back in bed clothes, back in the drawer as quick as could be. Will not try that again, not so brave as I thought I was. God was with me on that night because my family were no longer in London, they had moved out to a place in Berkshire called Farringdon. This I did not know until weeks later. Each day came and went, news of the bombing over the wireless, how many planes we had shot down. I kept thinking they can't keep losing planes like that all the time it must end soon.

Miss Hawton had relations come to see her one Saturday, we all sat round talking to them when Miss Hawton said Alma used to dance in a group, they asked me to dance for them. I had taken my tap shoes and one outfit, a red pleated skirt and white blouse. I was so pleased to think someone wanted to see me dance there was a routine remembered called "Shine", so I sang the song, did my dance. That was one thing I had not forgotten after a year no dancing or singing. These people lived in Redruth, they owned a sweet factory. They were so pleased with my act the lady thought it was a shame I had to let it all go. She asked Miss Hawton if they could take me to live with them? I could have music and dancing lessons. I think Miss Hawton would have been glad to get rid of me but because I had made a promise to Rosy and Tim's dad, I said no, what a fool, I never saw them again.

We were all in the kitchen helping to make Cornish Pasties the eldest of us were, when I went up to the toilet, and Miss Hawton was shaking Vera's little brother. This little boy had been buried under the shelter and was pulled out by his legs, so now and again he would wet the bed. Poking my nose in as usual, I came downstairs to tell Vera about it. Vera went upstairs and there was an awful row. Vera told her I had said, so that was me in trouble again. There was an hotel they called the hostel, all the evacuees that had problems had to go there. Some had scabbies, some wet the bed, some had dirty heads. This threat of going to the Hostel was always there if we were naughty, it was my biggest fear. So I tried very hard to be good. Auntie Edie, my Dad's sister, sent me a letter with a two and sixpence postal order in it. I asked Miss Hawton if I could go to the shop to buy some wool to knit myself a vest, as I did not have one to wear, and it was getting cold. Thinking this would keep me out of trouble, to my surprise she said yes. Off to the wool shop I went, I made the mistake of picking a very hard tern. This night Miss Hawton went out leaving the older sister. I got on much better with this sister so did not mind asking her to help me with the knitting. I tried very hard to do quite a bit myself but the holes in the pattern went wrong so standing there holding my knitting and asking her to help me. Wait a minute and I will so. I waited and waited while she put some sewing right that one of the other girls had done once again. I asked if she would help me; Can't you wait a minute? Oh dear I have done it again, so to get myself out of trouble I gave a nervous laugh. Nothing to laugh at, get up to bed. In bed I heard the other Miss Hawton come home. She was teling her sister all about me and how cheeky I had been to her. Well Alma its now or

never so I went downstairs and stood in the doorway, I don't know what I done wrong but whatever it was I am sorry. That was a hard thing for me to do to say sorry when I did not know why I was saying it. I never asked them to help me again with my knitting, but I finished the vest.

A year went by. One Sunday, Rosy and Tim's parents came for the day. I don't know what expected perhaps a ride in their car for looking after their children, after Miss Hawton told them I was a bad influence on them they did not want to know. I heard them say they were going to put me in the Hostel as soon as there was room. Why did I bother? Looking after number one from now on. I would have been better on my own and I should have gone with those nice people who wanted me. I tried to ask Tim's dad if they knew what had happened to my family as they had moved and I don't know where to write. All he knew was that they had moved and he had not seen anybody at the house, with that they were gone.

It seemed like weeks before I heard from Mum, they were having a hard time, no work as Mina's cards had been burnt in a fire where she worked, the Co-op soap, Eva's fur factory had also been bombed so they were living in a place called Farringdon in Berkshire where two of my cousins had been evacuated. Mum was trying to get me home with them but had no money for my fare. The wvs (Women's Voluntary Service) used to do a lot of good work. They often got us clothes to wear as we had none that fit us any more. My 13th birthday came and went, I had a couple of cards from my family in Farririgdon. Then before I knew it, we were thinking of Christmas, again I had no money to buy anything so we asked for paper to make our own Xmas cards. The WVS got us some old Xmas cards and crayons to make our Xmas cards to send home. I don't remember doing anything nice on that Christmas, my thoughts went home to London. A pillowcase with a few nuts, an apple, an orange, one or two new coins tied up in a homemade handkerchief. Oh happy times will they ever come back again.

One January morning a letter came for me, Miss Hawton had already undone it and read it, this made me very cross. We had nothing of our own and this was taken away. Well Madam you have got what you wanted, you are going home. They say it is a safe area where your mother is now so you can join them. My heart leaped for joy, this house was turning me into a frightened girl. Once I was a cheeky cockney sparrow with plenty of go, now I was afraid to speak in case I said something wrong and was beginning to think nobody wanted me or loved me. I took my letter upstairs in the bedroom to read, in it was a letter I was to give to a lady, can't remember her name, and ask her if I could have a rail road ticket to get me to Farringdon, my sister was coming to get me on Saturday. I think it was the first Saturday in January, all I know it was very cold. Asking Miss Hawton, jf I could go as I had to see this lady, a date had been arranged for me to pick up my pass. I had her name and address but I was not sure where it was so I felt I had to ask, she told me where it was. It is a very big house overlooking the beach. Well is it alright for me to go? Yes, you can go but be warned she is a very posh lady and has got a cat and nine tails, you want to watch she doesn't use it on you; she hates cheeky children. Well I must have been very naive in those days because I believed what she had said to be true and I was afraid to go. Me, who had never been afraid of anything before this war.

I went to Mary the only friend I had left in the house, please Mary will you come with me? I have got to see this lady. At first Mary was afraid to come she did not want to get into trouble with Miss Hawton but said if I can sneak out I will, you go on and I will try and follow. Waiting at the bottom of the hill I wondered if Mary would come, if not I must go by myself. If I want to go home then I must go if she whips me she does. Mary came running down the hill thank you God for letting her come with me, we found the house a big house with a long drive. Mary came as far as the door. She had heard what Miss Hawton had said, like me she believed it so only as far as the door she would come, no further. So like going to the dentist, you want to press the bell but afraid to. Here goes I heard someone coming to the door, I wanted to run away but knew I could not so I waited. The door opened a tall lady said; Yes what do you want? Please I have come for my train pass to go home. Well come in my dear, I could not believe my ears she sounded so nice my friend is with me, can she come in as well? Safety in numbers I thought. Of course she can. In we went, Mary holding my hand for comfort. Sit down, I will not be a minute to sign the form. She came in with a cup of tea and a piece of cake my eyes lighting up, no whip just a piece of cake and a cup of tea what a fool I had been to believe Miss Hawton.



## CHAPTER 15

We went back to the house. Well how did you get on? Alright, thank you. It was on the tip of my tongue to say what had happened and how nice the lady had been, but I had learned to keep my tongue to myself. When are you going home? Miss Hawton asked me. Next Saturday, my sister is coming for me. They would not let me go alone, so I have got to wait for her. Saturday came I was so excited I don't think I slept a wink that night, was up before anyone else packed my little bundle of clothes. My only regret was saying goodbye to Rosy and Tim, also Mary. The elder girls all said how lucky I was to be going home. I also thought how lucky.

Sitting outside on the cold steps. The coat Miss Hawton had got for me she took back as it might fit one of the other girls, I felt very cold. What I must have looked like sat there shivering on a cold January day I don't know. Lunch time came, no Sister. Looking up the road all the time. Miss Hawton came out and said perhaps she is not coming after all, she must have seen how cold I was and said you had better come in and have a bit of lunch. The only good thing I can remember about living there was we had good food, there was always a big bowl of milk on the rayburn the cream was taken off to go with bread and jam. They called it thunder and lightning, why I don't know. Back on the step I went to catch a sight of my Sister coming up the hill. All I remember was it started to get dark and no Mina. The first show of kindness Miss Hawton showed me was then she came out and said you had better come in, it's very cold out there and getting dark, your sister might have been delayed she might be here tomorrow. Giving up, I went in too upset to do anything, only go to bed cried myself to sleep.

Next morning I was up dressed and back looking out for my Sister. No-one coming down the road, but at ten o'clock someone was coming out of the bungalow next door. Yes it was my Sister Mina. Mina I ran to her with open arms crying with joy to think she had come for me. Her train had got as far as Plymouth then stopped because of a raid, they were pulled in to a siding for a very long time, my Sister missed her connection at Truro, there was no more trains that night after waiting a long time not knowing what to do. A train pulled in and an Airforce officer got out, he asked her why she was waiting there as there was no more trains running that night. Near to tears she told him she wanted to get to Perranporth As I was waiting for her. It was gone eleven o'clock no way of letting me know she had been delayed, she couldn't tell him she had no money for phone or taxi. I don't remember Miss Hawton having a phone. He had ordered a taxi to take him to Perranporth, you are welcome to share with me, if you wish as she said I have no other way of getting there tonight its too far to walk. So thanking him very much she got in the taxi. My sister was a very pretty girl, in London West Ham Mum's Brother Harry had taken her to a dance, entered her in a beauty competition and she won, so she was very lucky that night as he was a nice man coming home on leave. It was so late by the time they got to Perranporth, no use knocking on the door so she hoped the house where she stayed before could put her up for the night. The lady in the bungalow remembered her but said I am sorry we are full up. A lady from London heard what was going on and said if it was alright with the Landlady she could sleep with her, my sister was so grateful to her as she was afraid to stay out all night.

Asking me if I had any money to offer this lady for her bed, no breakfast, well all I had in the world was two shillings and sixpence, both the ladies said forget it. I don't remember saying goodbye to anyone, could not get to the train quick enough, our train was held up twice because of an airraid, getting near Swindon station we were pulled up to a sideline, and had to wait until the raid stopped. We were sat in a carriage with the blinds pulled down for what seemed like hours, we could hear the noise of the bombs and guns firing my sister said you were safer in Cornwall, I don't want to be safer I want to be with you and my family. The train started to move, we could hear the all clear sounding, pulling in to Swindon station we went to catch the little train to Faringdon but too late it had gone and it was the last one that night so we saw a taxi. My sister asked me for the two shillings and sixpence then asked the taxi man how far would it take us to Faringdon, we have had a very bad raid I was hoping to go home please will you take us we travelled all the way from Cornwall. Hop in I will take you as far as I can for two shillings, Oh good, I will still have my sixpence. What a nice man we was he took us almost into Faringdon. People helped each other in the war, I suppose we were all in the same boat.

Getting out of the taxi and thanking the man very much, Mina said it will not be long now before you will see Mum, Eva, Granny Monk, Grace and June. They have all left London could not stand the bombing any longer, are we all living together then, yes we are. We arrived at the house where Mum was given rooms. A lady came to the door, this must have been 12 o'clock at night, Mina pushed me in front to give Mum a surprise, it was us that got the surprise as the lady said they don't stay here anymore your Mother did not tell me you were coming here as well and there is not enough room for you all. Where have they gone we have been travelling all day and my sister is very tired? Well all I can tell you is she was going to see if there were any of the flats empty in Ferdale Street, with that she shut the door. Oh dear now is it my fault this has happened, we were wandering around Faringdon late at night trying to find out where they had all gone. A Marines camp had come to Faringdon, the officers had taken over most of the empty flats and rooms, Faringdon was only a small town. We got to Ferdale Street, Aunty Grace had come out to see if we were anywhere around; Come on where have you been? we have been looking for you all day to let you know where we were. Mum had been all over Faringdon looking for somewhere to live, but as there was seven of us it was a problem. Grace managed to find a room for June and herself for one night that left five of us. A Mrs. Oram had said we could have her spare bedroom if we could manage as it was not very big, a mattress on the floor for Mina, Eva and myself, Mum and Gran in the bed that was my first night in Faringdon I was beginning to think I was a Jonah, things seemed to go wrong when I was around. I don't care as long as I am at home with my family.

January and February were very cold we had one bedroom also a bathroom. Mum put two boards across the bath to make a table these flats must have been like the old work houses because there was a fireplace in the bathroom so every day I would go to a small wood about a mile outside Faringdon to get wood for my Gran to sit by a small fire. My Gran was in her 70's and would sit in the only chair we had in the bathroom. It had no seat in it and Gran's bum used to get stuck in it most nights, this made us laugh. You might think its funny but I don't, I never thought it would come to this.

There was a shop in Faringdon, called Tuckers, they also had a nursery where all their veg and flowers were grown. Mum got herself a job digging up carrots and picking sprouts. We used to go every morning, I went with her. Mum would sit and I would pick up the carrots and help pick the sprouts. Mum had to get money from somewhere as the only money she had to live on was one pound thirty shillings a week to keep all four of us on, the Government gave so much money to people who took in evacuees, food was very hard to get because of the rationing. The shoes I had when I came from Cornwall were wore out they were too small for me, anyway Mum said; You can't come out in the fields without shoes. I like coming with you, it reminds me of hop-picking. It has been raining and your feet will get wet. You go along to the WVS and ask if they have any shoes to fit you. The WVS had a little room attached to the church so off I went to see, yes, as I was an evacuee if I could find myself a pair, I could have them. A big pile of shoes in the middle of the floor. Having a very small foot, size one or two, not one pair could I find so ended up with a pair a size too big, never mind I could help Mum if I had shoes. Off I went flip, flopping all down the road. The job lasted a month or two, some days picking sprouts with frost and snow on them was no fun but I knew it was the only money Mum had beside her widow's pension. One thing stands out in my mind was the day she got paid. She took me into a shop to buy two vests, come to she only had enough money for one never mind the one I knitted was still wearable. Nina got herself a job in a village called Shrivenham, the Americans had taken over a big barracks there. Mina worked in a shop mostly clothes for officers. Mum helped Mrs. Oram wash the soldiers clothes, most of the clothes belonged to the soldiers who were cooks, this went on for a month. At the end of the month, Mum asked for her share of the money. Mrs. Oram said she had not been paid. Mum went to see the Sargeant in charge of the cooks and he told her Mrs. Oram had been paid. Mum was really cross as she had worked very hard for her bit of money. Going back to have it out with Mrs. Oram, she was crying; she could see how angry my mum was said she was sorry but Mr. Oram needed a new wooden leg. Mum said; of all the cheek she did not expect to pay for it, forgive me and come and have a cup of tea in my sitting room. It was the first time we had been in her sitting room, Gran sat on a sofa when a spring stuck in her bottom. This was the last straw, my Gran went mad; Your sitting room, why my dogs had better chairs to sit on, you rob my daughter of her hard earned money in a bath room with the window out we are all freezing no heat and



five in a bedroom. Don't make a fuss my Mum said as we have nowhere else to go, well I would rather go back to London and die at least I would die in comfort.

## CHAPTER 16

My Gran did go back to London, we stayed but after that Mum tried to find us somewhere to live. Miss Hawton and Mrs. Oram tried their best for us, I now understand you can't expect people to suddenly give up their homes to strangers to put themselves out for a lot of strangers who had a different way of life it was very hard on both sides. Mum heard about a house in Gloucester Street it had six rooms, three had two Jewish families living one side, the other three rooms a lady rented but was going away with her husband as he was in the Airforce. We could have the rooms and look after the furniture until such time she wanted to come back if it was alright with the landlord. Oh please God let it be alright, my poor Mum was coming to the end of her tether. We were worried that she would have a breakdown. Mum could not wait, she went round to see the landlord. Yes it was alright with him, but if the tenant wants to come back there is nothing he could do but put us out. Mum understood this, anything for a bit of comfort if only for a while.

Mum why don't you let people know you play the piano you could earn money that way? Good idea, I will ask over the pub if they want anyone. Mum was so booked up playing the piano she was out most nights playing for parties, my sister Mina would go with her and sing, soon Mum had enough money to send Mina to London to bring some furniture and clothes, lots of things we needed. For when my family left London, they only took what they could carry. Mum had to pawn her only ring to pay for a taxi to take them out of London. One Saturday Mina had a day off work to go with a lorry to get what we needed, also to get my Gran back with us we, were very worried about her being in London. That evening the lorry pulled up we were very excited to see some of our own things, we all ran out to help. There was no need, as most of Mum's home had been bombed and because the house was all open the rest had been pinched, so much for a show of kindness towards each other in the time of trouble. Most people were helping each other, there are always a few that will help themselves. We unloaded what bits and pieces there were, not a lot. Mum sat and cried she had worked so hard to get a nice home together. Nan said; don't be upset, I have got some of my things for you; her piano and Harry's accordion. I might as well look after them here as let someone pinch them. It was lovely to hear the piano being played again, I was beginning to think I would never hear it again. Mum was so upset over her furniture, it was good to see her cheer up. We were all very happy in our little house. We got on well with the two Jewish families that had the other three rooms. Living all together was nice, we would be singing and laughing. Grace came back to us, I liked that because June my cousin was five years younger than me.

One day a knock on the door. Mum went I heard a man say you have got two children living in this house who don't attend school, they must go - make sure they attend on Monday or you will be in trouble. Me go to school, I forgot what it was like to go to school, it had been nearly two years since I had gone to school. Mum this is silly, I will be 14 in June - over a month away, what is the point of going just for a month? To be truthful, I dreaded going I had forgotten all I had learnt, it was much as I could do to spell my own name. I knew they would laugh at me. June was in a different class as she was younger. As I thought, at my first reading lesson I was asked to read in the book something about Berkshire trying my best I read "in the town of Berkshire" with an e instead of saying it as an a, the same as Derby, the teacher said. I felt so stupid I nearly ran home.

The headmaster called me into his room. He wanted to ask me some questions why. After I explained why I could not read much, had no schooling for two years because of the war, asked about decimals and fractions I looked at him; Sorry sir I don't know what you are talking about. You will be leaving school in a month, what sort of job do you think you will get not able to read or write. If you want me to I will help you all I can perhaps your Mum will let you stay on? I don't think so, she needs me to go to work and earn some money. Sir was a very good man, he put a desk in his office and drummed reading and maths in me every spare minute he had, I think he knew deep down I wanted to learn and not to be laughed at. He put me in a play, supposed to be an angel. Little did he know me but I felt he had tried so hard to help me I would repay him and do my best. It was a very long speech to learn at the end of the play my Mother came to see the play and sir asked if she would wait behind as he wished to see her. First he asked my Mum if she had enjoyed the play? Good she said. Now your daughter has good learning

power and I want you to let her stay at school, I have got more in her head in a month than some of my pupils in a year. Mum said she would think about it but it would be up to me. Why I am writing this about school is because I want everyone to know how important it is to learn all you can while you are in school or life is much harder when you leave, What neither of them knew was I had already applied for a job in Smith's paper shop, yes I could start as soon as I leave school.

The job was in the shop. Thanks to Mr. Willis the headmaster I felt I would be able to cope in the shop. The manager of Smith's paper shop said yes you can have the job but the girl who was leaving has changed her mind and wants to stay a bit longer, if you are willing to do a paper round for a while the next time a job comes up in the shop it will be yours. Well better than nothing and ten shillings a week, start at 7.30 Monday morning. He helped me the first morning to sort out a paper round two bags each side of the bicycle I could just reach the pedals when he told me I had to cycle two miles to Stanford in the Vale deliver to all the houses on the way down to Shellingford, there was an airforce training camp there that had a big order for papers every day. Saturdays I had to collect the money for the week and if I was short he would stop it out of my wages. What a job? the thought of ten shillings a week kept me going. Mum took 7/6 pence the first Friday I got paid I had 2/6 what a proud moment that was for me.

Six months later I was still delivering papers getting soaking wet day after day, one lady on the round gave me a pair of her girl's welly boots because the rain was going in the back of my shoes and out the front as the sole was hanging off one shoe. When Xmas came along I had been saving 6 pence a week in a jewellery shop to buy my sister a present to thank her for getting me home. Christmas came how pleased she was with her present.

Night after night my Gran and I used to sit by the fire, she would be telling me stories about the family that is why I can remember so much about my family. I want to write a bit about the jobs I had because it shows even in those days that without education it was very hard to get a good job. One year at Smith's paper shop still delivering papers I went to see the boss, when am I going to work in the shop? You promised me it would not be long that was a year ago. I am sorry there has not been a vacancy. I knew there had been. Then he told me your spelling will not be good enough for the shop, your money has always been right but I can't help you, to think he made me waste all that time.

I had joined the girl guides. Our guide leader was a manageress of Tucker's Nursery where my mum and I dug carrots and picked sprouts. I told her about my job so she said she would see if there was in the shop for me, there was, 16 shillings a week. 6 shillings better off. I thought I had better tell her my spelling was not very good. Never mind, I will help you all I can. My luck was changing at last, so I thought. Started on the Monday after a week's notice to Smiths much to my surprise I was told to start at 7.30 at the big house that Tuckers belonged to. Clean out the two fire places, clean all the boots and shoes in the shed, boots they had been riding in, chop wood ready for the next day, help in the green houses until 9.00 a.m. When the shop opens, you can go down and do all the delivering. My bike was too big I had blocks put on the pedals, the bike had a big basket on the front. This is promotion indeed, I have swapped one bike for another and working just hard. I loved helping with the flowers, we had to get things ready for the florist, cut the withy bushes, cut the flowers, climb the trees to get the greenery help wire them up, this I loved doing.

A girl called Coral was a good friend we stayed friends for years, Winter came once again all the awful jobs came, sat in a frame picking out onion sets a little black seed with a small green shoot on freezing cold hands. In the shop I was expected to scrub potatoes and artichokes I had never heard of them, but I soon learnt what was what. When I was allowed to serve a customer I had to write everything down, so potatoes became spuds and artichokes became arts. Miss Davies used to have a good laugh at the end of the day at my spelling. She was very good to me, tried to help me all she could. So I stayed there for a year

One night my Gran and I was sitting by the fire she was telling me all the stories about her children. Then she told me she had a letter from her son Harry, I cannot understand it as he is stationed up North somewhere but not allowed to say where. Walls have ears, we were always being told be like Dad, keep

mum, we had lots of sayings, but I don't know what to think as his next letter came from Newcastle. That is where Len is stationed, he is going there to be with his elder brother. I hope they will be alright, Len will look after Harry, I lost my eldest son in the last war I could not face it if anything happens to them. Let me see, Gran's uncle Joe, Uncle Nicker Harry and Len are all in the Army. Uncle Bunny, Grace's husband he is in the Navy. What a lot of people we have got in this war. When I looked at my Gran she was crying, we will be very lucky if they all come home safe, I must pray for them all. It happened as my Gran said, Harry was given permission to go to Newcastle, an elder brother can claim his younger brother to be with him.

## CHAPTER 17

One night I was sat with my Gran by the fire when she

started shivering what is the matter are you getting a cold? I don't know girl something is wrong I can't get warm. I went and got her a blanket and covered her over but she went on

shivering started moaning I was getting worried about her. I think I will go and find Mum she is only over the road playing the piano at the Volunteer. Running as fast as I could over the road when I heard the piano playing so in I went what are you doing in here you know you are under age, never mind that Gran is ill I am worried about her please come home. Mum had a stiff leg but when she needed to she could nearly run when we got home Gran seemed a bit better but still shaking. Some— thing is wrong I was like this when Peppy was hurt in France, you have got a cold coming. Mum tried to convince her every thing was alright to go to bed and keep warm. Next morning a loud knock on the door a Telegraph boy on a motor bike, my Gran went an awful grey colour I thought she was going to faint. Any answer asked the boy my Gran shook her head no, before we had a chance to close the door a police car had pulled up the police had been trying to find my Gran, they were unsure if she was in London or Faringdon. The telegram was from her son Len, Harry has had an acc on a motor—bike as a dispatch rider come at once. The Army had got the police to find her they took her I don't remember if they took her all the way to Newcastle or to a station. We were all so upset could not do anything with Mum she would cry and cry saying he helped me play the piano and his accordion. She ket on stroking the accordion as if it was helping him. My memory of Harry was at my Father's funeral he kept saying to me now you are the youngest and you must be the bravest, don't cry try to be brave for your Mum so once again his words kept coming back to me don't cry be brave. It would have been better for me if I had cried a few days went by and Harry died his crash helmet had come off when the bike skidded he had run in to a big Army lorry he had massive head injuries brain damage.

They did not expect him to live the hospital said he would be a cabbage — I always think that is an awful way to describe a human being my poor Uncle Harry. He used to tease the life out of me when I was young, for all that I loved him dearly, his music I would sit and listen for as long as he would let me. What about my poor Gran ? this was her youngest son lost because of war, yet both were killed in England. We got news that Harry had died, I think he lived four or five days in a coma never round, his brother Len never left his side; he felt it was his fault that Harry was dead. Len kept saying if only he had not claimed him with him he might have gone on D day but he might be alive now Len being in charge of the depot had ordered Harry to take the motorbike along to the other depot to be mended. After Harry's funeral Mum and Gran went they stayed in London for a while. Sitting in the room where I always sat with my Gran, thinking about my poor Gran and Mum hoping they were alright in London, when the cupboard door behind me opened on its own and something tapped me three times on my shoulder. I was so scared I dropped my knitting ran out of the house and stayed out until my sister came home. If ever I told anyone about this they would say it was your imagination because you are upset. I would believe that if Harry had not come to me twice after that, I was older then so not so scared. Gran came back to live with us but was never the same as the years went by she became mental the grief over Harry would never get any better

Faringdon became a very busy place, a Marines camp in Faringdon, an Airforce training field at Shellingford, an Air fField at Watchfield, and the Americans at Shrivenham. My sisters were going to dances most nights, I kept thinking I will be glad when I am old enough to go. Getting on for 16, it will not be long now before Mum lets me go if I go with my sisters,. Mina had met a Marine called Reg, they were going out together quite a bit. I did not like the idea of my sister courting in case he took her away, so I was a bit cheeky to him. The picture house was just over the road from us. Mum would let me go with my friend Coral who I worked with. Coming home one night my Aunty Grace was kissing an American soldier outside our door, I thought this was awful because her husband was in the Navy fighting for us, but remembering how cruel he was to her perhaps she did not love him any more.

My Gran was waiting for me, she would make me a cup of cocoa if I went out. Well my girl, where have you been tonight? I have been to the pictures to see the Silver Fleet. You should not go dancing then you would not have sore feet. My poor Gran was getting a bit deaf, but I smiled to myself. Did you see Grace at the dance as June has been asking after her? No Gran I did not see her. It was not a lie as I had not been to the dance, I dare not say anything about the American. She had enough worry to contend with.

The Government sent everyone on to jobs that helped the country on the war drive. Coral and I left Tuckers, went to work in the Sawmills. It was very heavy loading lorries with wood and one big band saw really frightened me. I asked if I could leave only if I went to a job of more importance. Aunt Grace and Mina were in a factory drilling out gun barrels, I asked if I could get a job with them, but I was not old enough. Mina caught her finger in one of the drills was off work for a long time. Then a job came up at an emergency landing field at Puzey only 18 year olds, I said I was 18 and went to work with Grace and my sisters. Our foreman knew I wasn't 18 but said I was a good worker so I stayed, the job lasted for about 6 months. We went on a lorry every day, it was good fun and good money, so I was able to buy a few things. Shame clothes were rationed as I wanted to go dancing. One night a jeep pulled up, two Americans were in it; hi babe, could you tell us the way to Shriven bacon, in an American drawl. I had never heard before; I think you mean Shrivenham, Oh well I knew it was some thing to do with pig. I had a good laugh over this and he was very handsome. Honey we have got a big dance tonight at the camp trying to find some beautiful girls like you to come. We will send a lorry for you, please come and get some friends as well. Make sure you are there honey, well all this flannel went to my head I had never been called Honey or been told I was beautiful before with my old working clothes and a turban on my head, how could he think I was beautiful? My first encounter with an American left me quite bewildered. No wonder ray Aunty Grace was enthralled by her Al or Ale I was never sure.

Grace and Mum were always whispering together, one day I heard Mum say what are you going to do? Bunny is coming home, you will have to do something or tell him. Tell him what? I did not know that my Aunt Grace had got herself pregnant. Bunny had been torpedoed twice, the first time he was in the water for 8 hours, The second time he was in the water for 12 hours. In the letters he wrote home when a letter did get through, he had turned to religion in his letters he said he believed it was the only thing that had kept him going all through the war. Now he was coming home on leave, Grace said Al Cowin wanted to marry her, have his baby and go to America, my poor Aunt Grace was in such a state she did not know what to do, I am sure she loved this American he had showed her love and kindness she had never known before. There was talk of trying to get rid of the baby, but the means to do that in those days was not so easy, then there was June to think of how could she expect Bunny let his only child go. He loved her dearly and no way was Grace going to leave her, we would all have to wait and see.

Waiting my chance I asked my Mother if I could go to the dance? They are going to send a lorry for us so I would be with lots of girls going and coming home. Please Mum let me go? I will not let anything happen to me. Mum was so worried about Grace, she gave in and said yes. Running round all my friends; Coral said yes, we were so excited about going I quite forgot I had nothing nice to wear. My sister let me borrow a flared skirt, much to big for me. I had a black blouse Gran gave me out of some clothes she brought back from London, so with a belt round the skirt as tight as I could get it. Mina let me have a bit of makeup, gravy browning and a pencil line down the back of my legs I thought I was the cats whiskers. My sister Eva said she would come as well, we had been practising the jive at home, not bad I could hardly wait for the night to come. About 12 girls got on the lorry and we picked up a few more on the way. What a night a great big dance floor and a band, what a band, they said some of the players were from Glen Miller's band. That could have been true you, were never sure if the yanks were pulling your leg or not.

An American asked me to dance, it was a jive. Said his name was Me Fry I thought what a funny name. Yes, I would try. Boy could he go, a couple of dances after that when I got used to his steps they had a jive competition. He came to ask me again. Yes, as long as you don't throw me over your head. I would

have been too embarrassed to do that. Believe me or not, we won the prize. Was just a bit of fun. They gave us a bung out of the beer barrel, I was only 16 so did not drink; gave mine to another yank. He was pleased. What a night, had enough boys asking me for dates to last for weeks, thought I had better not as Mum would not let me go. Before we came home they gave us sweets and Merlin got me a tin of spam and best of all a bag of doughnuts to take home. He asked me if I would see him again I was not sure what my Mum would say. She had brought us up a bit strict having three girls and no father, so I said I would meet him at the next dance. This dance was run weekly so I hoped my Mum would let me go much to my surprise Mum said yes I could go as long as my sister came as well then perhaps you can both get a tin of ham not ham Mum it is called spam.

The Marines started to run dances, the Airforces wanted girls to go to their dances. Well this is not bad I wonder if I can get round Mum to let me go to some other dances, must find something to wear. Mum took me to a market. I had a few clothing coupons, Mum gave me some of hers I managed to get a bit of material black, the lady gave me a bit extra that was called on the black market. My Gran was very good with her needle so I asked her to help make a skirt and top together. We did it, I was so pleased it was the first new thing I had for years; a pleated skirt and a top. I think I wore that suit for years at all my dances. I would change it, just a bit different collars, beads sown on a blouse with the skirt, anything to make it look different. Night after night Mum would let me go dancing. Come to the Marines dance, come to airforce, and the Americans it was a good job they had them on different nights. I think the only nights I missed dancing was one night when I had to wash my hair. The next job I got was the airforce camp at Watchfield cleaning the aircraft we had to get up in under carriages. A tin of paraffin, the mud on the wheels had to be seen to be believed, but I liked the job there was always air men around to chat to.

## CHAPTER 18

The different jobs I had there was great. How to clean sparking plugs, how to do camouflage on the aircraft, watch the engineers change an engine, all this I found fascinating. The aircrafts were Oxfords and Ansons training planes, so there was lots of cadets there training to be pilots. They held a dance there every Friday or Saturday night. A notice went up for a girl singer as they had got their own dance band together, an audition was being held in one of the hangars. There was a stage, the piano was there, an airman had a girl on the stage she sang. My sister Eva had a very good voice, so I had persuaded her to have a go. While she was singing an airman came up to me and asked; what are you going to sing? Not me my sister is a much better singer than me. Go on. have a go. Last but not least. I said; Why not? The song I sang was Long Ago and Far Away. It had just come out. I could not believe it when they picked me. My sister had a much better voice than me. I just think that type of song was what they wanted. So every Friday or Saturday night did my singing with the band, lots of other songs came out that suited my voice "Moon Light Becomes you", "White Cliffs of Dover", all the songs that came out then.

Our foreman called me to one side and asked me if I would like a better job in the conning tower, checking in the aircraft, keeping an account of flying hours. I will try it if you think I can do it. First few days were fine, learnt the hundred hours, wrote the cadets names and what aircraft they were taking up, how many hours the aircraft had flown. This was great, singing dancing and now a better job; never count your chickens before they hatch. The other two girls there were twins, helping me to learn the job, went sick together so on my third day, I was sent alone down the end of the field to check the aircraft in, the names on the board that was ok. The time of departure, about 6 different aircraft was ok. Then they all came back, one after the other. They had landed at another airfield, so I had to work out the hours, take off landing, take off again, how long for lunch and landing.

I panicked, just went blank, one nice airman tried to help me. I am sorry I just cannot do this I had got the book in a right old mess. One pilot started to shout at me; You should not do this job, What are you illiterate? That did it, near to tears. I thought that done it, I never want to see this place again. I walked out of that place and said I am never coming back, left them to sort out my mess. The foreman told my sister to tell me not to be so silly and to come back, I was a good worker and he did not want to lose me. Come back, if I did not want work in the Conning Tower, I could have my old job back. I was too ashamed to face people, if only I had a bit more schooling, my singing was gone and I did not go to any more of the dances there.

Now I was looking for another job. My Mother was cross with me for not going back. An Airforce officer came up to me when I was out shopping one day he asked me if I was the girl who was singing with the band at Watchfield. I wondered what he was going to say. He can't hurt me now I don't work there any more. Yes, I was but I don't work there any more. They wanted someone who worked there. Well I think it was a shame I want you to have my card after the war is over come to London. This is the address of my night club, if its still standing and I come back there is a job for you. That was a lot of ifs, but it cheered me up. When I told my Mum and showed her the card she tore it up saying your not going to London you have been away enough now stay put.

My Uncle Bunny had come home in between jobs. I happened to be home when he walked in. Mum and Grace were there. He came in, gave Mum a kiss and a hug. Went to kiss Grace, she held him at bay. If she had been underhand she could have got away with it. I admired her for saying right away that she had something to tell him, I saw his face changed. Something the matter with June his daughter? No, she is at school. It is to do with us. Mum made a cup of tea, Aunt Grace told him she was in love with someone else and she was expecting his baby. Well I thought he was going to kill her. Got her in a corner and was strangling her. My Mum came in quickly and stopped him. Now leave her alone until you have time to calm down. Mum and Grace were crying and cuddling each other. She told me to go and meet June from school. Bunny followed me out. What school is my June going to? I told him, so he came as well to meet her. Running out to meet her Dad was lovely to see as he lifted her off her feet, he was crying at that moment. I felt very sorry for him with all that he had been through, this must have been the worst bit.



My love for my Auntie Grace was much stronger than my pity for him. I had seen her being badly treated in the past. Even if he had changed, I still felt sorry for her.

I cannot remember if Bunny stayed or went back to London for the rest of his leave. He told my Mum he would come back to sort things out, but Grace would never have June. This broke her heart, poor Grace did not know what to do. Grace was making herself ill every day, she was wondering what was going to happen. Bunny turned up unexpected, said June was pining for her Mother. So something had to be sorted out before he went back in the Navy. He had changed a lot I think, being shipwrecked and turning to religion had made a better man of him. He had decided to meet this American to see what they were all going to do. This took a lot of courage on his part because before the War Bunny was the sort of man to hit first ask questions after. They all got together, Grace decided she could not live without June her daughter, but could not bring herself to get rid of the baby. So Bunny forgave her and said if he came back safe he would have the baby as his own and that is how it was left, but she must never see Al Gowin again. Al went away broken hearted, he would have done anything to keep Grace and their baby so, Grace gave up the only true love of her life for her daughter. Grace found two rooms in a cottage and lived a very quiet life waiting for her baby. As promised she did not see Al again.

One night I had gone out to meet my friend Coral as we were going to a dance in Faringdon. They held one now and then in the Corn Exchange, a big building at the end of our Street. On the way to her house a funny looking man in home guard uniform started to follow me. The quicker I walked the quicker he followed. Lucky for me I saw Coral coming towards to me. That old chap has been following me, I don't like the look of him. Come on in the Marlborough, have a drink. Coral was older than me; No, my Mum would kill me if she knew I was in a pub drinking. Well I am going in, we will stand in the hall, you can have a lemonade. No way was I going back on my own. that funny man might be there again. So Coral got a drink, I had a lemonade there was a lot of Marines in the small room. I could just see them from the hall, one nice looking one looked and smiled. His berry hat cocked on the side of his head, his chair tilting back. I could see he had a good drink; Come on in have a drink with me, he said. No thank you. I knew I was too young to go in the bar. Out he came; Please have a drink with me, we have just come down from the Orkney's, first night out for months. No thank you. I thought he was nice looking but had too much to drink. Saying to Coral, I am going home are you coming? Not yet I am talking to this Marine. As I looked round my Uncle Bunny was stood there looking at me. What are you doing in a pub? You know you are not old enough. Out he went.. I did not know he had come home on compassion leave to sort out his life. Once again this Marine came out in the passageway. If you won't have a drink with me can I take you to the pictures tomorrow night? I will be waiting for you at 7.30 outside the pictures. I don't think so. I will be there anyway, he said. I thought he was nice looking but no way did I like him drinking too much. Coral I am going home, if you don't come now I am going. I was so worried because my Uncle had seen me and knowing how upset he was over my Auntie Grace I wanted to go home. I left Coral there and slipped out before the Marine saw me. He said his name was Joe, asked what my name was? I did not tell him, he might have thought I was older than 16. Running all the way home my Mother was waiting for me at the door. Where have you been? I guessed my Uncle had seen her and told her. Before I had a chance to say anything, a clip round the ear and a kick up the backside with a stiff leg that comes hard. Not another word, up to bed I give you in a pub with an old man drinking gins. Well I don't know what he told her, she was in no mood to hear the truth, so I did not try that night. I could understand Bunny being so hurt he was going to take it out on anyone, it just happened to be me.

Morning came, I could see Mum was still cross with me so I got ready to go for an interview for a job at Shellingford Airforce station. They trained air cadets there. Another girl called Kath was also going for a job so I met up with her We went together, both got the job. It was cleaning the offices and the parachute and flight huts, work 3 weeks then get 3 days off. I can't be sure what the wages were now, but at £2 or £3 a week we thought it was a lot. Mum always had £1 or £2 a week off me for keep, as long as I had sixpence to go to a dance or to the pictures I was happy. Getting home, told Mum I had got the job. Now will you listen to what happened last night and why I was in that pub? After telling her

about this funny man. Also if you want to see the old man I was having a drink with, he wants to take me to the pictures tonight. I will ask him to come and see you to tell you the truth and it wasn't gin it was lemonade. So I decided to meet Joe. I was not sure if he would remember. We could see the picture house from our upstairs window and sure enough he was there. Joe was 21 but only looked about 17, so asking him if he would come and meet my Mother or else she would not let me go to the pictures with him. He must have liked me because he came knocking on the door. I could see he felt embarrassed. Mum took one look at him said; Were you buying her gins last night? No, she would not have a drink with me. I was so glad Mum did not tell him I was too young to be in a pub. He was so nice looking I thought yes I like you. Things were moving in our house. Grace had moved out we had taken over the rest of the house. My sister was planning her wedding.

## CHAPTER 19

My sister's wedding was a very quiet affair. She managed to borrow a wedding dress, Eva and I borrowed bridesmaids dresses, Eva was in blue and mine was lavender. There was coupons on clothes, so to have enough coupons for a wedding we all had to save our coupons. No wedding cake. Mina got two small chickens from one of the farms. A quiet do at home, the piano was going in the evening so we made the best of things.

My Mum liked Joe very much and I often went to the pictures. The Marines only got two pounds a fortnight so one week Joe would pay and the next week I would pay, fourpence and sixpence for the seats. Joe never liked dancing but he never minded me going and would make sure he was there to walk me home. When I was telling him about my sister's wedding he knew Reg. After a few months in Farringdon they were both sent away, Joe went to Wales. It was then I told him that I was 16 nearly 17. So he said; I know you are young, but if your Mum will let us I would like us to get engaged then no matter where they send me I know you will wait for me. From Wales, Joe was sent to India, out in India Joe and Reg met again, Reg wrote a lot more letters than Joe, he said before going that he was not a very good letter writer. So I got more news from Mina's letter than from my own. Grace said she was expecting, two more babies in the family. Bunny was sent back to sea, we never heard any more about Al.

My new job was going alright, my new found friend Kath and I got on very well. New cadets came in once a month for training. We used to see if we could pick out the names on the boards. One day we were cleaning the flying officers' office. Kath was in there cleaning his desk and being nose-y. I put on the clothes of the officer's, helmet, all-in suit and boots, the lot and went in to where Kath was and in a deep voice I said; What do you think you are doing? Kath nearly jumped out of her skin, then a hand grabbed me on the shoulder and what do you think you are doing young lady? I did feel a fool, but he only laughed because I looked so embarrassed, red as a beetroot. Get those clothes off.

We were given a flight in an Oxford when I worked at Watchfield Air Drome, a fat chance now of getting one in the Tiger Moths now, as the flying officer said; I will keep my eye on you young lady from now on. Most of them were ok, but some of them were awful. We had many good laughs. A lot of Dutch boys came in for training, one had a surname the same as my first name "Alma", so I said to Kath I will look out for him. Sure enough at the dance that night at Shellingford the first cadet that asked me to dance was a nice looking cadet. Had a job to understand his English. When said my name was Alma he looked surprised. My name is (some thing I could not understand) and Alma. That night I had my black outfit on and my hair swept up in curls on top, made up as nice as I could with the little makeup we had. I got on very well with him, the next day Kath and I were in the parachute section when much to my embarrassment in came all the new recruits to have a talk on their parachutes. I could hear them saying among themselves; No that can't be her. There is no shame in doing a menial job such as cleaning, but to a young girl there are times when it becomes a bit embarrassing.

I still went dancing most nights the love of my life. Mum was seeing an american called Hammond. He was nice but I was afraid he would want to take my Mum back to America after the war. My sister Eva was also going out with an American doctor, he was getting quite serious and asked her to marry him. I said to my Mum, did she think Eva would go to America? No of course she would not leave home. What about you Mum, would you go to America? No way, if Hammond wants t marry me then he would have to live in England. So fears of them, going to America were unfounded. At the dance in Shrivenham I met a nice Yank his name was Merlin Fry. Funny name I thought to myself, but he seemed quite nice. My friend Coral met one called Bill, they took us as far as the lorry that was taking us home and asked if they could take us to the pictures at Faringdon the next night. We both said yes. On the way home we made a pact to always stay together if we went out with Yanks. I always felt safe when I was with my Joe, there was no pressure put on me. The Americans were different, they had money to spare and their sex life in America was very much faster than ours at that time.

Joe was still in India, not many letters from him but the ring on my finger kept me true to him. No harm in going to the pictures I thought. So Coral and I met Merlin and Bill, we came out of the pictures and they wanted to go for a drink but I was not going to get into trouble again so I said I did not go to pubs. We said we would meet them at the next dance which we did again. I thought, not too bad, they were not so bad as they were painted. A few weeks went by we met them for dancing and pictures. One night after pictures they suggested going for a walk, we agreed as long as we stayed together. They had other ideas, they must have worked it out between them as we somehow got separated. I was calling for Coral, but there was no answer, then getting worried I pushed Merlin away and ran like mad down the hill, we called the Folly arriving at the bottom of the hill, there was Coral. We laughed all the way home, to think we were so silly. I know I was afraid of sex, Mum had terrified us having three girls to look after and no Father she made me afraid what would happen if I got pregnant. Merlin wrote a nice letter to me apologising for his behaviour said how sorry he was he did not realise English girls were that timid, but would I wait for him until after the war? What I did not know was they were all ready to go on D day. I never heard any more from him so I guess he was killed poor thing, he was not the one for me but I felt very sad to think he might have been killed. A lot of the men were out for a good time as they never knew if they were coming back. So that stopped me from going out with any more Americans.

Aunt Grace had a little girl she was called Pat. a very pretty girl blond with big blue eyes, my cousin June loved her very much as she was pleased to have a little sister to help look after and was lovely for her but I don't think Uncle Bunny ever forgave Grace.. The end of that year my sister Mina had her baby, another blond blue eyed girl. You would have thought they could be twins they were so much alike. Life went on much the same, I went to work every day and went dancing at night. Lots of the soldiers had gone to France and some were sent to India. I used to feel sorry to see one lot of them go out of Faringdon then some more come in. I always wondered if they would come home again.

Uncle Len was sent out to France then on through Germany, his wife Gladys came to stay with us while she was there. An officer came to say he had been awarded a medal for bravery, he had gone through a minefield to save an injured mate. It was like Aunt Gladys said, he was so upset about his brother Harry, he always blamed himself for Harry's death. He asked to go abroad so he could fight and he did not care if he never came back. Aunt Gladys told him the last time, he had leave; you still have me and your daughter Carol to think of dont you dare go and get yourself killed. It was not your fault Harry died, but he seemed to be in a daze, no one got through to him.

After D day lots of the boys were brought back by train to a station called Didcot. All the poor injured soldiers coming home injured and shocked what they must have been through. I only wished there was something I could do to help, but there was nothing. Every day we were hearing news of how well we were doing going through France then Germany. I would always think of the poor men and women giving there lives out in a strange country, coming home with limbs missing, mothers grieving for lost sons and daughters they would never see again. Each night I would pray for Joe and Reg to come home safe, then I would feel selfish thinking of all the others who were out there. Fighting a war is such a terrible thing. Oh why must there be such awful things like war.

My poor Gran was getting worse, she kept on saying things like there was babies buried under the floor. I expect she could hear Mina's baby crying. Then she would say I have got to go and find Harry, he is asking for me, but I don't know where he is. Wandering around the house at night. We had the Doctor to see her, but there was nothing he could do; the shock had been too much for her, then she started to get a bit better. The next shock was a letter from Mum's sister to say my Granddad had a bad fall in the garden and was dying, he kept asking for my Gran, although they had not spoke or seen each other for years, he wanted to see her.

My Mother asked Gran if she wanted to go to London to see him, much to our surprise she said yes. I asked if I could go to see him it had been 6 years since I had seen my Granddad. He went to live with my Auntie Edie (Mum's sister) when Mum came to Faringdon to live. The three of us went and I cried at the devastation. My poor London, there were whole areas flattened down. I could not recognise any of the roads where we used to live. London would never be the same again for me. We found my Aunt's house,

my Granddad was upstairs in a small room. It brought back so many memories of when he lived up in our attic and I would take him a cup of tea and a boiled egg. As soon as he saw me he held out his hand and squeezed my hand. He said hello my old Skina Blacking, that was his nickname for me because I was little and dark, all the other grandchildren were fair. He had been digging in the garden and his foot slipped the spade and caught his throat, there was a blood clot so they could not help him as he was 80 years old. He then held my Gran's hand and in a broken voice he said you kept your wedding ring on I am sorry. I think my Gran understood as he called her a bad name and she said she would never forgive him. Auntie Edie said she would keep my Gran there until after the funeral, I don't remember going to the funeral I think Mum and I came home. A couple of weeks' later my Gran was put into a mental hospital as Auntie Edie could not manage her. She got much worse and got violent after Granddad died. My Mother was very cross to think she had been coping all that time and now she was in a mental home. She was still a very strong lady, they had a job to manage her at times. I think she lived for two years in that home. Mum used to go to London to see her but never stayed long. There was not so many raids now. There was nothing for her there when her Mother died.

## CHAPTER 20

My Gran was buried in West Ham Cemetery, the same one as my Dad was buried. When my Mum came home she was very upset as the cemetery had been bombed and the graves and skeletons had all been blown out of their graves and they could not tell who belonged to who. Mum was so upset as she could not find my Dad's grave, they could not help her as they had all been put together in one big grave. War has no respect not even for the dead

Time went very quickly working hard helping Mum and dancing at night. A Marine named Bob Roberts had his own dancing school in London, he said I was a natural dancer I must have met him at all the Marines dances. Then he was sent abroad. Before he went he said if I come back, would you come to London and be my dancing partner? All these things that I was going to do after the war but fate had other plans for me. When D Day came we all cheered that night, we all danced around the town hall that was a room on stilts in the middle of Faringdon. After the celebrations, everything went quiet, I never knew if it was relief that it was all over. Well that part was they were still fighting in the Far East, some of our poor boys were still being killed out there. So for a while things did not seem any different. Not so many dances, only a few local ones and the American ones. Some of the men were being demobbed. Reg came home, his little girl Christine did not want anything to do with him for a long time. She had got used to having all women in the house for such a long time. Reg used to get quite upset when she would not go to him. Chris must have been about 3 when Mina said she was having another baby. Eva and I went dancing but it was not the same of the time we were dancing together. Eva was getting serious with a soldier, his name was Dave. I seemed to be a lot on my own, will be glad when Joe gets demobbed. Perhaps we can think about settling down to a normal life. Joe was demobbed I must have been 19 little did I know it took my Joe nearly 2 years to settle down. That is another horror of war, the boys had been together for 4 or 5 years going out drinking and having a good time, they did not know what was going to happen next, so it took just as long to get themselves back to the ways of civilian life.

Time went on I did not see much of Joe, he would come and see me for a weekend and I went to his home sometimes when I had a holiday, the only difference was that he was safe. On the one weekend he came to see me, Mina was having her baby, come that night there was a blackout. The electric failed for some reason, there we were just waiting for her second baby. She had been in labour for days, we were beginning to think it would never be born. The nurse asked Joe to boil up some water. He put enough on to drown the baby I think. This put him off marriage for a long time. Pat was born a sister to Chris, I was pleased to help my sister. Aunt Grace went back to London, taking June and her new daughter Pat with her. Bunny got demobbed and said she would go on having children until he had a son, life went on for them but he never let Grace forget what had happened.

VJ day came and went. It did not seem so important to me as VE day. We went to London to celebrate. There was a big party in the street where Bunny and Grace lived in Dagenham, all my cousins had moved out of London. It has been 50 years since the end of the war and I have only ever seen a few of them, my dearest wish would be to go around and look them all up those that are left. We went up to a few weddings and funerals, war broke my family up as it did thousands of others.

Aunt Grace had another baby girl Carol, they stopped at 3, but their story did not end there as you will see later. 1948 we decided to be married, Joe came to live in Faringdon he got a job with Reg. We saved like mad, my job at Shellingford ended. All the cadets went home. Luck was with me as we were transferred to Harwell. Kath and I were still good friends so off we went together again for our new job.

5th June 1948 our wedding day also Derby Day, my coupons ran to a satin dress, my bridesmaids were going to be two little ones Pat and Chris in blue. We made their dresses Mina and I, there was some blue material left over so my sister said if I make my dress can I be matron of honour. In the end I gave in. Then my other sister Eva wanted to be a bridesmaid, no I only wanted 2. There is no more material left and no more coupons, off she went and borrowed a lavender dress from a friend.

I suppose after the war weddings had been so quiet during the war, that everyone wanted to get in on the act so in the end I ended up with 5 bridesmaids 2 in lavender and 3 in blue. June stepped in with another

borrowed dress. The flowers were made by me I had sweetpeas mixed colours in a silver doily. I had to get up at 5.00 a.m. to get my flowers ready. My friend Kath came, her Mother worked in a hotel so she was able to get a bit extra food for me, 2 minced up chickens a bit of salad, sausage rolls and lots of sandwiches, but it all looked very nice. There was about 40 guests. We were waiting for them to come into the room, there was a lot of noise coming from outside and we went to have a look to see what had happened they were all around the cars and taxis listening to the radio, as all of them had put money on the horse called My Love, he was winning the Derby. His price was 40 to 1 what a cheer went up we could not believe it.

We were the only ones at that wedding that did not have a bet on My Love. We had about 2/6 between us after paying for everything. It was a good day, Mum and Grace took turns playing the piano, we were all singing and dancing. Joe's dad gave us a few pounds as a wedding present. We had no intention of a honeymoon but Bunny said come to London for a few days my treat as I won on My Love, we did, it was nice.

Kath and I got jobs at Harwell Atomic Research Station so back to work to try and save money. We had one room at home, Mina had 2 children and was expecting again so she had to have the most rooms. Eva was talking about getting married, so Joe and I decided to move. There was 2 rooms to rent in Clevedon which was Joe's home town, he wanted to come back to his own home town and I thought it would be for the best so we moved to Clevedon. One room for 2 years and 2 rooms for 5 years, unhappy 5 years. There was a lady called Mrs. Tyler who let us have 2 rooms. She was kind but never had any children of her own. I was dreading to tell her that I was pregnant, much to my surprise she did not mind at all and was very good to us.

Once again I was missing my family, no music, the house was all gas no electric. I can never understand today's families they don't seem to be as close as we were, at every opportunity I would go home. The journey would take 5 hours on the buses 9b Clevedon to Bristol, Bristol to Swindon, then on to Faringdon. I would go as often as I could afford to go. I worked up until 3 weeks before my baby was born, a lovely little girl called Angela. For the first time in my life I had something of my own and felt I could cope on my own and not longing for my family all the time. Home again for a double christening, Mina had another daughter Josephine. Soon after that Eva got married so I was more content coming back to Clevedon after that Wedding as I knew there would not be any room for me there now, I would have to make my own life now.

We both worked for very little money, Joe all day and I would work in the evenings. Four years went by and I found myself pregnant again, yes I was pleased but very worried about money and telling Nan as we now called her. Our names had been on the list for a council house they had started building again, lots of people lived in prefabs after the war, The time had come to put people in nice houses again, my luck was in when I opened a letter telling me we had a council house, I cried tears of joy a very own place of my own, Nan did not want us to go. My only worry was a paid 12 shillings a week, our house was going to cost 24 shillings a week, could I afford it with another baby on the way? As long as I could work we would be alright, I would make sure my children did not go without things they needed. Moved into our house; it was like the queen moving into her palace it meant that much to me. The end of that year my other daughter was born. 2 lovely daughters Angela and Vivien. There was plenty of evening jobs for me to do, Joe would come home and I would go to work for a few hours.

From time to time there would be a funeral in London. Sometimes it would be a wedding, first Auntie Grace's Pat, strange as it seems she met an American in London, not long before they were married, we went to the wedding. Bunny had told her a long time ago that her father was American. Pat went back to the States to live, as time went by she was determined to find her father. Pretending to be writing a book on Americans that were in England she had her Father's name. Al Gooing, somehow finding where he lived. This brave little girl asked if she could speak to Mr. Gooing, her heart was pounding as the man standing in front of her said; Yes I am Mr. Gooing, Pat asked if he was in England during the war? Oh no you want my brother Al; Could I speak to him please? I only wish you could, he died of cancer a couple of months ago. Pat then told him she was his daughter and wanted to see him. They knew all

about Al's affair, he had told them how he was in love with Grace and wanted to marry her. He had heard he had a daughter, that was all he knew. They accepted Pat into the family they still see each other and are good friends now. The sad part was Pat never got the chance to know her Father. I sometimes wonder how many hundreds of children never know their own mothers or fathers, today is worse than ever. Pat's sister Carol also married an American they saw each other quite often.

Bunny was taken ill and died of cancer. One after another my Mother's family died, Aunt Grace still lives in London in her 80's now. The saddest one was my poor Uncle Len he never got over the death of his brother Harry. He was discharged from the Army and went back to work in the docks, but his health was very poor and he was diagnosed as having Parkinson's disease, poor chap got worse until he went into hospital — he never came home again.



## CHAPTER 21

The only one in London who kept in touch with me was my Auntie Grace. Her daughter Carol came back from America her marriage broke up, after a few years, she had cancer and died recently. Pat has been to see me twice. Don't know if I will ever see her again as now she has a grand child. One cousin Annett on my Father's side I met 4 years ago, we had not seen each other for 50 odd years. The reunion was un-describable, we cuddled each other and cried.

War parts families and it is never the same as their lives are so different. Annett told me that Doris had died. This I knew because one night I had a dream that my Auntie Edie (Dad's sister) was calling me. The next day at work we had a one day strike, so off I went to the Isle of Wight, my Auntie was in a home there, I did see her and spent a day with her. She was the last one left in my Dad's family in her 80's, much to my surprise she was fine. I left the next day phoned my cousin to let her know I had got home safe when she asked if I had known anything as my Auntie Edie had died one hour after I had left her. This made me very sad as she had been the only one to send me 2/6 when I was evacuated.

The reason I have been writing about different jobs was to show the youth of today that you can find jobs if you are willing to work hard and go on learning. Every job we do teaches us new skills. One factory job I got at first I was very worried about the time sheets as lots of jobs were worked out in decimals something I knew nothing about. Asking my daughter about it she showed me how easy it was, that job I had for 18 years and enjoyed going every day until I retired. My daughter Angela went into nursing I felt very proud of her. On one of our holidays I think it was the first holiday she had in 10 years, the first two days was great, then I had news that my Mother had a stroke. We came home I was so glad we were in England. My poor Mum was very ill she did not know anyone, it was heartbreaking to see such a strong, lady go like that. I helped nurse her at home as she was too ill to be moved to hospital. That 3 weeks seemed like a lifetime. I stayed with her night and day, then she died a sad ending for such a strong lady. For years after that, every time I heard her music it would make me cry. This story has really been dedicated to my Mum, the urge to write this story I feel sure has come through her to me. All the facts are true as she told me time after time.

My other daughter Vivien was born in the same house we are still living in, she also did well a beautician after taking lots of examinations. This is one thing that makes me sad, the youth of today have a good education but after all that there is not any jobs for them. In my lifetime work was the most important thing because we needed money to buy things this makes life worthwhile.

With all its ups and downs I still think this is a wonderful world. Four lovely grandchildren Paul, Sarah, Hayley and now Leah, what more could anyone want. For someone who left school not able to read or write much, I think this book is quite an achievement and if it ever gets published I don't know, if so I owe thanks to Molly a friend who retyped it for me, also Annie who also urged me on to do so.

We have been married for 48 years so I know I must have chosen the right one for me. Joe never held me back in doing anything I wanted to. 20 odd years on stage with the Clevedon Comedy Club and our Club dancing and singing, 2 shows a year. There is not much I have not tried to do. I have a go at anything, this typing for instance never typed in my life. I bought this old typewriter at a car boot and with one or two fingers it has served me well.

This story has no end because there are lots of my family to follow on. Mina had 3 girls and 2 boys, they have all married except the last son Wayne, so there are 8 grandchildren in that family. I will never know how many cousins and now second cousins there must be around the world. My sister Eva married her Dave he came out of the Army and had TB, why we never knew. My sister looked after him and when he got better he left her. She also lost her only baby, it was very deformed they would not let her see the baby. My Mother who was still alive then said it was an awful sight and blamed it on the first world war. My sister was always a bit backward, Mum always said that she had taken all the nerves from her. Eva married again this husband also left her, she then developed sugar diabetes, after losing one of her legs

then toes on her other leg and being almost blind her will to go on living just went, we did all we could for her.

So with all that war put me through it was only like a drop of rain falling in the sea. We will be celebrating our golden wedding anniversary in 1998 must watch out for any horses running in the Derby that year, we had My Birth, My Wedding, My Love won. Also another horse called Never Say Die - that year I said born Derby day never say die. Another winner was Angelo the 2nd, my daughter was Angela so luck and the good Lord has watched over m my life. All that I have written in this story is as true as I can remember it so it will end praying I will never go through another war.