

Reminiscences from a life

Jean Edwardes

*This book consists of texts and illustrations by Jean Edwardes,
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All of the writing is the personal work of Jean Edwardes, except where indicated.

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Three Trees
(Drawn Thread and Applique)

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Landmarks in my life

National events, 1933 to 1953

1933	Saw the Graf Zeppelin flying over London.
1936	Death of King George V. Peter (my husband) was taken by his parents to see the funeral procession. He remembered it was a very wet day.
1936	Abdication of King Edward VIII.
1937	Coronation of King George VI. Lots of street parties.
1938	Saw newsreel of Munich agreement. I was young, so it didn't mean much to me. I remember the film I saw that day: it was called "Fire Over England" (very prophetic).
1939	Evacuation, consequently heard the declaration of war with strangers; on the wireless, of course.
1940	Bombs and fire over London.
1941	The same.
1943	I remember watching a dogfight when I went for a picnic.
1944	D-Day invasion June 6 th . V1 Buzz-bombs, V2 rockets. London burns again.
1945	Nearly trampled to death in Piccadilly, 8 th May. Consequently I still hate crowds of any kind. End of Japanese occupation of Hong Kong 13 th July. VJ day 2 nd September (victory over Japan).
1946	Peter, my sweetheart, was demobbed. I remember he was given a suit and 7 shillings and sixpence, plus a trilby hat.
1947	Saw my first television programme on a 9 inch TV set. It was the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Prince Philip Mountbatten on November 20 th .
1951	Went to the Festival of Britain. Peter's Dad was an exhibitor, I can't remember what he exhibited.
1953	Good news: sweet rationing ended 4 th February after 13 years. Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, 2 nd June. I helped at the street party. Peter lined the route in uniform in Whitehall: he was in the RNVR. Then he remembered seeing a headline "Everest conquered" when he was marching through Horseguards Avenue.



**Medieval Maidens
(Tapestry work)**

Recollections of My Life

My very first memory was the birth of my baby sister. We waited in the street, and were given drinks from the neighbour. It seemed like hours and hours later, someone came and said “you can go indoors now. Your baby sister is here and, if you are very quiet, you may see her and your Mum.”

I was very surprised, and wondered why Mum was in bed (I was a very innocent child and I hadn't even known we were going to have another baby). Her name was Patricia, unfortunately she died when she was 10 months old. Her disappearance was as shrouded in mystery as her birth. When I was much older I was told that she had died of pneumonia. Of course, childbirth and death were forbidden subjects for children. I and my younger brother and sister were not allowed to go to the funeral; in fact we knew nothing about it as we were sent to a neighbour for the day, and it was never discussed at all. As far as I knew she had just gone.

My second clear memory happened a little later (we were still living in Edmonton). I was always very interested in sewing and the local dressmaker, her name was Ivy, took me under her wing; and each Saturday she would take me to her place of work. I remember it as being a room in a house in which she had a sewing machine (a treadle), ironing board and a dressmaker's dummy. She taught me how to sew on buttons, make buttonholes (quite an art), oversee the edges of seams. Occasionally I would be allowed to press the seams open, flattening them. I was over the moon when I received my wages, usually in the region of threepence or sixpence, old money of course. Nowadays the equivalent of I suppose 1p and 3p.

Ivy made my eldest sister's wedding gown, and my young sister and I were bridesmaids. We were so excited as we also had new shoes (white bar shoes) and hand-crochet socks. Our dresses were a very pretty blue with flowers on. Needless to say they became our very best clothes for as long as they lasted. I don't remember very much about the party afterwards, only that our front room had lots of people in it. We children were delegated to the garden after, of course, changing our clothes.

I have a very happy memory of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth and King George VI (our present Queen Mother). I thought she was very beautiful. I remember it was a sunshiny day and we had a street party. My Mum made myself and young sister red, white and blue dresses out of crepe paper, we felt like princesses ourselves. Our little brother was dressed up, also. It was a very happy day. I suppose we had a spread (food) but that part has faded from my memory, my recollections are all of people laughing, dancing and playing silly games. It was a wonderful day.

I remember my elder brother joining the Territorials and the terrific row when my Dad found out. (His memory of the Great War was always with him.) My Dad was captured by the Poles¹ and ended up in a camp where he was beaten with rifle butts repeatedly. Consequently, he suffered for the rest of his life with terrific headaches and became a severe alcoholic. He had a very quick temper, but he was never feared by us or my Mother. He was in fact a very nice man, humorous and charming, also excellent company in or out of drink. All the grandchildren who knew him have very good memories of him.

My mother was also a wonderful person, I loved her very much. She was always very supportive towards my Father, and she had a great deal to contend with. For example, my Father often spent nearly all his wages on drink, but there was always a little left. My Mother augmented the family income by taking in other people's washing and ironing. I remember coming home from school and turning the handle of, what seemed to me then, an extremely large wringer with huge wooden rollers. I used to think that if I wasn't careful it would eat my hands and arms.

In the war I remember my Mum would cook the most wonderful stews, always different in taste because they were always made with whatever was available at the time. She also made delicious shepherd's pie, which we always had with baked beans. And the times she baked an apple tart I would think I was in heaven, she made excellent pastry. We were very fortunate kids in having caring parents.

Back to the war years. After the doodlebugs, which we called V1s, came V2s. These were airborne missiles which were silent in their approach, one would be suddenly deafened by an unbelievably loud explosion. The blasts which followed were devastating to the participants and the fear and horror felt by all lived with us day and night. My Father became an Air Raid Warden. These were very brave men. They helped people to the shelters in the dark, as everything was in complete darkness (known as the Blackout). The Wardens' helmets were sort of pie-shaped with very wide brims which could prove to be quite lethal if one happened to bump into a person wearing one. The wide brims could inflict nasty injuries, especially to the face. My Father came home one morning, after a bad night, with a very nasty injury on his forehead where someone had accidentally run into him.

After the First World War, when my Father returned home he finally managed to get a job as a conductor on the horse buses. He really loved this work as it was outdoors and he met many people. They often took their customers from door to door; and sometimes, when the fogs were so thick, the horses would lose their way so that he would be stuck out all night. He worked at Chalk Farm garage, he did the

¹ This was a Polish regiment in the German army.

job for 40-odd years and was at that time the longest-serving conductor. When we moved to Edmonton he would walk to Chalk Farm and then walk home again¹. I remember his hands, in the cold weather they would become extremely cracked and sore; handling the copper coins certainly didn't help matters, and the cracks would often go septic. Also, he suffered a lot of boils. He couldn't wear gloves, consequently we used to knit him mittens with very short fingerholes. Even very young children were taught to knit, which is probably why I dislike knitting now. The mittens were difficult to knit as they were knitted in the round: one used four knitting needles, three with stitches on, and one needle to knit with.

Growing up was exciting, and in many ways fun. The boys learned to smoke and drink, the girls learned to dance, the Jitterbug being one of the favourites. Ballroom dancing gave us all terrific satisfaction, such dances as the Waltz, Foxtrot, Quickstep and, my own favourite, the Tango. We were very proud of our prowess at the various dances.

The Yanks were good fun to be with and appeared to us to be well off fellows (I guess they were better paid than our own forces). But my fella was in the English Navy, so the Yanks, to me, were young men good for an evening's dancing (they were so very good at the Jitterbug).

In due time my Sailor came home. He had served on the Berryhead and sailed right round the World. We got engaged and saved hard for our marriage. We were introduced in our prams so we had grown up in the same street. He later moved around the corner. We didn't attend the same schools as he was a Roman Catholic and we were Church of England. Religion was our first hurdle: there was as much prejudice then between religions as there exists today over colour and Jewish and other factions.

I guess I was a very difficult child for my parents to understand as I was more than once accused of having religious mania. I suppose I was a bit prissy, but even as a little girl I remember saying prayers to all sorts of holy people (or people I thought of as holy). I tried lots of different faiths as I grew older, I even went to a couple of spiritualist meetings; so even before we got engaged I became close to God in the Catholic religion, but I didn't start going to mass until after I met Peter's sister and started to see Peter on a regular basis. So in the end we were in agreement about religion. My Parents expressed their disapproval and my brothers and sisters were at times quite vociferous, but they had grown up with Holy Jean so, in the end, it was all accepted. Mind you, no one in my Family came to my Reception service². This was conducted in the big Catholic cathedral in Westminster. The great feelings

¹ Chalk Farm to Edmonton is a distance of about five miles.

² Reception into the Catholic church.

of peace, love and the quietness; also the acceptance that at last I had found the reason for my life is something that I shall never forget, and I daily thank God for his goodness for giving me such a wonderful life.

Now I could plan my wedding. My savings were now sufficient that I was able to modestly furnish a flat we found in a place very near our homes. It was called Camden Square: big town houses originally, now the different floors were let to individual tenants. The toilets were shared, usually by two families, as there were 2 toilets and 4 floors, a family on each floor. The basement was also let out as a flat, their loo was in the garden. We paid 10 shillings and sixpence (53 pence today) weekly rent. Our first child was born there, a girl weighing 5½lb. We named her Nicola.

Our wedding was what was classed in those days as quite an elaborate affair (although now it would be considered to be very modest). It was, of course, a “white wedding”. We had about 70 guests, mainly family, and a few friends. The wedding day started very dull and wet and we arrived at the church for a 10 o’clock ceremony. The Parish Priest was an awkward person and refused to marry us unless we were prepared to be wed at 8 o’clock in the morning. My family, not being Catholics or involved in the faith in any way, would have been horrified. So we did take things into our own hands and immediately went to the priory at Highgate, and a priest there very kindly said he would come and perform the ceremony for us at 10 o’clock (that news was hard enough for my parents to accept).

We had a nuptial mass and afterwards we had a civil ceremony conducted by the Registrar (it was the law in those days). Finally we were pronounced Man and Wife and, after church photographs, we went to the local posh restaurant called Beale’s Restaurant, Holloway Road, at 11:30am to 4pm. I took my flowers to the local convent where the nuns were very touched and put them on the altar.

We had a week’s honeymoon in a place called Ilfracombe. Then we returned to our flat and started our new lives together in earnest, with the great intention of living our lives together for always; and here we are still together 50 years later. Our faith has helped keep our love and respect for each other. Of course, we had our bad patches and unpleasant experiences, but we always managed to live and let live (faith again).

We had 5 natural children, 3 girls and 2 boys. We also adopted a baby boy, and he has proved to be a real joy. We also fostered several children, older ones and younger ones. Also a foster child who was partially sighted and disfigured by having a hair lip and a cleft palate. She was also very backward and awkward in her movements. But with hard work she has developed into a very acceptable person. She went to work and eventually she married a blind man and they appear to be

We now have 12 grandchildren and one great grandchild. We have run the gamut of emotions (you name it and we have experienced it). We are blessed with the most wonderful children and grandchildren, they are all individuals, but all are marvellous people. We have never been the recipients of great wealth as far as money goes, but the love, affection and caring of our children towards us is, in this modern world, almost unbelievable. We have indeed been blessed and I thank God every day for my life.

Life as we have known and lived for the past 74 years is now taking another turn, the final chapter. Our time together has been lived to the very fullest. Now my husband, always a rock of strength and strong character, has become extremely ill. Over the past few weeks I have seen him fading before my eyes, he is becoming completely dependent on others. Once again our children are all here supporting me and showing much love and helpfulness.

I expect the reader will by now have deduced his illness is cancer of the lung. He smoked heavily when he was a young man, until there came a time in our married life when money was at a premium, and he said “right, I’ll give it up”; and true to his vow he never smoked again. That was at least 20 years ago, a most heroic effort on his part.

The prognosis is very bad. We have had some wonderful cards and messages from friends, which are a great comfort; and my sister, who’s husband died a few years ago of cancer, has given me great encouragement (she phones me very often).

I will stop writing now. I know I have to be strong and caring for my children, especially when it is time for the final goodbye on this Earth.

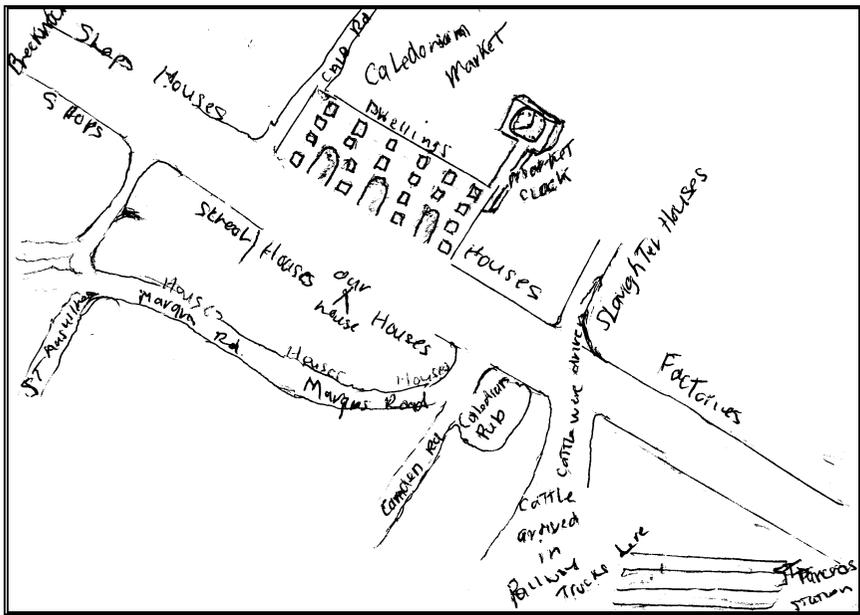


**Huck Finn and Montmorency
(Two dolls made by the Author)**

Pre-War Childhood Memories

When I was very young we lived near Camden Town. We actually lived in a street called York Way which started at a place called The Brecknock, a small collection of shops. Further down the road was a very big school called Brecknock School (which I attended). The road went from The Brecknock to St Pancras station, we lived further down the road from the school.

Right opposite us was an unsightly block of flats called, if I remember correctly, Camden Dwellings. It was a most unimpressive place: very dark walls, small windows, about four floors high with a flat roof. I do plainly remember arched openings onto the staircases (stone stairs). Further down the road was a railway yard where the cattle arrived in closed railway trucks and were disembarked and driven up York Way to the Caledonian Slaughterhouse – Caledonian Market was at the back of York Way.

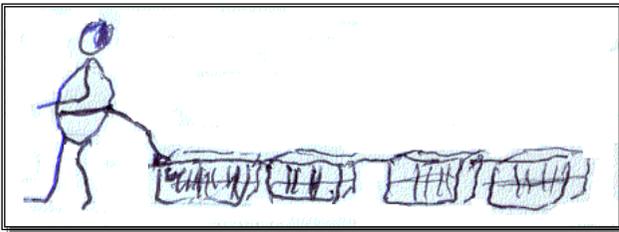


One day there was a terrible noise, and confusion became the order of the day. We children were all hustled indoors where we all watched from our front windows. A bullock had escaped and had run up the staircase of Camden Dwellings and onto the flat roof. They couldn't get it back down the stairs, and it was running around bellowing and causing havoc. In the end it was decided to get a marksman in to do

the job. He finally arrived and shot the bullock down.

Market day at the Caledonian Market was always very exciting, we would go to the market to try to earn a few pence. There were always very colourful characters to be seen. The Banana King always provided us with great entertainment, throwing us bananas and the odd halfpenny. We would all enjoy the friendly scramble for the throwouts. Then there was Prince Manoloulou, a very colourful character. He always chanted "I've got a horse, I've got a horse". Yes, he was a bookie.

There was also a homemade sweetie stall where for a halfpenny you could get a whole bag of sweets (broken or misformed, but they tasted the same as the dearer ones). The biscuit stall and the fruit stall were always favourite places, where, often by getting the stall holder a jug of water, this would reward you with a freebie.



As kids we would go round collecting empty wooden baskets, attach a string to our waist and go home pulling a few boxes behind us. Once we got home we would chop up the wood and make it into

bundles, and then sell it house to house (everyone had coal fires in those days). For three bundles for a penny we used to feel like Rockefeller (millionaires, now) if we earned threepence each.

Xmas was always a very special day. Not for presents: usually we had a sock each with an orange, a piece of coal, a penny, a lollipop and a Xmas cracker. We always had a family game between us. What made Xmas special to us children was that Father Xmas usually came round on his sleigh, ringing a large bell. Carol singers would tour the streets singing wonderful carols, and we always had a very special dinner with homemade Xmas pudding with a shiny sixpence inside. We would all explore our pudding to see who the lucky person would be. A great cheer would sound when the sixpence was discovered. Such riches certainly made you King or Queen for the day.

May Day! In those days we were all very proud of our country and Royal family. May Day was always a great celebration. We always did maypole dancing and had a procession of a May Queen and attendants. It was a very great honour to be chosen to be the May Queen. One year I was chosen. I felt really wonderful. Imagine my disappointment when, after a visit to the Great Ormond Street hospital (I had recently had my tonsils removed and never seemed to recover fully) they

told my Mother I had a suspected TB gland in my neck, and I would have to be immobilised for six months hence. I went home from my visit to hospital in a body splint, which completely immobilised my upper body movements.

It also put paid to my being the May Queen. I was unable to attend the parade, but I did go to the school service, a religious thanksgiving for all the good things in life. We always finished with “I vow to thee, my Country”. I still remember the words and the tune.



The Footballers

(Two dolls made by the author. All of the author's dolls are completely hand made, except for the porcelain features and the hair. The porcelain items are fired from moulds then painted by the author and re-fired.)

The Music Hall

When I was young we had a very unique form of entertainment. It was then known as “The Old Bedford Music Hall”. It was a marvellous evening out. The Chairman could make or break a show.

I remember “Jane”, a rather loud entertainer (a stripper). My Dad used to cover my eyes when she was on. I remember Max Miller (the Cheeky Chappie). A lot of the jokes went over my head; but I laughed with everyone else, with the sheer joy of being alive rather than the jokes.

We were always in The Gods¹, the cheapest seats, but we always had a wonderful view of the stage. The audience participation was terrific fun. I learnt all the old songs off by heart. One of my favourites was “My old Man said follow the van, and don’t dilly-dally on the way”. I used to sing with gusto. One song I always thought was very sad was “There was I, waiting at the church”. I could never understand why everyone thought it was so hilarious.

I would sing the songs to my Dad afterwards. I think it was the only time I remember him praising me.



Edwardian Dance Hall
(Embroidery)

¹ The upper balcony.

Childhood Games



Skipping

A very favourite past-time when we were young, it didn't matter what the weather was like, we always skipped - except if it was very hot; then we just lolled around, we didn't have television back then. We didn't have fancy skipping ropes with handles, either, all we had was a length of rope. We always made it the right length by winding the surplus round our hands.

We played quite a lot of games, one being straightforward skipping: ten skips on the right foot, ten skips two feet together, ten skips on the left foot. If you reached thirty skips without tripping over the rope you were a winner.

We also used to chant rhymes as we skipped. I can only remember three rhymes at the moment, the first one being:

Bloodstains on the carpet, bloodstains on the knife
 Doctor Buck Ruxton has murdered his wife.
 Maid Mary was watching, he thought she would tell
 So Doctor Buck Ruxton killed her as well.¹

Another was:

Hitler is a Nazi
 Ribbentrop's the same
 Lord Haw Haw is a loudmouth
 But we won't play their game.

There was also the one we thought was very daring:

Skip, skip, skip to the loo
 Skip, skip, skip to the loo
 Skip, skip, skip to the loo
 Skip to the loo my darling

These are not the official words, I think they are Skip to Marlou or something like that².

The rhymes were always followed by a series of "bumps". These were skips to a double turning of the rope. One would count the skips: 1 double turn, 2 double turns, 3 double turns, etc. If one was very clever you could reach as high as 15. A very exhausting game.

¹ This rhyme is based on a real double murder, which took place on 15th September 1935 in Lancaster.

² Skip to M'Lou was the recognised form in the 1950s, but this is probably not the definitive title.

A group of girls would play this game: one girl would skip while the others stood in a semicircle around the skipper. The skipper would proceed to skip and she would call a name (say, Eileen): “Eileen, Eileen come in with me, and tell me the name of your sweetheart.”



The one called in would say a boy’s name (say, Peter). They would then skip together spelling P-E-T-E-R, then she would run out. If she tripped over the rope she would be out of the game. The skipper could change with anyone she chose.

Five Stones

This was quite a skilful game. First one hunted for five pebbles, smooth and round and equal size (not so easy in a built-up area). Once found the game could be played.

The game was usually played alone as it needed a great deal of concentration. Four stones would be placed on the ground in a cross pattern, a snatching distance apart. Then one would toss the remaining pebble into the air, snatch up a stone and hopefully catch the one coming down so you had two pebbles in your hand. Then you continued until all the pebbles were snatched and you had all five pebbles in your hand.

Cigarette Cards

In bygone days cigarette cards were usually given away free in the packets, and would be collected by the children. We would stand about ten cards along a wall and throw cards at them, trying to knock the standing cards over. The ones you managed to knock over were your winnings. You would think that we would soon run out of cards. Our solution was that the one who knocked over the most cards stacked up the cards for the next game (very democratic).

Feinits

We had very few rows or fights because we had an unfailing rule: if one had to drop out of a game, a call from Mum, dinnertime, on a tumble, one could always call “Feinits”; and, although the game went on, you never felt excluded in your absence as you could just carry on when you returned. Feinits applied to any game at any time, especially when we were playing He¹. After running around for quite a while one would get out of breath and feel exhausted. One could call “Feinits” and

¹ Also called Tag, Chase, and many other names.

have a rest, then join in again when one recovered.

Kiss Chase

A game much enjoyed by boys and girls was Kiss Chase. The girls usually outnumbered the boys and it sometimes finished with the boys getting mobbed. They loved it.

Marbles

Another game which could be played by just two players was marbles. We had glass marbles in those days. They were truly beautiful, very much like miniature glass paperweights. They were different sizes: the small ones we called miggies, the large ones we called cannonballs, I forget what we called the sizes in between large and small. The object of the game was to roll your marbles and try to hit the other person's marble. If you managed to hit a marble (not your own) you won it. That meant no one ever ran out of marbles completely. At the end of the game you kept the ones you had, also the one with the most marbles could pick up the marbles left in play.

Statues

Another game was always played with a group of children. We called it "Statues". One person would stand facing the wall, the rest of the group would be over the road, the object being to eventually touch the one at the wall on the shoulder. To do this the group members had to move slowly or quickly across the road, the catch being that the one facing the wall would swing round to face the group; if she saw anyone moving they were out, hence the name "Statues". One had to be quite still when the spotter turned, which wasn't as easy as it sounds. It taught one the art of anticipation.

Traffic

There was very little traffic in those days, which made playing in the street comparatively safe. The traffic was always very exciting and interesting, like the Ding-dong-icecream, a tricycle with a bell that rang "ding-dong"; it was usually a Walls icecream bike. A great favourite was the water ice in a three-cornered cone (they were the cheapest) - about 3 inches long, all kids loved them. The coal cart with its friendly horse, we didn't mind getting dirty as, naturally, the coal carts were always filthy. Then there was the frozen block lorry: this carried blocks of ice which people bought to put under their pantry shelves to help keep the food fresh in very hot weather. Also the Organ Grinder, we always danced to the tunes he played, and begged our Mum to give us a halfpenny to give to the monkey. There was also the Rag & Bone man. His cart was always very colourful and we loved to shout with him "Raaag-a-boones" until he shouted at us to go away. If we had any old clothes to give him he usually gave us a goldfish in a jamjar. The Brewer's wagon was always a wonderful experience: the horses so big, with wonderful shiny

medals on their harness and a lovely jingle as they walked. It was so very interesting, when they arrived at the pub and they opened up a big trap door in the pavement and unloaded the big barrels of Beer; at least, they seemed enormous to us.

Hygiene

When we finally got home, usually very dirty, Mum would always strip us down and wash us from head to foot, always rinsing our hair with a jug full of vinegar-water. I am proud to say that when "Nitty Nora" visited our school we (our family) never had nits and we never had to visit a cleansing station. We always had very short hair, and I was pleased every Friday night, when it was my turn to stand on a sheet of newspaper and have my hair combed with the tooth comb (it would be a very painful experience with long hair).

Grottoes

One of our more inventive pastimes was building what we called "grottoes". They mainly consisted of a collection of stones, milk tops, pieces of wood, in fact anything that was small and colourful. We would then make small pictures or patterns. They were then judged, usually by passers-by. People had time in those days and didn't mind spending a few minutes to encourage children in their harmless pastimes. They would often reward the one judged to be best with a sweet or biscuit.

Indoor Games

We played numerous card games. Some are still popular today, although they now have different names. There was Patience, played with the whole pack by one person. Perseverance was needed in this game, not skill. Happy Families was usually played with two, three or four children - a special pack of picture cards was used for this game.

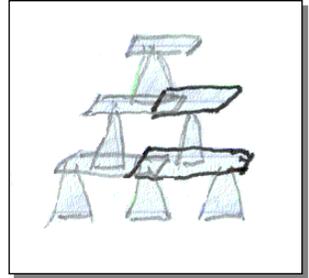
Also we played a game called Fish. The cards were dealt face-down, each player receiving seven cards (there were usually three or four players). After each player had received his cards what was left was placed in a pile face-down in the centre of the table. Each player then looked at his cards and kept them facing himself so that the other players couldn't see them. Then they would ask in turn the person sitting on their left for a specific number card, but it had to be one they were holding in their hands, the object being to match one of the cards in your hand. When asked "have you got any twos?" the person asked had to hand over any he had, if not he would answer "Fish", and the asker had to take a card from the centre pile. The final intention was to obtain four cards the same, then one would lay the set on the table in front of one. When all the centre cards were gone the player with the most sets in front of them would win. The twist was if one had collected three the same and someone asked if you had that card, you had to hand over your three so the

other person had a set. Memory played a big part in this game.

We also played Pontoon (still very popular today). We used buttons to bet with (grown-ups would use money).

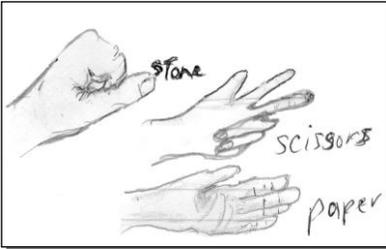
A very popular pastime was building the cards (always played by oneself). Very tricky, it demanded great perseverance and patience, but one got very involved. One would start by standing two cards on end in an inverted V, then proceed to lay flat cards overlapping them to form a platform. Then you would proceed as follows:

One could use as many cards as one wished to. The object was to build as high as one could. Such involvement and endeavour, but the thrill of achievement was unsurpassed when one achieved a large, tall tower. Everyone enjoyed blowing it down so it could then be started all over again.



Scissors-Paper-Stone

Another game we played in pairs. This was often used as a divvying-up game. It consisted of two people facing each other with both hands behind one's back. On the count of three they would bring one hand forward. There were three hand movements: a closed fist (stone), two index fingers held forward (scissors), and a flat hand palm uppermost. The stone would blunt the scissors, the scissors would cut the paper, the paper would wrap the stone.



Potatohead

I also liked a game called "Potatohead". We would go over to the Caledonian market and find the old potatoes the stall-holder had thrown out and, on the way home, we would hunt for bits and pieces such as small pebbles and buttons, pieces of wood, string, coloured papers (sweet wrappers, usually), anything at all that we felt might be useful. We would wait for a rainy day, we never had to wait too long, then we would make our own potato-men with the bits and pieces we had collected. Our imaginations could run riot, and sometimes the finished men were really funny and entertaining. This could be played any time, we didn't really have to wait for wet weather. We had little competitions in the streets, we had fun.

A Childhood Memory

We always took sandwiches, usually fish paste or jam, and homemade lemonade. Adults had a flask of tea. The steam train journey was always exciting. We usually walked to the railway station, about ½ mile, but it seemed a long way.

When we reached the seaside, usually Southend, we always stood and took deep breaths outside the station. I can still remember the salty smell and clean air. As we got nearer the sea the smell of fish and chips made us all feel hungry. If Mum and Dad were “flush” they used to buy a bag of chips and a bag of cracklings, which we all shared.

Our day was spent on the beach. It was a thrill to jump the waves and make castles with moats that went down to the sea. There were usually Punch and Judy shows and donkeys on the beach. I also remember a man in a peaked cap that used to come up and down the beach collecting payment for the hire of deckchairs. I only remember the sun shining.

The esplanade (now called the front) was usually very wide with steps down to the beach, but it always seemed to me that the sand and sea were very very big. I can still see the sea and sky meeting and thinking to myself heaven is out there somewhere. After what seemed to me a most exciting day we caught the train home. I had had a lovely holiday.



Country Scene
(Tapestry)

My Memories of the 1939 to 1945 War

I was twelve years old when the 1939 war began. It is still very vivid in my mind. The various feelings of the people around me. The trepidation of my parents, who had already lived through the 1914 to 1918 war. The separation they felt back then, was now going to be experienced by their children. For example my father, during the first war was missing for a very long while, eventually the news came through that he was a prisoner of war. The experience affected him for the rest of his life and naturally we grew up in fear of war.

The family consisted of Mum, Dad and five children. Three girls and two boys and my grandma (Dad's mother). Born in Camden Town, London where I lived until I was seven when we moved to a house in Edmonton. Just an ordinary three bedroom semi, but to me it was like a palace, it even had an indoor toilet and bathroom. Unfortunately Dad couldn't settle and Mum missed her friends, so we moved back to Camden Town (tin bath in front of the fire and an outdoor loo again!)

When the war started I was therefore back in London. First came the fitting of gas masks (a horrible experience) but the biggest trauma was evacuation. We all assembled (children and parents) in the school hall There we were all duly labelled. My mother insisted that my little brother and sister and myself all stayed together and gave me the responsibility of making sure that separation never happened.

We finally arrived at the railway station, all labelled with our gas masks and carrier bags more or less tied to us. There were lots of tears and desperate feelings of separation (not understood by the younger children). Big girls like me, at the age of twelve and over were forced into the roles of adult carers and comforters. I felt the role very keenly. I couldn't give way to my own feelings, as I had the youngsters to comfort.

The train journey seemed to last forever, but eventually we arrived at a place in Bedfordshire called Leagrave. From there we went on a long walk to a village called Sundon. By this time we were all thirsty and hungry, they took us to the village hall where we were all put into a line and the villagers came to choose the child or children that they were willing to take home with them. As there were three of us and with the eldest girl, me, being adamant that we were not to be separated, we remained until we were the only ones left. Eventually, a very kind woman agreed to take us. I later found out that she was 38 years old and expecting her first baby. We spent five very happy months with Mr and Mrs Norton until she felt that with a new baby she wouldn't be able to cope, so we had to be moved. By now, of course, accommodation was at a premium and unfortunately we had to be separated. My sister and I went to a Mr and Mrs Coeshall and my little brother was

taken to another couple who didn't have any experience or understanding of children. My younger brother was very unhappy and started to have nightmares. The young couple's reaction was extreme to say the least. They were convinced he was a mad child and tied him to his bed (which made matters worse).

I spent several very unhappy weeks, suffering all the pangs of failing in my obligations both to my brother and my parents. We stayed in Sundon until I was 14, which was school leaving age. Then we went to stay with an aunt who lived in a village called Langford (it was a village back then).

I went to work in a factory as a machinist and received the weekly wage of twelve shillings and sixpence (12/6). The equivalent of about 62 pence. For this great wage I worked from 8 to 6 with an hour break for dinner, plus a half day on a Saturday. It was hard work and after we were trained we went on to piecework. Three shillings and sixpence for a dozen under slips and believe it or not we would be absolutely delighted when we earned another ten shillings or so on top of our basic wage of 12/6. I used to pay my aunt 10/- a week for my board and food. It was surprising what I could do with the money I had left.

After about 2 years I returned to London, I was about sixteen and by this time there were raids of the Doodle bugs. This was a horrendous weapon. If one was lucky there would be time to duck between hearing the whistle and The Fall. Then the terrific explosions of the doodle bugs were very frightening. Even now when I see warfilms or programmes on the television, the sound of the siren still makes my blood run cold. The Blitz was a terrible experience, my parents were bombed out and even then there were villains about. They had a habit of stealing from the bombed houses, so sometimes it seemed that life was pointless.

The rationing of food and clothes taught you that everything was precious. Sweets, fruit, stockings, feminine intimate articles, were all out of reach (luxury dreams). Butter, jam, sugar, tea, bread, meat and some vegetables. Today, these all seem such basic foods but back then they were rationed and difficult to buy. I remember our first tin of salmon towards the end of the war, we savoured every mouthful We all learned to make do, for example we all became very proficient at turning clothes, that entailed unpicking them and putting them back together again with the insides turned outside. Invisible mending became a real art and I personally used to get great satisfaction when I repaired an item of clothing.

Family life was very difficult. The mothers were left to get on with it. They became wonderful cooks and very inventive. They always managed to present the family with wholesome and enjoyable meals even though they may have had to queue for hours to get the necessary ingredients. They learnt how to make a very little go a very long way. Looking back, it seems to me that we children remained

comparatively healthy and well fed. I sometimes feel that we (the older generation) had to deal with so much stress when we were young that it was bred in us to have certain strengths to cope with the pressures of life today.

Here are a few facts that I don't often think about, we all attended the village school which caused great animosity with the village children. It came to a head when I was made head girl. The village children were up in arms, consequently on the way home one afternoon, I was waylaid and very severely beaten, then thrown into a very prickly ditch. I was in bed for a week, but after that incident there was no more trouble.

The other thing that stays in the back of my mind which makes me laugh, was that the second family we stayed with were vegetarians and being wartime only drank green water (the water that cabbage had been boiled in) we thought it was vile, consequently for a couple of years we drank only tap water.

We learnt a lot, mainly how to get on with unfamiliar people and surroundings and to accept another way of life.



Castles

A selection of pottery castles from various collections

My Memories of the 1939 to 1945 War (2)

Going back to wartime experiences, I remember a friend of mine, when her house was bombed, she went to see the damage. The only thing standing upright was her wardrobe. Her first words were “Thank God, it looks as though my clothes are still safe” (very important at that time of coupons, and acute shortage of clothes to buy, anyway).

When she opened the door her clothes were all shredded rags. The blast had opened the door and the window glass had been blown inside, cut up her clothes, then another blast must have shut the wardrobe door and the wardrobe remained quite intact.

Blast did a lot of peculiar things. Sometimes it actually saved lives, just leaving the person confused and very bewildered.



Flowers
(Stitchwork and Rouche)

My Headmaster

We were very lucky in our Headmaster. His name was Mr Widdicombe, he really took me under his wing. He was so kind, gentle and understanding, I could take all my worries and concerns to him. He always comforted me and gave me strength to carry on. He encouraged me in all my artistic pursuits - I was a very idealistic child, probably quite boring at times - but I always loved art, needlework, writing , any kind of art. I loved collecting things: pebbles, and wild flowers which I would painstakingly press and make folders of them. I loved horse chestnuts and acorns (which I would polish), fir cones and leaves.

Mr Widdicombe brought me all the things necessary to make him a rug (looped wool, canvas, etc). The rug, when finished, measured about 3ft by 5ft¹. I really enjoyed making it , it took me an awful long while but I did eventually finish it.

I corresponded with him until he died. I was married with two children when he died; I really missed his letters and answering them. He was a wonderful man and I owe him so very much, he really taught me how to develop into a sane human being.



Toadstools, from the collection of Philip Rescorla
(Pencil drawing)

¹ 1m x 1.5m.

Meetings

My husband and I have known each other all our lives. He was just nine months older than I. My Mum always said I was a twinkle in my Dad's eye when Peter was born, so we became acquainted in our prams.

We grew up in different circles. He was a Catholic, we were Church of England, and religion played a very great part in social circles in those days. I became very aware of these differences in beliefs very early: I was always very envious when I saw them setting out together, as a family, to go to church on Sundays and other special occasions. When I saw his sister all dressed up for her first communion I can remember feelings of jealousy and admiration. She looked like a princess to me, and I thought "how wonderful to have such lovely new clothes!"

As we grew up our differences became less apparent, and Peter became one of a gang (greatly admired by we girls). I remember the nicknames of his gang. Peter was known as "Despo", a shortened form of Desperate Dan (a comic character then). Then there was Ernie Walker, known as "Hookey"; Pat Windybanks, always called "Windy"; and Stanley Standeven, simply known as "Stan". They were a real gang, never vicious but real rascals, always up to mischief and deeds of daring. They caused many a heart-stopping moment with their various activities. Very much admired, never feared by other children, and tolerated by the adults, they all grew up into nice young men. In fact, my sister went out with Hooky Walker for a while.

I always liked Peter. I liked his red hair. He was different from the other boys. I forgot to mention John Nash, "Nobby"; he was also a member of the gang. I had quite a crush on him at one time, but he never really liked me (I think I was too goody-goody for him). But he was a handsome lad. Everyone was impressed with the fact that his father was a train driver, quite a prestigious occupation in those days.

Peter's experience of evacuation was quite different to my own. In the first place, he and his sister Christine were separated (they went to different schools). Peter was sent to Welwyn Garden City and Christine, after a simply horrendous journey, finished up at Penzance. Peter's experiences were very bad. He was even taken to court by the people he was billeted with, his crime being wetting the bed. He was obviously discharged. The whole thing makes one realise how inexperienced people were when it came to dealing with life.

Peter had a very varied life, although on the surface it could be viewed as very humdrum. Right from a very young age he loved ships and the sea, as he grew older it became almost an obsession. So the war gave him a chance to join the Navy

and live a little of his dreams. He sailed right around the World and loved every minute of the experience, but I think he was pleased to settle down to marriage. He did join the RNVR when he was demobbed.

He had a very good memory, which made him a most interesting person to talk to. He also had a good eye for detail, and was a regular Mr Fixit. He could do anything, especially if it was electrical. He was given the grand sum of seven shillings and sixpence, plus a civvy suit and a trilby hat to celebrate his demobilisation; this all happened in 1946.

We both remembered the end of sweet rationing in 1953. We had been married three years, we both had a sweet tooth so we bought the largest bar of chocolate we could find and had a feast. It was a real treat for me, after thirteen years of going without. Peter had an easier time, foodwise, when he was in the Navy so it wasn't quite such a treat for him.

He always looked very smart, manly and really handsome in uniform. I was as proud as he was when he got his first officer's uniform. I really used to feel very privileged to be seen with him and always tried to be a credit to him. In later life he became highly excitable and was inclined to get frustrated and short-tempered. He would often thrash about and I sometimes got in the way, hence I had several black eyes and various bruises. But he was never malicious or fault-finding, just quick-tempered (which never lasted more than an hour).

He was, in fact, a happy person, always willing to help and assist in any way he could. We had the usual kind of life together, but we were friends as well as lovers. Friendship is a most important attribute in a marriage.



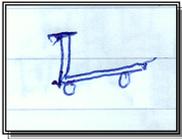
Tigers

(pencil drawing, from the collection of Philip Rescorla)

Small Memories as They Come to Me

One of the things that caused us merriment, my Dad would come home drunk and go to sleep. He would sit in his armchair and very gradually he would slide down until at last he would finish on the floor, still sitting up. It never woke him and he always acted surprised when he finally recovered. I always cleaned his shoes for him as he always said I did them better than anyone else.

In my early teenage years two young lads lived across the road from us. My Dad always called one "That Ginger-haired Bugger" and the other one "That Cheeky Sod". The ginger one later became my husband. The other was his cousin, Billy. They, at that time, were in cahoots with a few other terrors: Pat Windybank, Hokey Walker, Stanley Standeven to name a few. They got up to mischief, but never any criminal intent.



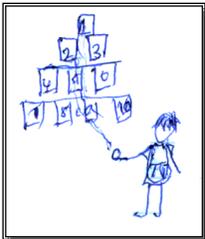
We (boys and girls) usually made our own toys. The boys had scooters which were very roughly put together. They usually had two wheels, one at front one at the back. The wheels were quite small and had ball bearings in them. They were very basic, something like this:

We also had whips and tops. We used to decorate the tops with coloured chalk or drawing pins. The whips were usually made from a piece of wood with string attached to make the whips. We also had lampposts in those days that had an arm from which we would suspend a loop of rope to make a swing:



We also used to play Hopscotch. We would draw the pattern on the pavement, number the squares and use a small stone to score with, the object being to jump to the squares in turns until one reached the end. We started at 10 and finished at 1, the tricky part being one had to hop to recover the stone without touching any lines.

Another old game, which any number of children could play, was one child would stand one side of the road facing the wall, and the rest of the children would stand in a line on the other side of the road. Someone would call "can we cross the river. The one facing the wall would answer "yes", then when the children started moving he or she would swing around and anyone caught moving would be out. The last one left would be the winner, or of course if anyone managed to reach the caller he would win and be the caller for the next game.



We also played the usual naughty games, “knock down Ginger” being one of the favourites. Hated by adults, because it involved knocking on doors and running away. Mind you, in those days we always looked for the “coppers”. They would deal with any miscreants on the spot. A clip round the ear was usually all it would take to make us behave ourselves. We were always brought up to respect aged people. Which, I suppose, makes the treatment which some old people receive these days at the hands of the young seem all the more unbelievably horrific.

I remember my Dad’s favourite programmes on the radio. They were Fu-Man-Chu, an action mystery story; also Dick Barton, Special Agent. Our Wireless was an accumulator set. The accumulator had to be charged up periodically. It was our job as children to take the battery to the local cobbler called Lullington, to be exchanged for a full battery. They were quite heavy when full so one had to be very careful not to spill it or drop it. The local cobbler was a well-known figure; he soled and heeled shoes, as in those days a pair of shoes were built to last, and one could have new soles and heels put on several times (much cheaper than a new pair of shoes).

We also had a wind-up gramophone, my favourite records were Handel’s Largo and “None But the Lonely Heart”. Both were hated by my Dad and Mum, so I only played them when they were both out. Needless to say, I only have to hear them on the tele and I am immediately transported back in time.

Of course, I had lots of boyfriends. Some experiences were shocking to me then, but now they are very laughable. My children and my grandchildren have enjoyed a few hearty chuckles when I have told them. One story which I feel isn’t too near the knuckle I will tell you about. I was being taken home by a young lad, and he marched me into a disused air-raid shelter. I protested that I was not that kind of girl. He walked away and left me, making the remark “I don’t care, anyway, you ain’t got very big tits” (shame and humiliation on my part).

About once a fortnight we would go to a big dance hall in Tottenham Court Road. The Yanks were fantastic dancers, and doing the Jive with them was a real experience. They were always very generous with their favours, but I never really succumbed to their sexy charms.

By now I was going steady with “that Ginger-haired bugger over the road”. He had joined the Navy and he looked very handsome in his uniform. I fell for him hook, line and sinker. He was away a lot, he served on the Berryhead and went right round the World. He was so clever. I think it’s about time I mentioned his name, Peter Alfred Edwardes.

One very funny happening occurred after we were wed. I had a habit of moving the furniture around the rooms. This particular day I decided to move the bedroom furniture to make room for the crib (I was expecting my first baby). I moved the bed from its position; consequently when it came to bedtime, the lights were out and the curtains drawn. It was quite dark. We had no heating in the flat except for the coal fire, so we were in the habit of getting undressed in front of the fire and then running across the landing to the bedroom. This particular night I went to bed first, and later Peter came running in and took a flying leap and landed on his bottom! I had forgotten to tell him I had moved the bed. He was very cross at the time, but now it causes great hilarity when I recount the story.

I have very unpleasant memories of the extremely thick London fogs. They were quite terrifying. They were literally so thick that one really couldn't see more than a foot or two when walking forwards. The mist felt damp and dirty, and seemed to clog the lungs so it was quite difficult to breathe. One would wrap a scarf around one's nose and mouth to make it easier to breathe. The Fog seemed to creep everywhere; if you left the door open you could see it curling in ghostly, creeping, dark, misty coils inside the house.

The year my first baby was born on January 2nd 1951, the weather was very cold. There was deep snow and my husband (Peter) was kept really busy. I ran out of gas & air and he had to go and collect some more. I was a very long time in labour and it was very cold and icy. Poor Peter fell many times, as the cylinder was heavy and awkward to carry, especially when it was so slippery underfoot.

I finally gave birth to a girl. She only weighed 5½lbs¹, but nevertheless I had to have stitches, which the doctor came the next day to put them in. The midwife's name was Sister Luha. She was a matriarch of the old school but she was very good at her job.

I had all my babies at home. Each confinement was different, but the pain never lessened. I had been told that each successive birth gets easier: baloney! But I am very happy to say that each child is their own person. They are all individual in their approach to life. They have their own characteristics and their own individual response to everything. We have, at times, experienced great explosions of temperament, but they can eventually agree to disagree. Happily they are all the kind of people who are capable of saying the word 'sorry' and can accept the maxim of being able to live and let live.

When we bought our first car, a little Austin Seven, we felt like kings. Peter and I were so proud and we used to wash and polish her so that she always shone. It

¹ About 2.75 kilos.

made us feel as though we owned the world. It was just as exciting as the day we moved into our own house. That was a tremendous achievement, we were so proud. It was only a very small house but we really enjoyed it. We even had a front garden and a back garden, we felt that heaven had really smiled on us. Money was tight but we felt that we had been blessed, and that helped us enormously. Personally, I really appreciated having been given the gift of faith and the ability to have a love of living and the grace to say thank you to my God.

My life in the country¹ taught me many things. What fun scrumping can be: the adventure and the stealth, and keeping an eye out; expecting to caught; and, if lucky, making a clean getaway. We also used to go peasing (quite back-breaking work) for which we were paid for each sackful; how much I don't remember, but it can only have been a small amount. Nevertheless we always enjoyed it. We also used to go blackberrying (not always enjoyed). The larking about and the picnics usually made up for any discomfort experienced when picking the berries.

We walked all the time we lived in the country. We always used Shanksy's Pony – our feet – we walked everywhere. The miles we used to walk in a day (up to ten, never less than three) were all part of our daily lives. Obviously we at first thought “going for walks” unthinkable boring, but after a while we started to listen, to see, to smell. There was so much happening that our walks became walks of discovery. First our immediate surroundings, lanes instead of pavements, grass instead of concrete, fields of corn instead of rows of houses.

We were fascinated by the wild flowers: bluebells, primroses, dandelions, dog daisies, poppies. The world seemed to be so full of colour, all framed by the different shades of green (hedges). The most wonderful sight of all was obtained by laying down in a wood, looking up to the sky. The tracery of the tree boughs, and the whisper of the moving leaves, was a little glimpse into heaven. Trees fascinate me, even today I love to sit under them and listen to the whisper of the leaves. They seem to me to be talking over all the sights and wonders they have lived through. They stand regally clothed in beauty and I realised that only God can make a tree. We also were introduced to the world of animals and insects. We saw (some of us for the first time) frogs, slugs, snails, rabbits, sheep and cows to name but a few.

One day when I was lying flat on my back I saw (and vaguely heard) the sound of a few planes overhead. Then to my amazement I realised I was witnessing a dogfight. I was frightened and enthralled. There were three aeroplanes dodging and diving in the sky above me. Every so often a puff of smoke would appear until finally one plane seemed to explode in the air then started spiralling to the ground. I later learned it had hit the ground a few miles away (a German plane, of course).

¹ During the evacuation.

I gained very much from my stay in the country, I think that is one of the reasons why I love my garden so very much. It has always been to me a haven of peace. It's only a 30ft x 90ft plot¹, but I have a lovely tree in it, and a water feature. Also, the scents of the various flowers make it my heaven on earth.

When I was grown up and beginning to develop, my elder sister knitted me a swimming costume. I felt like the bees knees in it – then I went swimming. All was well until I started to come out of the water (it was a river we were swimming in). As I got to the bank everyone was laughing at me and I felt very uncomfortable. My swim suit had stretched down to my ankles, and my top half was completely exposed. I scrambled out of the water clutching my swimsuit as best I could, but I felt a complete dilly. I was unable to face anyone for the rest of the day.

When I was a child, one of the treats I remember was a ½ pennyworth of cracklings. They were obtained at the fish and chip shop. The Fryer would clean the surface of the fat fryer and the result would be all the little bits of batter. They were captured in his large basket that he used to get the fish out of the deep fat. They were delicious, we were allowed to add salt and vinegar – divine – and a halfpenny would purchase a whole bagful.

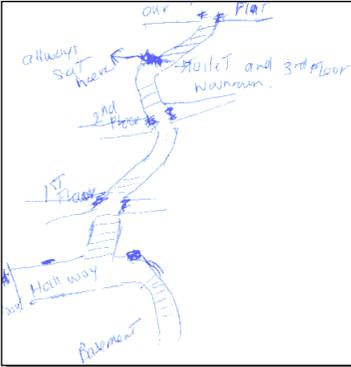


Jean and Peter in the garden

¹ 9m x 27m.

A Ghost or Spirit

Most people are very sceptical, it is something in life we need to be convinced about before we believe. I, like the majority of people, didn't think much about the existence of ghosts or ghoolies, but I always believed in an afterlife. Anyway, I have a very strange story to tell.



When we were first married we rented a flat in a place called Camden Square in Camden Town. An old lady lived in the flat before us, but she was a very lonely, unloved, unkempt person. She only lived in one room. On the few occasions she left her room she would sit on the bottom stair of our landing. It was a twisty staircase.

Unfortunately, she died before we moved in. We were sad but thought no more about it.

One night when I was sitting in our living room (I was by myself as Peter had gone to the RNVR¹), I was huddled up in front of the fire, I looked towards the door and saw the handle turn. The door gently opened and then closed, the handle being turned again so that it shut quietly. Then a something sat in the easy chair by the fireside. How did I know, you may ask. Well, the chair had a sprung cushion and I clearly saw an indent appear just as it would if someone had sat on it. I wasn't scared, only struck dumb. After about 45 minutes the chair flattened out again and there was the same knob-turning business, only in reverse. I was never scared but I did notice that, if she was sitting there, no one ever sat in the chair at the same time.

Further evidence of her being with us is as follows. I have marked the place on the stairs where she always sat. When she was sitting there and friends came to call, they would not be aware of the fact that they would unconsciously cross over on the stairs, and sort of walk around her. They never realised they had done it.

She was never a scary manifestation, but I have wondered: since we moved, and they subsequently pulled the houses down, where did she go? I hope she found peace at last.

¹ Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

Our homes in Welling

In 1954 we moved to Welling, a small semi-detached house with a garden back and front. We lived in this house in Swanley Road until 1957, when we moved again to a larger house in Lynmere Road (still in Welling). We have lived here ever since. We extended the house to four bedrooms and an additional bathroom.

This house has seen some living and holds many memories. We always tried to share our lives with others, consequently through the years we had quite a number of foster children, foreign visitors, nieces, nephews, et cetera stay with us. Having a large family, the children would all bring their friends home from school with them. One day I had 26 children in my garden and in my home. Needless to say I rationed the numbers after that episode.

I made all my girls' wedding dresses. I used to take in wedding orders, it was always a great thrill for me when I saw the brides in a dress that I had made. I used to make all my clothes and most of the children's, too. Of course, as they grow older it was more of an adventure for them to do their own clothes shopping. But they are all very practical and can make their own clothes, and can turn their hands to any task presented to them. Their skills have been very useful to them when it comes to school plays, etc.

I have had so many landmarks in my life. Seeing the Pope; visiting a foreign country for the first time; a man on the Moon; the invention of TV, microwave ovens, modern hoovers; plastic used for all kinds of things; record players and discs; computers; colour photography; electric sewing machines; cine cameras; fridge freezers, to name a few. Vast developments in the medical field, far too numerous to list.

I have also seen the decline in the moral tradition set by the Royal Family (and expected of the old-time commoners). It must have been heart-rending for the Queen Mother, also the Queen and Prince Philip. Moral ideas change often for the better, but the criminal mind seems to get more evil and the criminals themselves seem to become more aggressive. I wonder if the so-called modern inventions, and the outspokenness of the modern world, bring with it added stress. That makes living more complicated, which in turn causes dissatisfaction and aggression, also deep depressions. But that's enough of my pontificating. I am inclined to preach sometimes.

A Holiday on the Norfolk Broads

Another very laughable incident (again at my husband's expense): we were on a holiday on the broads. We had moved our boat into an inlet, and landed and had a picnic. Come the time to return to the boat we found it had drifted away from the edge, so the only solution was to jump the gap. Peter, my husband, said "come on kids, it's easy, and to prove it I will go first".

He took a flying jump and promptly landed between the boat and the edge of the bank. Luckily the water was only leg-deep, but it was hilarious to see his face. We were all convulsed with laughter. Needless to say, we all landed on the boat safely.

I always took the precaution of putting the children on a line tied firmly to the boat. The couple that were with us (they had two boys) thought I was idiotic until one of their boys fell in. They didn't miss him straight away, and when they did we manoeuvred back and found him. He was very wet and very frightened, it certainly made all concerned more observant.



Finches

Tapestry from collection of Philip Rescorla

Hospital 1980

I think nearly everyone has a serious illness in their life. After 50 years of the usual illnesses (childhood infections, measles, mumps, chicken pox, boils abscesses, TB when young, trouble with wisdom teeth, double pneumonia (really quite ill with this one), the usual discomforts associated with childbearing, bronchitis, asthma, arthritis – it's quite frightening when one writes these things down) my really awful illness became my lot in January 1980.

January the second I had a hysterectomy. I was quite scared as I wasn't looking forward to the anaesthetic. I can remember shaking uncontrollably when they put me on the trolley. I remember arriving at the anteroom to the theatre, where they gave me an injection. The staff were very reassuring. Then I think I must have gone to sleep because I remember no more until the following morning, when the ward got a wake-up call to get up and shake a leg.

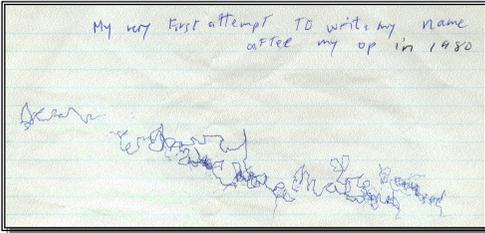
My memory is very hazy after that. I only know I collapsed. I was told, a long time later, that I practically died on the spot. They revived me and I was rushed to the special care unit. The family and my husband were all contacted as I was not given any hope of recovery. But the doctors and nurses really worked on me, although I was out of this world for nearly three weeks. When I did regain some semblance of life I gradually became aware that I couldn't see, could very barely hear, and was paralysed from the neck down. They took me back to the ward, but I don't remember the transition.

My very first clear memory happened during the Doctor's rounds. I very clearly saw him at my bedside surrounded by students, and hearing him say "This poor woman had a massive embolism, she will never walk again." I thought "Oh, won't she", and from that minute I started to fight.

My sight and my hearing gradually returned (except that I am still deaf in one ear). My memory also very gradually returned. At first I didn't know anyone or anything. It was quite a milestone when I began to sit up. After several days I was able to pull myself up by the pulleys they provided.

Then they decided to take me down to the Physio room – quite an experience. There I learned a lot of things. It was all very hard work, I had to teach myself again to look, to count, to manipulate, to think, to talk, and to eventually walk again. The exercises, the manipulations, the massages were sheer heaven.

Back in the ward I practised writing. I have included my very first attempt.



The only thing that remained perfectly normal was my ability to pray, and Heaven was really bombarded with my thoughts and prayers. Funny how God remained such a constant thought in my life.

I gradually got better. February 21st was my birthday, and the ward sister very kindly let my children arrange a birthday tea for me. I was allowed one Babycham. In the middle of the festivities the double doors opened and Sister announced “It’s a boy”. My Grandson had been born in the Mothers and Babies Nursing Home at Charlton. My eldest daughter, Nicola, had given birth, so it was a double celebration.

In March I went to a convalescent home for two weeks, then I came home to my houseful of children and my very caring husband. It took me a while to get back in my stride, but with hard work I did it. God had given me a second life and I vowed not to waste a minute of it.



Female head
(Scrapboard, from the collection of Martin Edwardes)

My Children

A really with-it teenager is the only way to describe my eldest daughter, Nicola. She was always very canny and bright as a button. I remember making her a pair of slacks (trousers), as they were called then, with very wide bottoms; and up the side seams I stitched hundreds of tiny bells – you could certainly hear her coming. She was very popular with both sexes and it wasn't uncommon for her to go out on a date with one chap and come home with another. But I must stress she was never promiscuous. She eventually met and married an extremely nice man, and together they have both developed into great parents. Nicola has a very forceful personality, she can be kind and forgiving and thoughtful, but this is tempered by a very decisive approach to life.

Our eldest son, Martin, was a joy as a baby. He was always very happy and contented, as he grew he developed into a peaceful and quite reticent person, extremely loving and giving. He is generous (unbelievably so), and his partner is also an extremely charming and kind person. They are both very successful businessmen, but they have never lost the common touch.

Jane, my next baby was a girl. She was also a lovely baby. She arrived screaming and kicking, but with a lovely head of hair. I have a very strange story to tell of this stage in my life: I took the three children shopping, two toddlers and the baby in her pram. I got to the shops – the shop assistants and people that owned the stores were all very friendly in those days, and each customer was an individual. I had the two toddlers doing what toddlers generally do, so that after shopping I was just keen to get home, so off the three of us went. Back home, unpacking the shopping, I realised that something was missing: horror and panic, I remembered I had left the baby outside the shop in her pram. Hurry, hurry, the poor kids were rushed off their feet, but joy and relief when we arrived back there; she was still waiting, happy and gurgling in her pram. Thank God for all his goodness in making an unhappy episode have a happy ending.

Jane has developed into a self-reliant person. Two husbands and five children later she is a hard worker and a caring person, but she worries me as she smokes too much!

My next baby was also a girl (Sarah, very blonde and blue-eyed). She once again was a different little person to deal with. She had her own way of tackling everything and her own character, which was a very loving and sunny presentation. She very rarely lost her temper, but when she did she made her presence felt. But she was never a sulker and very quickly recovered her equanimity. She has grown into a very helpful person, always willing to do her share in any task, and has

accomplished many things. She has a mischievous little lad who shows interest in all things.

When Sarah was still a very young baby I went to a meeting (Mother's Club). They had a speaker that particular day, she came from the Adoption Society for Catholic Babies. She spoke to us all about adoption (it was much more straightforward in those days). I came home and discussed it with all the family, we all decided to make further enquiries. We had a very nice Welfare Officer come to see us and to vet us. She came two or three times, eventually bringing a few photos with her of baby boys (we had specified that we would like another son). We picked three, one whose name was Tommy, another whose name I can't remember, and a little boy called Francis.

For one reason or another our choice was finally whittled down to Francis. It was arranged that we should go and see him at an orphanage in Cavendish, Reading. He was very shy and extremely attached to a certain nurse. We went to see him two or three times, then we were told we could take him home with us. Coming into a fairly large family, he fitted in very quickly and proved to be an ideal fifth child. He and our last daughter, Sarah, were born in the same year and people always express surprise as there are only months between them. Happily, they got on well. We renamed him Micheal Francis.

Our latest member to our family was slowly growing used to us, he had many little foibles we had to accept as part of him. The first surprising discovery happened when I took him shopping for the first time. He was about 16 months. People that I met (some I hadn't seen for a while) saw I had the two babies in the pram, one at the top and one at the handle end. Sarah was as blonde as can be and Micheal was a very dark-haired baby. They were always admired, and people would say things like "I see one takes after you, and one takes after your husband".

Micheal was a very nervous child. For instance, he was terrified of kerbs; it would take all my powers of persuasion to help him to be able to step down a kerb and up the other side. He was also very nervous of the traffic. I guess he had not been taken out very much as the orphanage stood in its own grounds, which were extensive; so there was no need for him to be taken out where he would have come into contact with traffic.

He very soon became a real part of our family. He took after me, he was always on the religious side; and, as he grew up, it became more apparent. He has grown into a very fine person. He has the family quick temper but he also possesses a great capacity for helping people. He, like all our children, has proved to be a good parent: loving, kind and understanding. He is emigrating to Australia in a few weeks, he will leave a big hole in my heart. But I thank God for lending him to us

for 40 years. I am a very lucky woman that my other children will all help to fill the gap. They will, no doubt, miss him, too.

And then I had another baby boy. I now had three boys and three girls: lucky, lucky me. When my last baby was born it was just as exciting as the first time. There is no other joy that can replace the first peep at a baby one has just given life to. It is silly to say that moment wipes out all the pain, but it does make it all seem to be worthwhile. This new baby was a complete character from birth. He always thought he knew his own mind and the way he wanted to do things.

Being the youngest in a large family must, at times, be extremely puzzling: everyone around you can do things that you would like to do but can't. It must, at times, make one feel inadequate and consequently can cause feelings of resentment, embarrassment and discontent. It is a wonderful thing when a boy becomes a man, having dealt with all those feelings. David is now a man who has had to contend with heartbreak and a feeling of despair in some aspects of his life. But he has had the strength of character to come out very well from these experiences, and find happiness and contentment and acceptance. He is a very nice person. He is always supportive, especially now when I need all the support I can get.

I have also cared for quite a few foster children, some young and some teenagers. Each one brought with them various problems. I think our own children coped magnificently with the added temperaments and difficulties they were faced with daily. I, myself, found the added burden sometimes very stressful. Looking back I don't know how I managed to cope; nine children was quite a usual count, and I didn't have any domestic help so my days were very full to say the least.

I feel I must say something about my sons in law and daughters in law, also my grandchildren. The three sons I have gained are really an asset to us all, and all are wonderful; two are successful men. They have lived good and productive lives. My daughters-in-law are delightful people to know and very easy to love, and they give me great pleasure. Micheal's wife, Roshini, has shown me a caring personality; I will miss her when she goes to Australia. Annie (David's second partner), although I have not known her very long, has my very sincere thanks for all she has done for my son. I have never seen him so happy and fulfilled as he is these days. She has helped him to develop into a far happier and contented man (a great improvement on his previous marriage).

I feel, as a grandmother, it would not be quite acceptable to comment on my grandchildren's characters as I do not feel I am in a one-to-one situation. I can only say as they appear to me. I have twelve grandchildren and one great grandson. They have (according to their age) always given us real affection and they are all being very helpful and supportive at the present time. They are very caring, which

is unusual these days, and very helpful. As I say, I can only speak from my own experience. Some I know more intimately than others, but they all seem nice children and young people to me.



Pots from various collections

These pots are not thrown, they are wound from strips of clay; then fired, glazed and fired again

The Emigration

It's nearly here now, the time to say a farewell to one of my sons and his family. They are emigrating to Australia in two weeks' time. The family had a bon voyage party last night, Saturday November 25th. They are due to leave December 9th.

It was a teary affair, but happy also. We all wish them well (needless to say, I feel part of my heart is being very bent and bruised). Peter, of course, wasn't able to go to the party. It was arranged that someone would stay with Peter for one-and-a-half hours, then someone would bring me home. My very good friend, May, came with me and came home with me. She stayed with me for the evening. I was, of course, very upset so it was nice of her to stay with me.

I still feel very teary today, although I know there is worse to come. Barbara and her children, Elaine and Peter, also came home to see Peter. They stayed about an hour.

Ho hum! I guess life goes on and progresses; and, if we are lucky, we experience all the different flavours and emotions it has to offer. It is only by having a faith that one can accept the continued challenge of living, loving, sharing, giving and, ultimately, dying. Happiness and contentment keep the pot boiling. Anger and frustration causes the pot to boil over (temporarily we hope).

It must be extremely exhausting when the pot is always on the boil and spilling over. Occasional anger is a very good thing as it does enable us to get things in perspective, and also it is very good for the ego to occasionally explode.



Leaf Pot

Diary of an Illness

Monday October 9th¹

Peter very ill. Children came. Doctor came. Eleanor Nurse came, said I could contact her day or night. Nurse came and gave Peter an injection for the sickness and dizziness. It definitely helped.

Tuesday October 10th

Peter had a very restful and reasonable sleep. I managed a few hours, too. Sheila and Bill came. Peter still comatose from the injection. Nicky, Louise, Emma, Michael and Roshini also came. Peter passed a lot of urine (dark orange in colour).

Wednesday October 11th

Peter very out of sorts and contrary, but appears to be more with it today. Passed a great quantity of urine last night and again this morning. Eleanor nurses came and assessed Peter and, after a lot of energy had been used to try to get Peter going, in the end decided he is much too weak to undergo further treatment at Guy's Hospital tomorrow. The journey itself would have been far too much for him to undertake. A commode chair, bottle and bedpan were delivered.

Thursday October 12th

A very stressful day. Nurses came again to assess Peter (Twilight Nurses) for further treatment. The Eleanor Doctor came (Dr Nicky). She diagnosed ADDINGTON'S disease. It is quite a rare occurrence these days. She tried to get him into a hospital, but that proved a no-no, so I must manage as best I can. Two care nurses are coming in tonight to settle Peter for the night. Two more will be coming in the morning. It is wonderful: four will be coming every day, even weekends. I am a bit puzzled and bewildered by his medication. I will have to make further enquiries for clarification.

Friday October 13th

The new pills are wonderful. Peter stood for the first time for two weeks. He appears much improved. Anyway, his appetite has improved: he has eaten breakfast, dinner and tea, and said he had enjoyed his food.

Care Nurses came this morning. Also Nicola came. The nurses practiced with the hoist, using Nicola as a guinea pig. The Eleanor Nurse and Dr Nicky came. Without her knowledge the Addington's would never have been discovered, then Peter would have died in sheer agony from the continual vomiting. He was getting really exhausted. He couldn't even keep the Complan² down.

¹ The Diary covers the period from the end of 2000 to the beginning of 2001.

² A nutrient drink, used to give sick people the necessary vitamins and minerals when normal eating is difficult.

The Physio also came. She encouraged Peter to do exercises. She was very pleased that he could stand with the aid of a walking frame. She did not realise how much effort it took, and knocked him out for at least the next day. He is very worried that he has not had a bowel movement for four days.

Susan, Ryan and Neil came. I feel I have been on my feet for hours (it is certainly all go), but I did take fifteen minutes off, I went out and sat in the garden. The rest and relaxation was wonderful (even though it was cold). Roshini called in on her way home from work. They (Michael and Roshini) have at last sold their house.

Saturday October 14th

First job today was to wash Peter all over. After he was settled I gave him his breaky. Michael and Roshini came and took my shopping list. Sarah came to see us: she came to see her Dad and to help me any way she could. Peter had a Complian for lunch, a little bit of fish and chips for tea. He had lots to drink: tea, orange, water. Christine and Irene came (from pottery) this afternoon. David came all the way from Somerset. Martin and Philip also came. Quite a houseful, but it is wonderful of them all to come.

Sunday October 15th

David stayed the night. He got very upset over an earring Annie had lost. I think his emotions were all upset, and to get angry took some of the pressure off. They went home before lunch. Maureen Smith came, also Chris and Alan – they came all the way from Oxford. Michael, Roshini and Katie came. Unfortunately they forgot to bring their door key with them and they had locked the house up. They had to stay until Nathan got home. I fed them sandwiches and chips. I couldn't cook because the smell of food cooking made Peter violently sick. I saw them off about 2:30.

I had just put the kettle on to make myself a cup of tea when Father Peter arrived. He had only just returned from his hols in Canada the day before. He was tired, so it was extremely good of him to come to see Peter. Michael and Roshini brought us down a lovely roast dinner about 5 o'clock. I enjoyed it very much, Peter ate a little bit.

Monday October 16th

Two care nurses came this morning, 8:30 on the dot. Very pleasant young women. Peter passed a small motion. Chap from Church (Brian) came and gave Peter Communion. Peter much brighter, he had a good night. Barbara came. I went to the hairdressers. Emma ferried me to and from the hairdressers. She later went to the Doctor's surgery and collected a form. Michael came, also Sarah. She said she would take me to Pottery Class on Wednesday.

Tuesday October 17th

I felt terrible this morning, but forced myself to get moving. I gave Peter his nine o'clock pills. He had tried to pass a motion and was convinced it was stuck. He

made the next hour really hellish for me. The nurses came about nine o'clock (he was still on the commode). They saw to him and said "now you must realise what a woman goes through in childbirth". Anyway, he finally performed and I was very thankful that the care nurses were there to attend to him. They washed him, shaved him, and changed all his clothes, so he felt very fresh. I had just sat down for a few minutes when I was startled out of my skin by a very loud voice calling "Jean, Jean, Jean". He was convinced I hadn't given him his pills. But in the late afternoon he felt peckish, so I made him a meal of braised steak and skinned tomatoes. He said he enjoyed it.

Wednesday October 18th

Another day. It dawned very miserable and wet. Peter very up-tight, I am not feeling at my brightest. Peter had an Ensure Plus¹ and a drink of water, also his pills. Care nurses came and washed Peter's hair. They had only been gone a half-hour when Peter needed the commode. I had great difficulty getting him out of his chair and supporting him to remove his pants. Eventually I managed to get him to the commode, but not before he had begun. Consequently I was literally sprinkled, also the floor, but at last I got him to the commode. He really filled it. I didn't know what to do next. In the end I cleared up the floor; took off my blouse and skirt; washed Peter and got him settled again in his chair; washed the additional mess off the floor; emptied the commode (was very sick); came back downstairs and washed the chair; put the commode back together again (used half a bottle of Dettol in the process). Later, when everything was normal again, I went and had a quick shower and changed all my clothes, then collapsed in the chair. After about ten minutes I had a drink of water and gave myself a talking-to: "Get on with it Jean, at least you are alive".

The day got worse, more stressful. Jane and John came. John insisted I went to pottery for the afternoon. He took me at 1:15 and picked me up at 2:30. I had a very peaceful hour. Peter just had another Ensure Plus and a trifle to eat. I realise I hadn't eaten all day so I made myself a bacon sarnie. Peter complained bitterly about the smell, but I felt justified and really enjoyed it. I also had a cup of tea, heaven.

Thursday October 19th

Peter felt a little better today. Carers came, gave him a strip wash. Ate quite well. Greengrocer came in to see Peter (got his ear bent). Maureen came, Sarah came, also District Nurse came and took blood. She said Peter had a further complication (Peter is certainly doing the job well).

Sheila arrived about 4:30, the three of them (Sheila, Bill and the dog) left at 7 o'clock. Peter had an Ensure Plus, I had a sarnie. Finding time to eat is quite a problem.

¹ Like Complian.

Friday October 20th

Another day of great agitation. Started off about his bowels. When I said it was only the day before yesterday he went with a vengeance, he insisted it was Tuesday (thank God I write everything down). I was able to prove to him that it was indeed Wednesday he last went. After a lot of mumbling finally went to sleep.

Care nurses came. I had the first bill for agreement to pay for the services received. District Nurse phoned to say they had lost his blood sample. Peter was very irate. He threatened they find it or else he would contact the Press. Another case of Health Authority balls-up.

He has eaten quite well today. He had lunch, and dinner this evening. Needless to say they found the sample of blood.

Rosemary phoned, we chatted for $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour. She was absolutely full of her new boyfriend (quite Mills & Boon). She sounded happy (good on her).

Saturday October 21st

Peter feeling quite perky today. I had a very busy day, everyone seemed to be here: Michael and family, Nicola, Billy, Sarah, Matthew. Nicola very kindly brought lunch in with her, so everyone had a really good meal.

Sunday October 22nd

Peter very tired today, he got really worn out yesterday. He has slept a good deal today. I even fell asleep for about 20 minutes, I felt very disoriented when I woke up. Went to Mass this evening. Michael and Roshini cooked us a very nice dinner. I ate mine, Peter couldn't eat his so I saved it till Monday (I had it then). I must come to terms with them going away, but at the moment I can't bear to think of it at all.

Monday October 23rd

Peter had a good sleep last night. He had his bowels opened (thank God). Care nurses came. Peter was disturbed by constant phone calls. I managed to get to the hairdressers. Emma took me, Katie stayed with Dad, I was only gone an hour. David phoned and said he was coming to see us next day, Tuesday. Helen came in the morning, also Brian came to give Peter Communion. Eleanor Nurse phoned and said we could have a wheelchair. Also, she intended to phone the Hospital about Peter's treatment.

Tuesday October 24th

Another stressful day. Peter had a bowel motion. It takes me all my strength to move him from his chair to his commode. I got up about 6:30 to give him his pills. Care nurses came about 9 o'clock, washed, shaved him and changed all his clothes. He always feels better after their administration. David is coming today.

Wednesday October 25th

Care nurses came about 9:30. Peter always perks up when they come. David stayed the night. Katherine stayed with her other Grandparents. David did so much in a short while. He mended the bathroom sink, also the chair. He phoned lots of different Doctors to see if they would accept Peter. He (David) will phone tomorrow morning as to whether the Doctor will accept Peter. (David was feeling very poorly himself, so I was extra thankful that he helped us so very much.) He went to Sidcup and hired a wheelchair from the Red Cross. We had to pay a £30 deposit (which I donated when we returned the wheelchair). He mended the wheelchair – the footrest was broken. He also helped me do some sorting with different things.

Peter heard on the phone that he has an appointment Monday morning to go to Guy's Hospital in London to start his treatment. Rosemary came with her new "friend", male of course. He seemed to be a pleasant person. It was very nice of them to come. May did some shopping for me. Michael and Roshini called in, it is their 20th wedding anniversary today.

Thursday October 26th

Quiet day so far, care nurses came . They said they would be here at 7:30 on Monday to get Peter ready for his marathon trip to hospital, his appointment is at 10:45. Transport is coming at 8:30. Sarah came and took his prescription to Dr Gupta's surgery, still his Doctor until we hear otherwise. Peter feeling very sick today, not eating at all, and even water makes him heave and reach.

Friday October 27th

Peter slept most of the night, exhaustion I expect. I observed every hour and wetted his lips and inside his mouth. Care nurses came and gave him a strip wash and shave. Dr Elliot has accepted Peter onto his books. I am so glad as I couldn't have faced a further upheaval regarding the appliances. We have received the appliances from the Bexley Council, but if no other Doctor would accept Peter we would have had to go through the Woolwich area, as our old Doctor's main surgery is in Woolwich. So I would have had to go through returning the appliances and obtaining them from Woolwich council. What a load of rubbish, it didn't seem to matter that a person was dying, red tape must be adhered to. Still, thank God, things have worked out all right.

The hospital, Guy's, phoned today to clarify the arrangements for Monday. Peter should be well enough to go, but I know that secretly he is dreading it. Father Peter came today. He chatted to Peter for at least a half-hour.

Saturday October 28th

Care nurses were late this morning, but the weather is absolutely atrocious. The conservatory roof nearly blew off. Sam our next-door-neighbour came to our aid and helped me reduce the rain coming in, and put weights on the roof to hold it

down. He is such a kind man.

Jane and John came. She had a win on the bingo so she gave me some money she and John had borrowed. It was very good of them to return the money so quickly, especially with Xmas so near. Michael and Roshini called in, Michael helped Sam do the roof. Peter has actually eaten some food today. Unfortunately, he felt very sick and couldn't stop reaching and coughing.

Sunday October 29th

Care nurses came. Michael cooked a dinner and brought it down. Sheila and Bill came late afternoon, weather awful. Peter very tired. Went to Mass, Roshini sat with Dad.

Monday October 30th

Nurses came, as promised, at 7:30; got Peter ready to go to hospital. Unfortunately, the storms had caused havoc and travelling was very difficult. The ambulance didn't arrive to pick Peter up till 10:30, Peter eventually got to hospital about 12:30. The ambulance driver was able to contact the hospital to tell them about the delay. Michael went with his Dad. He said I could never have managed it on my own. He apparently had to walk a very long way, pushing the wheelchair; and, as I have a stick and cannot walk unaided more than 100 yards, it would have been impossible for me.

Peter didn't arrive home till 7 o'clock. He looked very ill and said he had had a most horrendous day. He collapsed in his chair and just slept and slept. To say he was exhausted was putting it mildly.

Tuesday October 31st

Care nurses came. Peter had a restless night. He is feeling very ill and sick. It is very worrying, I do not know what to do to give him some relief. District Nurse came. She said she would come again next week. No one can understand the constant strain of being in a permanent situation of stress.

Wednesday November 1st

Peter is in very great pain in his stomach, so I phoned the District Nurse again. She said she would come and give him an enema. Sarah came, insisted I went to pottery for an hour. Jane and John stayed with Peter while I was out. Nurse came and gave Peter an enema; he went to the toilet and said it had relieved his pain a bit. It is a bright day today, but very cold.

Thursday November 2nd

Peter feeling ill again today. District Nurse called again. Eleanor Nurse came and made me feel like a person again. She prescribed some different pills for Peter to help his sickness. She phoned the surgery and put in an order and Sarah went and picked up the prescription.

Friday November 3rd

Peter tried out the bed today. Couldn't settle, extremely uncomfortable. Managed to get him back into his chair. He had a little sleep, then he was violently sick. He was very distressed all day. Phoned Doctor, he said perhaps the new pills would help. Drank mostly water, had one Ensure Plus.

Saturday November 4th

Carers came, Peter had his bowels opened. Comatose all day.

Sunday November 5th

Peter very ill again today. Sickness and retching back again.

Monday November 6th

Peter feeling very confused, didn't know who care nurses were. Bed sore on bottom has broken the skin.

Tuesday November 7th

Bowels open again, very loose. Extremely demanding, then collapses completely. One Ensure, lots of water. One piece of bread soaked in soup. Eleanor Nurse came and helped me sort out his pills. I was very unsure and worried about them. It is very difficult to keep up with all the changes, it can be quite confusing. Nicola and Mick treated me to a Chinese. To say I enjoyed it puts it mildly. Peter had two prawns and a little rice, and kept it down.

Wednesday November 8th

Peter couldn't settle for a while, then he went to sleep about 12:30pm. I just went into a very deep sleep, the first sleep for a week. Peter woke up about 2 o'clock, very concerned that he had not had his pills. He couldn't make me hear him so he phoned Michael. Michael came straight down and had to break the window in the door. He finally got in and came to wake me up. I gave him a fright, I was so deeply asleep that it took him quite a while to wake me. I was able to convince Peter that he had had his pills. Confusion can cause a lot of stress for all parties concerned.

Thursday November 9th

Carers came, also the Eleanor Nurse (Margaret) and the Doctor came to see Peter. A fresh prescription, different pills again! Jane and John came, Jane took the prescription in to the chemist. John mended the window temporarily. I ate some more of the Chinese that Nicola had bought for me. Peter had a mouthful as well, it was still yummy. Peter complained of feeling very thirsty. Sarah reminded him that they had told him that the new pills might have that effect. Bowels not open since Tuesday, but the new pills do seem to be helping the sickness.

Friday November 10th

Michael's birthday. The District Nurse came and took some blood. She said that the outcome would tell us whether or not the pills were working. If not, they would have to be changed again. Michael stayed the night so I could get some sleep. Sarah took the new prescription for Dad's Ensures to the Chemist (they delivered them).

Saturday November 11th

Peter felt better today, he ate a full meal.

Sunday November 12th

Peter had a really bad day today. Peter crying with pain (eating yesterday doesn't seem to have helped him at all). He tried and tried to pass a motion but couldn't, finally after about an hour he finally succeeded. Very hard. District Nurse came and gave him an internal, said his bowel was quite clear. Peter insisted on sitting on the commode again for a further half-hour.

Martin came. Michael brought me down a dinner. I gave church a miss today: Roshini or Emma could not possibly have managed Peter if he needed to be moved. The cares came and Peter was quite bad-tempered, but they handled him well.

Monday November 13th

Mick's birthday. Peter used the commode again. Nurse came and changed Peter's pills again. I no sooner get used to one lot than they are changed again. Peter ate well today. Martin came to allow me to go to the hairdresser (complete rest for an hour). Selfish me, but I really enjoyed it.

Tuesday November 14th

Peter very grumpy today (another "don't want" day). Constipated again (according to Peter). Maureen from Church came, Peter perked up. Sarah came, also Michael: he needed a torch to clean his loft.

Wednesday November 15th

Peter very lethargic: no appetite at all. Two Ensures, two glasses of water all day. Went to Pottery for an hour: John took me, Jane stayed with Dad.

Thursday November 16th

Very busy day today. Peter still out of it. Care nurses came. Sheila and Bill came and stayed with Peter while Sarah took me to Crayford Craft Centre. We had a beefburger in MacDonaldis. A very pleasant change and treat for me.

Friday November 17th

Chap came from Church and gave Peter Communion. Peter slept a lot but he was

quite active when he was awake.

Saturday November 18th

Michael bought me new light bulbs: they had all blown in the front room. Peter still off his food. He had a bowel motion, very loose.

Sunday November 19th

A better day today. Cares came. Peter still has no appetite, but he is very subdued. Only two jugs of water today.

Monday November 20th

Peter had a bowel movement in the night, so I had a job seeing to him. The weather is very bright and sunny. Brian came, gave us both Communion. Went to hairdressers, May came in, Emma took me and Sarah picked me up.

Tuesday November 21st

Humdrum day, still no appetite. I gave him some jelly and custard and water. Slept a lot, but when he was awake he complained of a very dry, sore mouth. I feel most inadequate, I can only moisten his lips and his mouth.

Wednesday November 22nd

Peter very loose today, quite a bit of washing and cleaning him up. (I forgot to mention that Helen came yesterday, also Barbara.) Peter very sick in the morning. Only drank water today.

Thursday November 23rd

Peter, by turn, one minute chirpy and the next minute very bad-tempered. He can no longer shout but he can still make himself felt. In the end he went to sleep very deeply. No solid food again.

Friday November 24th

Heard today, Peter's new chair coming on Monday. Christine phoned today, very comforting talk. Peter had two bowel movements today. Carers came this morning, they are late tonight.

Saturday November 25th

Day of the "Bon Voyage" party. I feel it is going to be a very long goodbye. It was a wonderful party, a lot of people were there (not Dad). I found it all very emotional and came home early. If I had stayed I may have put a dampener on the proceedings. I had one surprise: a phone call from Matthew's school. They told me I had won £50 on a ticket. May came home with me from the party. Peter very, very pale, and sleeping very deeply.

Sunday November 26th

Very tiring day. Peter used his commode first thing. Next, a miniature invasion: Michael, Roshini, Emma, Katy, David, Annie and Katherine arrived; tea all round. They stayed about 1½ hours. Then May came in and we found a home for the photos they gave me at the party. They are lovely photos. Expecting Martin, too. Must send cards today.

Monday November 27th

Bad day today. Peter didn't eat a thing, he only had three Ensures. He had an unfortunate accident and messed everywhere. I had a very difficult time cleaning him up. In fact I couldn't manage it by myself so I phoned Michael and he came down and helped me. Also my washing machine has gone wrong, and Roshini brought her washing down as her machine has gone away, too. I shall have to phone for the engineer.

STOP feeling sorry for yourself, Jean. You'll live another day.

Peter feels very low. He only passed a little urine in a bottle. Care nurses came and administered to him. Phoned Doctor, he has spasms in his right shoulder: the growth is the size of a large egg.

Tuesday November 28th

Peter very poorly. Care nurses came and washed him and shaved him. Very limp and helpless. Only water and two Ensures again today.

Wednesday November 29th

Peter very tired and listless. District Nurse came and said they are trying to get Peter into a Hospice.

Thursday November 30th

Peter in considerable pain. Care nurses told me to call them if Peter became uncontrollable.

Friday December 1st to Thursday December 14th

Peter in a lot of pain. I rang care nurses and they came immediately. Peter couldn't move at all; one arm was completely paralysed; extremely weak. They called for an ambulance (Peter was asking to go to hospital). I went in the ambulance with him. Brian arrived a few minutes before the ambulance and gave Peter Communion, he was very comforted.

After that, things happened so fast, I found it very difficult to keep up. We arrived at the hospital and Peter was put in a cubicle. Sarah and Louise arrived and we were all allowed to stay with Peter. He was still in great pain (but, of course, denying it). They came and looked at him and told us we would have to wait at least two hours. In the meantime the Eleanor Nurses were working on his behalf, they sent me home to get his pyjamas and shaving gear. Louise took me, Sarah

stayed with Dad.

While we were away the Eleanor Nurse (Margaret) phoned the hospital to say they had a bed for him at the Hospice, but it must be taken within the next hour. The hospital had, by now, taken a blood test and they said they would hurry up the results. Anyway, they organised an ambulance to take him to the Hospice. Sarah phoned us at home from the hospital, and we went straight to the Hospice from home.

When we arrived there, Peter was already in bed and very thankful to be there. They are very kind at the Hospice and told us we were very welcome anytime, day or night. I stayed there all day with Peter. Sarah came and took me home about 7:30. They treated Peter, loved him, nurtured him, and did their very best to keep him comfortable.

The first couple of days and nights he was very aggressive and made everyone's life a misery. I think he had to come to terms with the fact that he had been taken to the Hospice to die. He was such a vital man, always helping people, and always had plenty to say on all subjects. It was very difficult for him to accept the fact of his own weakness and, of course, the fact that he was dying. Each day I saw him getting weaker. He gained great comfort when the Priest went to see him. I had several talks with the Counsellor and the Doctors and staff. I found great strength and acceptance through them. They are great people, very encouraging and understanding and helpful. No misplaced sympathy or coddling, one is helped to be able to face the future and be positive, at the same time advising that grief and self-recrimination are all part of the process.

Friday December 15th

Peter died today at 2:20 this morning, Louise's birthday. Timothy, her brother, was born on my birthday, when I was in hospital recovering from a very-near-death experience (spooky, or what?).

I was with Peter when he died. We were together. Sarah was dozing in a recliner, but as he breathed his last breath she nearly came out of her seat (sixth sense). She went straight and fetched Nicola, who had only left the bedside ten minutes before. Thank you, St Peregrine¹, for coming to his aid.

Life is a long, bumpy road, but stillness and inner thought can be a great help. One realises we are given the insight to see everything is inside one's self. We are what we make ourselves, as everyone has the power to control one's emotions: to accept, to adapt, and to know that we are eventually responsible for ourselves. There are times when one needs the comfort of other people, and the support they can give. But it should always be remembered that decisions are ultimately made by oneself.

Monday December 25th

Peter has gone to his God, very happily and peacefully. I was with him to see him

¹ Catholic patron saint of cancer-sufferers.

and pray with him. We will always be smiling at each other. His strength and presence will forever be in my heart. We have shared so much: love, anger, excitement, joy, tears, pain, hatred, anxiety, bad tempers, fights, enjoyment, good times, bad times, poverty (never riches, moneywise), but so much richness in the ways that really matter.

We have, in fact, had a very good life, blessed by God all the way. Sometimes it may feel that one's being ignored by God, almost deserted. It makes one question the sense of believing, almost putting faith to the test. But Peter and I could support each other in our moments of doubt; which, as our children grew older became more insistent to both of us. But somehow we would see our way become clear, God was always there to help us. We were both "prayers", but we always did it individually. We were guided and comforted along the seemingly right path, but I've had the choice whether or not to take certain decisions. Needless to say, I've sometimes made the wrong one, sometimes with very grave outcomes (that's when faith really comes into question!)

Today was my first Xmas without him. I felt very lonely. I really tried to find peace and acceptance; and my children were there with me all day, supporting me with love and understanding. My friend, May, was also with me. I coped quite well, until quite suddenly I felt overwhelmed with realisation that we would never have the pleasure of another Xmas together, hence flight into another room where I had a little weep.

Katherine and Joanne came round this morning. Joanne brought me some flowers, Katherine was very sweet. We spent the day at Nicola's. Martin and Philip did their Xmas day visit (always very exciting).

The house is silent now, Peter used to have the television on all night. I think I will go to bed, soon. David and Annie are coming tomorrow, so I must change the sheets on the bed. Good night all.



Shirley Bassey doll made by Author

My Husband Peter

Peter was born in a nursing home at Hampstead Heath, seventy four years ago. His mother was Irish and his father was English. Peter grew up in Camden Town. He was a very clever lad; he went to St Ignatius Grammar School, Stamford Hill. Even as a lad he loved the Navy, he eventually joined up and served through the War. It left a lasting impression on his life.

We were married when I was twenty three years old; Peter was twenty four and had been demobbed by this time. Peter was a very reliable man and always worked hard and provided very well for our family. We had six children and countless foster children, some of whom attended his funeral. He always showed great concern over all church matters. He was a very helpful person and very popular, although he was no angel: he had a very quick temper, but he never bore any grudges.

I will miss him very much; he was always there for me. We really loved each other. I thank God for the fifty years we had together, and thank you, Peter, for being part of my life.



Squirrel and birds
Applique and embroidery

Diary of a death

Wednesday December 27th

The day of the funeral. This day will always be in my memory.

I woke up this morning (I took two sleeping pills to make me sleep) to the realisation that today I would be saying goodbye. I suppose part of me has been shut down; but today I must acknowledge that, and my heart must accept. Peter will no longer be at my side, my intimate companion can no longer help me with earthly problems. I have no one to spring little surprises on. Memories can comfort but they will not solve the daily problems that occur. Of course, the children will help, but ultimately they have their own lives to live and their own problems to solve.

Finally I arrived at the church for the funeral. I have always known that Peter was very well-known in the parish, but I was amazed and speechless at the very great number of people in the church. God bless them all. The prayers said for him that day must have bombarded heaven. I thank them all for sharing my precious day with me.

Father Peter made the whole service, for me, something I will always carry in my heart: the day was truly unforgettable. The service was most inspiring, Father Peter was everything one could hope for: understanding, humorous, sympathetic, helpful, kind, concerned and a wonderful presenter of God's Holy Word.

(This was eventually published in the church magazine as a thank you to all the people who came to Peter's funeral).

Thursday December 28th

(I wrote this the following day.)

Life is a long, bumpy road, but stillness and quiet thought are a great help. One realises we are given the insight to everything that is inside oneself. We are what we make ourselves. Everyone has the power to control their emotions, to accept and adapt.

To eventually accept responsibility for oneself, of course, there are times when one needs the support of other people; and, if we are lucky, we can ultimately make decisions, and realise we are really responsible for ourselves.

Afterthoughts

I miss Peter so very much. Only those people with a similar experience can realise the extent of the bottomless pit of one's emotions. Sometimes it seems as if the easy way would be to step off the edge, and be free. But my guardian angel is always there to hold me back and help me to find the grace and faith to carry on.

Peter was always very strong in mind and body. I could always rely on him. He made most of our decisions, especially those concerning the necessities of living: mortgage, rates, electricity, gas, dentist, doctors, and so on. I am having to learn to

do all these things myself. Sometimes I get very discouraged, I no sooner solve one problem and another one raises its head. But I find my solace by baking a cake or working in the garden for an hour or two. I have very good friends, and I am a very lucky woman as I have the really most wonderful neighbours. For instance, the following tale is only one of the marvellous things I have had done for me.

Yesterday, Sunday April 29th, Mary Jo, my neighbour, took me to mass at ten o'clock in the morning. When we returned home I had a wonderful surprise: outside my conservatory I had a large cold frame, 4ft by 2½ft, filled with earth, and I knew I had to get it moved before they fitted my new conservatory; Sam (Mary Jo's husband) had done it all for me, even distributed the earth in the right place in the garden. Thank you Sam!



The Old Couple
(Dolls made, dressed and painted by the author)

Some Thoughts on Faith

Faith is commitment; personal, sincere praying; learning the art of forgiveness; love; and most, of all, belief in the unbelievable - above all, belief.

Faith also gives, and receives. It gives one confidence to believe in Truth, in values, to rely on others and to trust. One can also find consistency, actuality and steadfastness. For example, faith-healers need implicit faith in themselves and a very deep conviction of faith in the people they treat and "cure".

Faith is a confident belief that does not rely on logical or material evidence. Only faith can make one believe in "miracles". To keep a faith can, at times, be a difficult thing. When one is faced with the unkindness, the injustices and the sorrows of life it is almost inevitable to feel abandoned by God; but faith returns when one realises the unending love of God.

Belief and trust in God as presented in the scriptures, or any sacred work, can be a source of great inspiration. Also, the suffering of others can arouse great feelings of admiration and acceptance that God's way is the only way.

Religion is essentially a way of life: belief in dogma and routine worship; obedience to rules; sharing experiences; learning to accept people of all races and creeds, and to care about them. The word Religion often conveys feelings of superiority but, in essence, it is the expression of Man's belief in a supernatural power that created the Universe. Another form of religion is to become a very keen collector of things. One often hears it said that so-and-so makes a religion of his hobby. So it would appear that, although religion can take many disguises, faith is an entirely different concept. It can be seen as the roots, and religion as the branches. Faith goes deep into the soul and nurtures the heart and mind. Religion is the cover spreading its leafy branches over it all.

When I first caught religion (seriously) I was still a child, nicknamed by my family "Holy Jean". As a child I was always impressed by the show of religion: The communal singing and heartfelt joy expressed by some; I loved the clapping and arm movements; the general volubility of the clergy. It always appeared to me to be a performance enjoyed by all, especially the children. As I grew older, religion became a more secret thing inside me. I lived in a non-religious community, and I suppose I found it was less painful to be quiet about my inner thoughts. I remember the explosion at home when they discovered I had been concealing my religious thoughts and doings from them all. Nonetheless, I survived and lived to fulfil my desires. Later (much later) my Mum said I was the only one of her children she felt truly loved her, and added "I expect it's because of your religion. You really have

Now that I am old myself I realise how very much old people can be a drag on the younger generation, especially as we so often know the answers to various problems. It becomes a very great temptation to say "I told you so", but if we are sensible we hold our tongues.



Jean and Peter cutting their 25th Anniversary cake

Small Memories (2)

One memory I don't think I have mentioned concerns my young sister and myself. She was eleven and I was thirteen, the war was still going on and we were still evacuated. Barbara took the secondary exam (eleven plus as it was later called) and I took the exam for Trade School (as it was then called), only taken by thirteen-year-olds. I suppose it is called Technical College now. We both passed. I would really have liked to study dress design, I was very good at drawing and needlework. But my Dad ruled that Barbara should have the opportunity for Further Education as she was the brainy one, and I would always be able to get by as I was so good with my hands. So Barbara went to High School, which she hated, and she left it after a few months. By this time I had left school (I was fourteen) and started work in an underwear factory.

But I have always used my God-given gifts. I loved sewing and creating many things, ranging from doll's furniture (made with stiff paper), cards for special occasions (which I still make), rug-making, and designing clothes for my children and myself. At one time I made uniforms for a pop band. I loved making wedding dresses and bridesmaids dresses. I had finished one order and had hung the finished bride's dress on the living room wall (we had curtain rails so I could use them to hang any finished clothes on). The dress looked really lovely, and the bride was coming to collect it. Anyway, we were all sitting at the table eating our dinner when Peter, my husband, decide he wanted some tomato sauce. He promptly shook the bottle, unfortunately someone had removed the lid. Yes, you have guessed what happened, tomato sauce flew through the air and landed on the front of the wedding dress. Calamity and pandemonium! Luckily I had some material over, so I was able to unpick the stained parts and put new panels in. But I had to work all night as she was getting married on the Saturday and this happened on Thursday. She was collecting the dress on Friday, so I really had to work hard to have it ready for her to collect. We have enjoyed many a "do you remember when" since.

When we had a lot of children at home Peter loved to play the Tyrant and, especially at mealtimes, he always insisted on good manners. We never had peace and quiet because he loved a good argument; and at family meals he had various reactions, sometimes good, sometimes hostile, to his arguments. But he really enjoyed them all and, afterwards, he often said to me "the children made good sense today". But he loved getting his own way.

Mealtimes with me in charge were quite a different affair. I used to let the children get on with their own business as long as they ate their food. It was quite a while before I realised that Micheal hid anything he did not like (especially crusts) in his teddybear's trousers. The memory has caused very many chuckles since.

Another incident occurred one day when Nicola was being helpful. She was helping me to lay the table. I used to have 2lb jars of jam, they were quite heavy. Nicola managed to get hold of it despite her small hands, but unfortunately she dropped it. Jane happened to be in the way and it fell on her head. She still has the scar today, but it luckily didn't do any serious damage.

Poor Jane really went through the mill. Another time we had a caravan in the Forest of Dean. One day, Peter dropped Jane out of the door. Luckily she was in her carry-cot so she didn't sustain any damage this time. When we lived in Swanley Road, Welling, we had a very small house and the kitchen was extremely tiny. Nicola was, as usual, arguing the toss with me. Jane was standing behind her. I went to smack Nicola but she ducked. I had a saucepan in my other hand and the underside of it (the flat bottom) hit Jane in the face. She had the mother and father of all nosebleeds. We were all frightened by the blood but, fortunately no real damage was done.

Of course, we had our share of the traumas teenage years bring with them. It was quite a usual occurrence for Nicola to pack her bags and go out of the front door, making a great exit and Peter chasing after her. They usually came home together the best of friends, but agreeing to differ. And differ they did! Nicola was a flamboyant character: she always knew her own mind. She loved to dress in unusual clothes. I remember when bell-bottom trousers were fashionable, I made her a pair and sewed what seemed like hundreds of tiny bells right down the side seams. She certainly made an impression when she wore those trousers.

We often had family gatherings, especially at Christmas and Easter times. I remember cooking and preparing the house for a miniature invasion. We often played silly games like Consequences and I-spy. We had many hilarious times, especially when my middle daughter played. She is dyslexic and often set us all guessing what she had in mind. When we finally gave up we often had a good laugh at her interpretation of an object. But, strangely enough, she was a wonderful map-reader and often helped her Dad when we were travelling in the car.

Talking about cars, our first one was a little Austin Seven. One day when we were all on board and going down a hill we saw a car wheel careering in front of us. A slight wobble told my husband that the wheel was ours! God only knows how he kept control of the car, but he managed to pull up and we all got out safely. Luckily we were not too far from home so we used our feet and walked home.

Going to Mass on Sundays was always an occasion for us. One Sunday, when we were still young parents with two children and Nicola just toddling, we were all in the pew. Suddenly we became aware that Nicola was missing, then we saw her. She

was at the foot of the altar and saying in a very loud voice "Hello God!" Everything stopped, and I went up to the altar where the priest handed me Nicola with a smile. I went back to my seat and the Mass proceeded. You might be asking yourself "how did she get there?" The answer is that she crawled under all the pews in front of us. Luckily we were only three rows from the front.

Michael became an altar server and used to get up at 6:30am every morning to go to the convent school "Maryville" (where I later taught Art and Religion) to serve for the 7:30am mass.

I have done a lot of different jobs in my life, starting with Machinist in an underwear factory. Then I worked at a big store called "Peter Robinson" in the West End, in their sewing room. It was all hand-sewing, which I loved doing (still do). Then I went into another factory, making soldier's uniforms and overalls for more money. Next I went to a small factory and made clothes which bore the Duetto label. Our factory was opposite the Middlesex Hospital and we often saw people in a state of undress being examined. We thought it was a laugh (we were all very stupid and young). I made a friend there called Winnie. She later married and became Winnie Wintle. I still write to her occasionally.

Then I went to work in a very small factory in the West End. The Manager's name was Joe. It was well-paid and we made quite exclusive clothes, which I often modelled when a buyer came. They opened a larger factory in White Hall Lane, Edmonton. I went there and became a Forewoman.

Then I got married and didn't go out to work for a long while. When the children grew up a little (went to school) I got an evening job as a barmaid at a pub in Woolwich, near the Ferry. We had a very diverse selection of customers. I must say I enjoyed the atmosphere and I loved being chatted up by the fellas. Then, as the children grew older, I fancied working in the daytime. I was offered a job at the local convent school for girls, Maryville. I really enjoyed doing this job, and for the first time in my life I felt I had a job with dignity. I really enjoyed teaching art and I really tried to make it an interesting lesson. I had the satisfaction that, at parents' evenings, the parents would often tell me I had made a great impression on their daughter. I was also asked to teach Religion, which I took to be a very great compliment, considering it was a Convent run by Nuns.

I went on a school journey one year, we went to Switzerland to ski. I wasn't very good, and the experience put me off for life. The girls didn't go for the foreign cooking much, and they promised the girls fish-and-chips on Friday night. They were looking forward to it, all day they talked of nothing else. Imagine their disappointment when it was served that evening, any resemblance between our fish-and-chips and what they served could not be seen!

Jane also suffered with boils, which I always treated with kaolin poultices. It was a paste that had to be heated, and treated very carefully as it had to get very hot. It was usually applied between the folds of a pad. If used directly on the skin it would burn and dry hard, and prove difficult and painful to remove. My daughter also reminded me that I used vinegar water to rinse the hair. Consequently my kids never had nits. She said she was so proud when Nitty Nora (the children's name for the Nurse) came one day, and she was the only child in her class not to have nits.



Young Scamp
From the collection of Philip Rescorla

The Pearly Movement

The Pearly Movement was originally founded about 1875 by a man called Henry Croft. He was, himself, an orphan. His original idea was simply to raise money for other orphans (the need was very great then). Eventually he was joined by other fundraisers, hence the development of the Pearly Movement.

The Pearly monarchy was set from the beginning, King and Queens, etc. The honours are passed down. They are a very flamboyant movement and wonderful to see. Their suits and dresses are covered in pearl buttons, each one is sewn on individually.

I can remember seeing them when they were raising funds. They were always very entertaining, and all their efforts were for charity. They were a sight once seen, never forgotten.

The Pearly Movement is essentially a London thing, it especially belongs to the East End of London. They are all true cockneys and very proud of their heritage. The designs on their clothes (created by the pearly buttons) are all individual. The clothes were usually handed down, if they were well looked after (and they usually were). After all, they took untold hours to create and they were all real pearl buttons.



A London street scene
(All dolls and dolls clothes hand-made by the author)

Pets

We have had the usual selection of pets. All the children liked animals. My eldest son always preferred insects, he would sit and watch them for hours. Now he is an adult his fascination has increased, and he takes some wonderful photos. They, the photos, are truly magnificent: the colours he captures are almost unbelievable, I would never have thought one could find insects so interesting and beautiful. He shares his love of nature with his partner and me.

It is my wish to have my ashes scattered under trees in a wood. I have spent so many peaceful hours just sitting under trees, and listening to their whispering leaves and enjoying the coolness cast by their shadows. Also, to watch the patterns created by the movement of the leaves and branches as they stir in the wind against the sky.

I digress. I remember my eldest daughter had a goldfish. When it died it was a very sad day. We put it in a matchbox and proceeded down the garden in a funeral procession. A hole was dug and, as the fish was placed in the hole, Nicola said in a loud voice "here lies my fish that has had its chips." A stunned silence, then we all dissolved into laughter.

Nicola was always bringing cats home. One day she brought two home, who promptly had three kittens each. I felt smothered by cats and kittens. Still, we were very lucky, we did manage to find good homes for them all.

We had an epileptic dog, much loved by the children. They were heart-broken when he got very ill and we had to have him put to sleep.

We had the usual jars of caterpillars, moths, worms, earwigs, etc. We had rabbits, a tortoise, and frogs in the garden. I used to love to go out into the garden and look for the spider's webs shining and trembling, with dewdrops glistening from the strands, a truly breathtaking sight. (Needless to say, one had to be up early to see this wonder of nature.)

We have had several cats who have had very long lives. Especially Sandy, she lived sixteen years, a very happy and healthy life. Then, quite suddenly, she became ill and was suffering, so the vet advised us it would be the kindest thing to have her put to sleep. Peter took her to the vets, I stayed in the house and cried. I missed her all the time.

Later, my middle daughter (she worked in a pet shop) said they had a little kitten

that they were going to have to put down, as she only had one good eye¹. She was completely blind in one eye, and consequently she was unsaleable, so we had her and called her "Nelson". She is a beautiful cat and very alert. Having only one eye has not impeded here adventures in any way: she has climbed to the top of our cherry tree (at least 30ft high), and got down by herself. She is always bringing me in little presents - dead fieldmice (we live near a railway). She also catches pigeons (which she brings home), so you see her one eye is no impediment to her cat instincts.

She is a very aloof character and doesn't like children or the Hoover, and is quite fussy about her food. For instance, she hates fish and won't touch any food that has fish in it. She likes some biscuits, not all biscuits, she prefers the mixed variety. But her main attribute is that she doesn't dig up my garden.



Nelson

¹ She is, in fact, a diamond-eye cat, and would be considered very lucky in Thailand.

Our 50th Wedding Anniversary, 15th April 2000

Over half a lifetime, fifty years of wedded experience. I refuse to believe when a person says "we had a perfect marriage, we never had a cross word." That statement always sounded to me to be completely ludicrous as I believe everyone is an individual; and, as such, it is an impossibility to always agree with each other.

So I perceive our fifty years together were full of living, loving, quarrelling, making up, lots of laughter, our fair share of sorrow, illnesses, disappointments, bad luck, anger with each other; and our children: squabbles over the children, pride with their achievements; and, most of all, we never failed to be proud of each other and to recognise and praise each other's achievements.

Peter was a very clever man and did not suffer fools calmly, but he always was quick to congratulate others on their achievements. He always encouraged me in my craft work. I miss him dreadfully, as he always made a point of enjoying and sharing with me any of my creations.

Fifty years is a long time to be wed to one man and, although other attractions entered our lives, we always stayed together. Our wedding vows were made for life - we really belonged to each other. The years seemed to slip away: 20 years, 25 years, 35 years, 40 years. Then the big Five-oh! And a big celebration. It was a really wonderful day. In retrospect I know I enjoyed it much much more than my wedding day. There were no undercurrents or bad feelings that are so often present at a wedding. I didn't have to do any of the planning as my children made all the arrangements, whereas I made all the arrangements for our wedding, and suffered much anxiety and worry both before and after the wedding.

We had great respect for each other. We were both very volatile people, and we had some really aggressive rows, but we were never too proud to admit when either of us was in the wrong and behaving very badly. Sorry is perhaps the most important word to use in any marriage. Understanding and forgiveness are also a very necessary ingredient. But I feel a sense of great achievement when I think, fifty years wed to one man. I thank God for giving us the stickability that enabled us both to survive.

I have lived a long while, hopefully I still have some time left. My only sentiment, as Tiny Tim said, "God bless us all".

A Few Words from my Diary

Saturday August 11 2001

Peter always took me to the Danson Craft Show. This year Sarah and Matthew took me for the afternoon; it was a very hot day. I bought some dolls' house furniture, also a couple of lavender plants. They have taken to my garden quite happily.

Sunday August 12 2001

Mary Jo's friend came and took me to mass (Mary Jo is on holiday). In the evening I watched a Whoopi Goldberg and Ted Danson film. I enjoyed it very much, it was very entertaining. Now it is bedtime: cocoa, a good book and bed.

Monday August 13 2001

New specs today. Sarah came and took me to Bexleyheath to collect them.

Tuesday August 14 2001

I felt a bit upset today. My elder brother's grandson got married. I didn't know anything about it. My sister told me about it on the phone. She said it was a very grand affair. She went, also my younger brother and his wife. I didn't get an invite. I felt very hurt, but I had to accept that these things happen, I guess. I just feel very vulnerable at the moment, and am very sensitive to things when I feel I am being slighted. But I tell myself it's not such a big deal (life goes on).

Mary Jo and Sam are home again. They said they had a good time, but the weather was atrocious.

Saturday 18 August 2001

Back to routine. Went shopping today, it absolutely poured with rain. Sam has painted the side wall. He hoped the rain would not wash it all away (it didn't). It looks really good.

Thursday 23 August 2001

My first holiday without Peter. We left home about 10:30am and had a very good drive to Sibton Park. We had dinner on the way, we went to a pub called "The Coach and Horses": very good food, but I missed Peter.¹

Friday 24 August 2001

Sarah took us all to Folkstone today. Very hot, we (May and I) stayed on the beach most of the time, we took a picnic. Matthew had a beano, he went on everything on the fairground - if it moved he was on it.

Saturday 25 August 2001

Today, Sarah took us to Dymchurch. Nice weather, not too hot. Had a lovely day on the beach - no amusements or fairground! Matthew spent the whole day in the sea. We were all extremely tired when we got back to the chalet.

Monday 26 August 2001

We went to a bird sanctuary at Wingham. Then we went to a craft and wine centre; no crafts, no wine - the centre was shut!

¹ The party consisted of Jean, Sarah (daughter), Matthew (grandson) and May (next-door-neighbour)

Tuesday 28 August 2001

We went to Dover today. We were all disappointed. We called in on another pottery on the way home, only to discover it was a pottery that only dealt in building materials.

Wednesday 29 August 2001

Sarah took us for a country drive in the morning, lovely! They went home in the afternoon, as Matthew had a party he wanted to go to. May and I had a very quiet afternoon and evening. I went for a meander around the grounds, May had a sleep. In the evening we did our packing.

Thursday 30 August 2001

Sarah came back in the morning and brought us home. I felt very sad and disoriented coming into the house without Peter. It seemed so very empty and lonely. Unpacking was unbearable. It felt, to me, as if it was all happening again. Peter was all around me, but I knew he was gone. I must admit I spent the night wandering around and crying, but I pulled myself together as a new day dawned, and I began to cope with life again.



Jean and Peter cutting their Golden Wedding cake

Reflections

Jean Edwardes looks back on 10 years of pottery work



Hamill Gallery

Sidcup Arts & AEC

20th September – 18th October 2006

Please ask for the key at reception

Biography for Pottery Exhibition, 20 September to 18 October 2006

I have lived a full life; I will be eighty on my next birthday. When I was born, I was the middle child of five. Life was hard and we never had any luxuries but we were always content. When the war broke out, I along with my younger brother and sister were evacuated.

When I was thirteen I won a trade place at school, at the same time my younger sister passed her eleven plus, as my parents couldn't afford sending both of us to school, it was decided to send Barbara to higher education and I was told I had the key skills to survive in life. I would have loved to have had the chance to train as a dress designer.

At fourteen I left school and started work in a factory making underwear, I changed jobs a few times, at one time I was making uniforms for soldiers.

I got married to Peter when I was twenty-four in the year 1950 and proceeded to have five children and adopting one giving us three boys and three girls. While the children were growing up I would make several of their clothes for them I also had a job as a barmaid to make ends meet. When they got older and were at school I got a job as an art and needlework teacher. When the school closed I went to work with disabled people. I had to leave that job when I went into hospital for an operation and ended up in a coma for about a month. When I came around I had to be taught everything from walking to talking.

When I came out of hospital several months later I joined a pottery class with my eldest daughter Nicola, this helped me with my co-ordination. I also discovered another world which gave me free rein to use my imagination. I found great satisfaction creating with clay, after a few years the class at Charlton closed. My husband was now retired so we both signed up for classes with the Sidcup Adult Education Centre.

We both enjoyed coming to our pottery classes but in 2000 my husband suddenly died of cancer, I continued coming to pottery as it became my lifeline, as it was the only day I went out and meet people. I still love coming to pottery every week and I am still learning new and exciting things that I can make with clay.

I would like to thank my teachers, David who has now left and Jane who encourages me to try new and wonderful ideas.

newshopper.co.uk September 20, 2006

Learnin



Jean and teapot

Pottery class is lifeline

LIFELONG learner Jean Daisy Edwardes is holding her first exhibition at age 80.

Jean took up pottery after recovering from a coma when she had to relearn everything from walking to talking.

After her husband died in 2000 the classes became more important. Jean said: "Pottery became my lifeline — it was the only day I went out and met people."

Her exhibition runs until October 18 at Hamill Gallery, Sidcup Arts and Adult Education Centre, Alma Road.

Boss your

WOMEN in north Kent who have a good idea or perhaps just a great hobby that they would like to develop, which might lead to working for themselves, are being urged to attend a series of workshops to help them develop their thoughts and confidence.

Run by Business Link, the workshops are for women who have an idea but are not sure how, or even if they want to, develop it; women who want to gain enough confidence to talk about their ideas; or for those in the pre-start stage who have some great ideas but don't feel ready enough to attend a formal business course.

The programme consists of three one-day workshops, held over a three-week period, each with a different theme.

Business Link's Enterprise manager Janice Sandwell said: "This programme is relaxed and learning is through creative activities.."

Poem: I Smile

I whispered your name,
I said a secret prayer.
I know it sounds insane
But somehow I felt you were there.

You told me to smile,
The burden would be easier to bear;
And so I smiled,
Somehow I knew you were there.

When I am lonely, I smile.
When I am grieving, I smile.
When tears clean my soul, I swallow and smile.
My heart aches,
My eyes cry;
But my lips smile
Because I know you are here.

Poem: I Will Try

After an argument I wrote:

I will try to love you better,
To love what is truly you,
To love what is best in you.

It will help to increase my respect and admiration
To love your faults, as well as your desires,
Because ultimately it is all you.
So I accept and love you wholly.

"Lord give us the wisdom to know your divine will,
The grace to accept it, and the strength to fulfil it."
A quote from somewhere.

Poem: Rejection

When I was going through a very emotional time (someone I cared about was desperately unhappy) I wrote the following few lines.

Rejection is a part of Life
It's how one deals with it that matters.

To believe in oneself
Helps enormously
Towards finding again
Happiness and contentment.

I can remember feelings of failure and rejection of myself; but all my love and sympathy (although unspoken at the time) was buried deep inside my fractured heart. Writing these words for both of us released me and mended my heart.

Poem: Wonder

Look up to the stars and ... wonder,
Look around and ... wonder:
Streams and oceans,
Trees and flowers,
Fields and showers -
Look and feel and ... wonder

We are guided by Nature's miracles,
We are lucky to be given life.

We can invent and imitate God's creations,
We can live and live and admire.

So be glad of life,
It gives us the chance
To ... wonder.

Poem: Life

Leap into the dark
Into Life's
Fortunes. Joys, sorrows,
Experiences for good or ill.

Love to be given,
Injustices to suffer,
Fears to conquer,
Every day, every week, every month, every year.

LIFE is freely given to us to use.
The decisions how to use it are always ours.

Poem: Fight

When I was young I learned to fight
Parents, brothers, sisters and friends.
To become an individual in my own right
I learned to take each opportunity that came in sight

When I reached my teenage years
The conflict often caused me tears;
But the lesson I learned was:
To survive, I had to fight, fight, fight.

Middle age brought emotional fights:
Pride, selfishness, possessiveness and obtuseness came to light.
Children all grown, their own lives to lead -
I feel I must fight if I am to succeed.

Old age comes, and with it it brings
Sadness and sorrow, perhaps fear for tomorrow.
But with each new dawn of each new day
If I have learned my lessons right I can say
Yes, it is right to fight to survive to live.
So I fight, fight, fight, endure and forgive.

