

Looking Back



A family memoir set in Finchley and Friern Barnet 1913-1953

Elsie Lawrence Mudd

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This book is a tribute to my dear mum, no longer with us but always in our hearts. She was a wonderfully caring mother in every way. She brought up two little girls, sheltering us through the bombings and dark days of the war, going without herself and always putting us first.

Thank you to my daughters Barbara Toplis and Rosie Buckle for their encouragement.

Special thanks to all those who made the book possible.



Elsie Lawrence Trusler 1913-1999

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Looking Back



My account of the Trusler and Lawrence families

Elsie Lawrence Mudd

Preface

With all my precious childhood memories I had to reflect on, I decided in 1991 to put pen to paper and write an account of these times, with the intention these words becoming a book.

I want to leave in this book something of a record of the past, as I remember it. Usually, life passes on, leaving just a few photographs and memories as grandmas and grandads recollect. These sometimes are forgotten, as the older generations pass away and life flies forward, taken up with new experiences. New babies are born, the younger generations become adults, and there is not always time to think of the past.

Winding forward to the year 2021, these are unsettling times, with so many families losing loved ones to such an awful pandemic. On a comparison, I now reflect what my family faced: life hardships, fears of war, tragedies of losing children and loved ones.

I hope my grandchildren and their descendants will have pleasure in finding out about my grandparents and those who lived before them.

Chapter One

Hamilton Road

4 4 Hamilton Road, East Finchley, North London was where my mother Elsie Trusler,[1] spent most of her childhood. A simple street, it had a Stonemasons on one corner, which I found a bit scary, because looking down through the glass windows were marble angels surrounded by crosses and tombstones.

On one side of the road was a high wall all the way down to the end and this was the boundary of the Good Shepherd Convent.[2] From No. 44, Elsie's house,[3] you could see the nuns feeding the chickens they kept on the other side of the wall. Across the road were a row of terraced houses, most of which had their windows draped with lace curtains while the first few properties had picket fences and panelled front doors with heavy black knockers.

One of the houses had the front room turned into a little shop, known then as Davies' and a favourite for children. It smelt of paraffin, candles and Sunlight Soap,[4] with sweets in glass jars along the counter. Mrs Davies was a nice elderly lady with grey hair swept up in the fashion of the day, her crystal dropped earrings twinkling in the light as she made squares of paper into cones and tipped sweets from the brass scale into them, folding each very carefully.

A few houses on was Blakey's Yard and I think they made nails or shoe studs on the premises. Next to the yard was an electric generator which would give a gentle humming sound day and night, and you would not know it was there if not for the high green doors with a notice on the front. Of course, before electricity, all the houses in the area were lit by gas and oil

lamps, and my mother could remember the lamp lighter coming around at dusk with the long pole; usually the time the children came in from playing in the street.

After the generator was Mr Dors' butcher's shop with sawdust on the floor and sausages hanging up with sides of beef and pork. And then there was No. 44 itself, the residence of the Trusler family, my nanny and grandad's house and home to my mum, her five sisters[5] and two brothers. Lace curtains draped at the window, while upon a Victorian whatnot and a wooden pedestal, the leaves of a dark green aspidistra plant pressed against the glass.

The same sort of houses carried on down to the end of the road, which ended at Manor Park Road, all looking neat with ornamental iron railings and gates, some of which were taken away during the Second World War for scrap metal to make guns and ammunition. The little gardens were full of flowers in the summer, with geraniums, roses, asters, all brightening up the street.

Chapter Two

Mum

My mother was born in the Richmond area of London in 1913, moving with her family to Islington, and then to Finchley where they soon settled. East Finchley was then almost entirely countryside with fields going as far as Hampstead Heath, so it was a relief to my grandma to have this house at last after living in rooms.

My grandfather, Jim Trusler, served for a time in India, and then in the 1914-1918 War (known now as World War One) where he was unlucky and lost an eye. With six girls in the family, my grandparents had always hoped for a son. First there was Florence, then Ethel, then my mother Elsie, followed by Rosie, Maisie and Ada. My mum's aunt Louie (my grandma's sister known as Aunt Lou) lived just down the road at Manor Park.

During my mum's childhood, she lost two sisters. Ethel died at sixteen with TB and was buried at the Holy Trinity Church in Church Lane, East Finchley; later me and my sister Barbara were to be christened there. Rosie was eight years old when she died of Scarlet Fever, in the Fever Hospital on the North Circular Road, opposite Coppetts Wood in Friern Barnet.

Life was not easy for the Truslers, but my grandma looked after her family very well. The children were all members of Sunbeams, the junior part of the Salvation Army, and when Rosie was buried the whole of the Sunbeam group turned out, as well as most of the street. Mum said that it was a very sad day.

Grandma did all the washing in the old scullery using a copper—a tub surrounded by concrete with a hole underneath to burn coal and bring the

water to a boil. The white clothes, sheets and towels were pushed around with a copper stick as they boiled, after which they would be rinsed several times in the sink, then folded and squeezed through the enormous mangle outside in the yard by the back door. During cold weather, or when it was too wet to dry outside, the washing would be hung up on lines in the kitchen and draped around the fire on a clothes horse.

There were no vacuum cleaners, so most of the cleaning was done with brooms, mops and by scrubbing on hands and knees. There were no wall-to-wall carpets, usually just linoleum (lino) floor covering and rugs. Plenty of floor polish was applied to the lino and rubbed with a duster until it shone.

From the large kitchen, French windows overlooked the yard at the back. Inside was a black leaded range, which was a heavy iron oven with a fire at the side stoked with coal. Bread and cakes would be cooked in the oven, and with the kettle settled on the hob, it would be boiled when the lid over the fire was lifted off.

Over the range was a high shelf called a mantel shelf, usually with a fringed cloth draped around it, and on top stood a clock and various ornaments. Grandma always had a canary in a cage by the window and a dresser with cups, saucers and plates on it along the same wall. There was a large table surrounded by chairs and two old easy chairs by the fireplace. My mum and her sisters and later two young brothers, spent most of their time in the kitchen as it was cold in those days.

On Sundays and holidays a front room with a well-worn settee and two arm chairs was used. There was a mirror over the fireplace surrounded by a brass fender and pictures on the walls. At Christmas time everyone helped to decorate the front room and laid a fire in the grate ready for after dinner on Christmas Day.

Mum doesn't remember much about being small, but the early years at Hamilton Road do come back to her a lot. Grandma would be strict with them: no messing about at bed time and at meal times and up to bed as soon as Father said. Often the bedroom would be freezing cold (no central heating then) with a bath in front of the fire with Grandma scrubbing away behind your ears and making sure they were clean. Then there was cocoa with bread and dripping before bed.

There were hardly any cars then, mostly horses and carts. The children would play in the street sitting in street doorways if it was raining, playing dressing up or ball games by the Convent wall, or swinging on a rope from lamp posts. Sometimes they would walk down to Manor Park Road and watch the trains thundering over the subway, which, back then were steam trains, later to be electrified as part of the London Underground system in 1939.

Mum and her sisters, and later on, her two brothers, went to school in Long Lane, just a short walk from their home. During the summer holidays, their parents would take them to the fair on Hampstead Heath or they would take a picnic to the nearby fields.

Then there were special occasions when Grandad and Grandma would take them on holiday,[6][7] such as the time they went to Margate on the *Royal Sovereign* steamer[8] boat which they boarded at Tower Pier on the River Thames. Mum said how exciting it was and how they were allowed to go down below and see the ships engines. Each girl had a straw hat to wear for their holidays. Mum, her older sister and my grandma would sit late on in the evening before they departed, trimming their hats with artificial roses and ribbons.

For several years they travelled to Southend-on-Sea where they enjoyed a holiday at a quiet house, where the landlady was always pleased to see them. Grandad would make them take off their shoes when it was time to

come in as not to make a noise. In the morning they would all peep through the banisters to see the breakfast table laid with bread, butter and egg cups ready for the boiled eggs. Yes, there were some good times.

My grandfather had an allotment—a piece of land which was rented out locally to the public for growing vegetables and flowers. Mum, not minding the blisters on her fingers, loved to go and help him with the digging. 'You ought to have been a boy,' he'd say, not knowing that later he would have two sons.

If Grandma had to go shopping and leave the others to Mum's care, she would promise to bring back some cream cakes... providing Mum had helped her do the cleaning and kept the other children in order.

Another job Mum had was to go and help at Dors Butcher Shop next door. Mr and Mrs Dors had two girls, one of them called Elma, a friend of my mum's during the time when they were young, but she became a bit stuck up later on in life, as Mum would like to point out. Mum's jobs involved scrubbing the floor and cleaning the shelves. Mr Dors would often give them some fat for the dripping or extra sausages every now and then.

One time there was some trouble when a rat's nest was found at the back of the shop under an old tank. The butcher had decided to employ a young boy called Clifford, and when the girls were once getting a picnic ready in the garden he threw some old mouldy sausages and meat bones over the wall... and and not only that! He was always calling them names.

My Auntie Florrie, Mum's older sister, was very religious. She would attend most of the church meetings and took small children for Sunday School lessons. Auntie Maisie (May as she was also known) and Mum, on the other hand, were not so bothered about church, had quite a lot of friends and went out more. One day when Mum was talking at the front door to a friend, Florrie slammed the front door, trapping Mum's finger and almost taking the tip off. Afterwards Florrie was shocked at what she had done, but

still insisted that she was fed up with girls knocking at the door. Florrie did not like looking after the smaller girls and had a row with her father when she found out a new baby was on the way.

'I am not helping out!' she stormed.

The new baby was the son they had longed for and was christened Harold. Mum didn't mind. She loved babies and loved caring for them.

Chapter Three

Aunt Lou

At the bottom of Manor Park Road lived Mum's Aunt Lou. She and her husband Jim had four children: Jim, Jack, Louise and Henry. They and Mum's family looked very much alike, because Aunt Lou was Mum's mother's sister, and their husbands were brothers. Thus, the two sisters married two brothers and so both families had the surname of Trusler.

Mum spent quite a lot of time at their house. They were all members of the Salvation Army and Louise, Mum's cousin, was one of Mum's special friends. Later on, Aunt Lou would sometimes ask Mum to go and give her a hand with the housework and to help make the beds. Mum's reward would be to stay for dinner and have some of Aunt Lou's meat pudding, a speciality.

After losing her husband Aunt Lou wore mostly long black clothes, right down to her stockings and shoes. I remember her one Christmas during the war when she came to Grandma's wearing a little black straw hat with cherries on it. When she smiled it was obvious that she did not wear any dentures, and us children were fascinated watching her munching Christmas pudding.

A very tiny woman, there was a lot of sadness in her life. Her married daughter Louise died young of cancer, and one of her sons was divorced, splitting up the friendship she had with his wife. After her son remarried and went to live in Wales with his new wife, Aunt Lou, because of her age and ill health, was forced to leave Finchley and move to Wales and live with them, where later she died.

My mum always had sallow skin, not fair like my father and his family. My grandma was the same, dark brown eyes and black hair as a

young woman, hair plaited and worn around her ears, being the fashion of the time. Grandma's mother lived in a caravan, smoked a clay pipe, wore a flat cap and played an accordion. Could it be that at one time there were gypsies or travelling people among our ancestors? Who knows?

As Mum grew up, her first brother—Harold—was born, followed later by a frail little boy named Jim, which seemed to compensate for the loss of the two girls Ethel and Rosie. During the time of Jimmy's birth, Mum was sixteen and from the age of fourteen she had been a great help at home. The one and only job she had was as a domestic helper, which involved housework and helping with children.

New homes were springing up on land that was once the fields leading to Hampstead, and young professional comfortably-off families were quickly moving in. They required the services of young girls, often poorly paid, who worked long hours washing, cleaning, cooking and returning home from their duties totally worn out.

When Mum's little brother was born, her father said she would have to have time off from her job to help at home. Although there were no wages, Mum did not mind doing work for her own family, since her own mother was not a young woman anymore and her time giving birth had not been an easy one.

Mum remembers washing her mother's hands and face, and plaiting her hair, running up and down the stairs with hot water for the Midwife. At the time near the birth, the nurse told my mum she was not old enough to be present there during it.

Grandma looked at the nurse. 'If she is old enough to look after the family and me, it does not matter.'

After Jimmy was born Mum went back to work. She loved the little boy and treated him as if he was her own child, dressing him, coaxing him to eat and carrying him around everywhere.

Chapter Four

When Mum met Dad

Mum was now growing into a young woman. Because the house was always busy with the two younger boys and her growing sisters, reading was one of her favourite pastimes. It was quiet upstairs away from the family where she could be alone, deep into reading her book, but then someone would call for her to come down and help with something or other.

After a while, young men would start to become interested in Mum and sister Maisie. They often went to the pictures, as most young people often did of a Saturday. Maisie would meet a young man and they would walk home together, but Mum often found herself on her own. She did have boyfriends though, as when there was a young lorry driver who would send children down to Mum's house with notes for her to meet him at the top of the road. This romance did not last very long as he was away a lot on deliveries.

Not far from Finchley there was an army base where Mum met a young soldier. She was very happy with him but he had to go overseas, from where he wrote to call off their engagement as he would be gone a long time.

On one occasion two lads asked Mum and Maisie out, treating them to an outing at the pictures with sweets and ice cream. On the way home, they decided to walk across a field after a short cut was suggested but Mum and Maisie had a shock when the lads thought they would take liberties! Maisie shouted to Mum for help and Mum laid into the young man with a clout, before the two girls made a run for it. After that they felt a bit wiser about men they did not know too well.

Maisie later met Peter, who I came to know as Uncle Pete, and they fell in love. Pete loved to play football but unfortunately had a bad fall that damaged his hip and spine. He never recovered from it and was disabled for the rest of his life. He and Maisie were married and later had a little girl called Betty, my cousin.

Mum sometimes found it hard to make ends meet as the money she earned from domestic work didn't go far after giving her mum money for her keep. When she wanted to have her hair permed, she joined a club and paid so much a week at a hairdresser, and when the day came for her new hairstyle, she turned up at the shop full of excitement, thrilled to be finally getting the perm. Upon returning home, however, her dad became annoyed.

'If you can afford to pay to have your hair done you can afford to give your mother more money for your keep.'

This spoilt it a bit, but her friends admired the new hairdo and soon girls were having theirs done the same.

There was a time when Alexandra Palace (the first home of the BBC television network) held a funfair. Mum and her friend went along and had a wonderful time, such a good time in fact, that they failed to notice that everyone had gone and the iron gates at the entrance were shut and locked. Realising there was only one way out, they tore their stockings climbing over the gate. Next time, they made a note of when the fair would be closing!

Maisie and Mum would row a lot. After Mum bought some new stockings, they would disappear from her bedroom draw, and only after Maisie came in from the pictures would Mum find out her sister was wearing them, and then there would be trouble.

Once Mum found her new pair of shoes caked with mud. My grandma would tell her, 'Stop moaning about it, your dad will start creating' (complaining), so Maisie would get away with it.

Another time, the lady that Mum worked for gave her some very nice stylish clothes.

'You are welcome to them,' she told Mum. 'They don't fit anymore.'

The clothes were neatly folded on a chair in Mum and Maisie's room. On getting in from work the next day, it was discovered that young Jimmy had given the clothes to a rag-and-bone-man who had called earlier in the day. In exchange, Jimmy had been given a goldfish in a bowl.

Maisie and Mum had been to the Grand Hall at North Finchley to see a good film, and round by the Tally Ho Pub[9] was a little café they often called in for something to eat and a cup of tea. On one occasion the two girls sat down after thinking they would have time before catching the bus home. Over by the window were two dark haired young men, one of whom looked over at Mum every so often. Maisie nudged Mum's arm.

'I think he's got his eye on you,' she said, laughing.

A few minutes later the young men came over to their table and offered to buy the girls a cup of tea.

'That's alright,' was their reply. 'We've just had one.'

'I am Frank' said the taller of the two. 'And this is my mate, Darkie, that's his nickname.'

'Is your friend foreign?'

'I am half Italian,' said Darkie.

It turned out that Frank Lawrence lived in Summers Lane, North Finchley, and Darkie worked with him bricklaying. They were soon chatting away as if they had known the lads for ages. Frank offered to walk Mum home.

'It's OK. I'm going with my sister on the bus.'

They decided to all go on the bus. Before Mum went indoors Frank made her promise to meet him, then he and his friend were gone. He didn't keep his promise to meet her at the pictures even though Mum waited ages

for him. Disappointed, she went home and told Maisie. He had seemed such a good-looking chap.

'Sorry he didn't turn up,' said Maisie, as she got ready for bed.

Mum shrugged. 'I don't care.'

Just then there was a loud knocking at the front door. Mum opened the bedroom window and looked down to see Frank Lawrence looking up. Mum was mad.

'What do you want at this time of night, I waited hours for you!'

'Sorry Elsie, but I had to work late. I promise I'll turn up next time. You will come, won't you?'

There was a pause while Frank waited for her answer.

'OK.'

A new time was arranged but by this point her dad had come to the front door.

'Come on now young chap, we all want to get to bed.'

Frank called his goodbye, mounted his bike and was gone again.

The next time, Frank—my father to be—was there as promised when Mum turned up. The romance blossomed and it wasn't long before Mum went home with Frank to meet his family at 179 Summers Lane, North Finchley. She was surprised to find he had three sisters and six brothers.

Chapter Five

The Lawrence family of Summers Lane

My father's family, the Lawrences of Summers Lane, began when my grandmother, Lucy Matilda,[10] married Harry Lawrence, a horse dealer. She had come from a large family and as a young woman had to go into service as most working class girls did.

Their hours were long and she often told me of the times she had scrubbed steps in freezing cold weather, gotten up at dawn to clean out fire grates, chopped wood, lain fires and made early morning tea for her employers. She only got a few days off, and taking a husband was the only way out of the grinding hard work.

Her family had been hard-up, and one of her sisters had been forced into adoption, travelling to a new family in Canada. When Lucy met Harry Lawrence, she looked forward to getting married and settling down in a home of her own. The children kept coming along, and soon there was not enough room in the terrace house on Summers Row, a line of small properties down a short alleyway off of Summers Lane.

The Triumph Public House[11] was at the top of the alley, which was very handy for Harry as he enjoyed a pint or two. The children, including young Frank—my father—would play in the alley, sometimes bare foot, but enjoying life. Harry was gradually selling off several acres of land he owned in North Finchley and spending more and more on drink and gambling. He was soon left with only one horse and cart which he used for a greengrocery round. My father would often help him and wait outside the pub while he would call in for a drink with his customers.

When the council houses were built in Summers Lane, the Lawrences moved into number 179.[12] It was built on a corner plot with a wide piece of land at the side and front, which was good for Grandma as she took much pride in the garden[13] and soon had the family all laying out a lawn, planting hedging and growing vegetables.

By now the family had grown. First, there had been two girls, Maud and Lucy, followed by Jim, Harry, my father Frank,[14] Len and Stanley, Victor and the last son Philip. Then, thinking that nine children were enough, another baby girl, Barbara, was born.

The two eldest, Maud and Lucy, worked hard at home looking after the younger children, while my grandma took in washing to make ends meet. Even so, she still found time to go to the Mother's Meeting at the Church Hall. All the children had to attend Sunday School and the boys would play hooky, running off to play in Coppetts Wood, climbing trees, throwing stones and all the things that young boys get up to.

As the children were growing up, Grandma's husband became less help to her and more of a liability. Often drunk, lying in bed, noisy and offensive, she became weary with it all. As the boys grew older and began looking for work, they became resentful of the way their father behaved. Harry was just not pulling his weight

Later on, there was to be an almighty row and I was told that the sons jointly and physically threw him out of the house. Harry packed his bags and left, leaving Grandma to bring up the two youngest—Phil and Barbara—on her own, but her sons' wages helped to make ends meet. Maud and Lucy left home to make a life for themselves, with Maud to later marry Fred Mantel and Lucy marrying Charlie Gould.

179 Summers Lane was a pleasant house to view from the road. A clipped box privet hedge surrounded a circle-shaped lawn on which there were rose beds and a bird bath. The house was whitewashed on the outside

with small square windows of the casement variety. A trellis covered in white and yellow roses was around the front door, while to the side of the front garden was a large splendid lilac tree, lupins and other herbaceous plants, and then more trellises with roses.

Down the side of the house ran a path which led to a greenhouse at the back. Then there was the chicken shed and by the door a place where logs were stacked ready for the fire. Over the chicken shed grew a lovely display of orange blossom, which along with the other flowers scented the night air with a sweet aroma.

Dividing the garden from Summers Lane at the front was a high thorn hedge sheltering the house from the road. On entering through the garden gate was a large vegetable plot, my father's piece of ground, where he grew vegetables for Grandma and the family.

Grandma loved her garden, and we were to enjoy it too as children, playing on the lawn, picking daisies and helping with the watering in summer. A second hedge enclosing the garden at the front of the house, had been cut to look like castle battlements.

This was the house my mother saw for the first time as a young woman. Dad had first brought her home to tea to meet his mother and family, back when his father still lived at the house.

Mum soon made friends with Frank's sisters Maud and Lucy, who were fond of cooking, embroidery, reading, and arranging flowers, always working hard to help at home. The Lawrences had an Africa grey parrot, which would swear, whistle and mimic my Grandmother calling her sons to get up in the morning. It pecked Mum, but everyone else welcomed her.

On February 27th 1937, Mum and Dad were married, and Lucy made the wedding cake. Maud had left home by then to live with Fred Mantel at 3 Goldsmith Road, Friern Barnet, with whom she had a young son called

Bobby. When the flat upstairs of number 3 became vacant, they helped Mum and Dad to secure the tenancy so they would have a home of their own.

For the new home, Mum chose a new bedroom suite and had curtains and a bedspread to match in an old gold colour. They acquired some second hand pieces of furniture and soon the flat looked nice and homely.

Chapter Six

Goldsmith Road, Friern Barnet

From The Orange Tree^[15] pub, opposite the Town Hall at Friern Barnet, you walked left down Friern Lane and onto Goldsmith Road, which is on the first right. Walking down that road on the right is Kennard Road, followed by Hartland Road, Ramsden Road, then MacDonald Road. Continuing along Goldsmith Road, Number 3^[16] is the last but one house on the right before Stanford Road. Number 1 Goldsmith Road, the last house, was where Mum's sister Maisie was to live later on during the war.

Number 3 itself was a Victorian bay windowed house with a small front garden surrounded by a privet hedge. Two large steps—the top inlaid with red and blue tiles—led to an imposing front door with stained glass panels. Similar stained glass panels were to the side of the door, which were all inside a porch and set off the appearance of the house. The door had a large brass bell on the side panel, a brass knocker and a large-handled brass letterbox. When rubbed with Bluebell polish, these would sparkle and shine—a job I was to enjoy doing.

As a child, I remember the little front garden being unattended, except when Mum would have a go at it, clipping the hedge and the tangle of brambles beneath the bay window. A few flowers grew underneath the hedge, mostly Lilly of the Valley and dandelions.

After Elsie and Frank had settled in at Goldsmith Road, they realised that they soon would be a family of three; I was on the way. Mum was a healthy young woman and looked after herself as soon as she found out about her pregnancy, and, having worked looking after children, was not worried about being a mother. Dad seemed pleased, although he still liked to go out

for a pint with his brothers at The Triumph, The Orange Tree, or The Cricketers at North Finchley which was another of his haunts.

Maud and Lucy—Dad's sisters—made matinee coats for the new baby, and so did Grandma Trusler who did a lot of knitting. During the end of Mum's pregnancy, there was a bus strike and she was given a ticking off by the Doctor at the North Middlesex Hospital for walking most of the way there just to keep an appointment.

At last the day came. Mum had been uncomfortable all night and was admitted to hospital the next day, where, on 30th September 1937, I was born in time for tea. Mum's father Jim, Grandad Trusler, had been ringing the hospital all day, eventually being told 'it's a little girl'—his first grandchild—and he was delighted. The nurses said I looked like a little Chinese baby because I was so dark.

Grandad Trusler collected the new pram from the shop at East Finchley and walked all the way to Friern Barnet with it, complete with a new cover and pillow he and Grandma Trusler had bought.

The day came for Mum to come home. Grandma Trusler came too with her things, travelling with her back to Friern Barnet. However, a shock awaited them. Frank's sister Maud, Fred and Bobby had moved out of the downstairs flat at No. 3, and Dad had started to move some of Mum's furniture downstairs, but the job had not been finished. He had gone to work leaving the place upside down with beer bottles in the grate.

Grandma Trusler soon got cracking. She rolled up her sleeves, made some tea, made up the baby's cot and began clearing up the mess. When Dad came home the rest of the furniture was promptly moved down and soon everything was in its place. Mum breathed a sigh of relief.

The only thing now, was they only had two rooms instead of four upstairs, but at least they had the garden to wheel the baby out for fresh air and somewhere to hang the washing. A new tenant came to live upstairs and

life settled down again, with Dad busy with his bricklaying work. Maud, Fred and bobby had moved to Chelwood, a large house on Oakleigh Road in Whetstone. Auntie Maud had the job of Caretaker and they lived in half of the house downstairs.

Elsie and Frank were now parents. Mum loved the baby and she felt so proud wheeling the pram out, the baby all nice, clean and fresh, dressed in hand-knitted clothes, with a little white bonnet edged with swansdown. Dad did not fuss the baby a lot, because, after all, it was considered women's work, but he was pleased when his daughter was admired. He would have preferred a son of course, but perhaps next time.

Mum would feel full of energy, always busy changing and bathing the baby, washing the clothes, polishing downstairs, walking to East Finchley to her mum and dad's and brother's and sister's houses. Elsie's family loved the baby and her two brothers Jim and Harold loved to see her too. Once baby was tucked up for the night, Mum would feel tired. Breast feeding had soon got her figure back to its trimness, but by teatime she had to have a rest. The baby grew chubby and rosy-cheeked.

'Don't over feed her,' the clinic doctor said. 'She will get rickets if she's too heavy.'

The back garden at Goldsmith Road was quite big so Dad made a small vegetable plot. There was a plum tree which must have been there for years and we planted a white lilac. There was an old coal shed, and later on Dad built a long shed to house some rabbits he kept at the bottom. It was never a beautiful garden, but it is where me and Barbara played as children, hiding in the privet hedges, making bonfires in the autumn and snowmen in winter. We lived in our garden in the summer, never wanting to come in at bedtime.

Dad would call out what had become a regular line of his: 'Just popping round to Mum's.' It often meant that he would not be back until after

10 o'clock at night when the pub closed. He would call in at the Cricketers or Triumph for a pint, which Elsie got used to, glad to put her feet up and do some knitting or read the news.

The news was not too good, as things were getting bad in Europe with talk of war. Surely not after the first one with all that suffering? Elsie tried not to think about it and enjoyed being a mum. At this time, Elsie's sister Maisie was courting Pete, and Ada had found a nice young man called Tom.

Elsie's dad was not looking too well and was suffering with his chest. Grandma Trusler had noticed that Frank did not come with Elsie to visit them.

'He is treating you right, girl, isn't he?' Grandad would say to Elsie.

'Oh, yes, Dad. You know how he likes a sleep-in on Saturday afternoons?' She would always change the subject.

Soon, I was tottering about, to Mum's delight.

'Look at her, Frank. Isn't she doing well?' Mum would pick me up and sit me on Dad's lap.

'Oh eh, you take her,' he would laugh. 'She might be wet.'

Mum thought that he should be more interested in his daughter.

I was christened 'Elsie Lucy', at the Holy Trinity Church, in Church Lane, East Finchley, and my mum's family made afternoon tea to follow. Once I had begun walking, Aunt Edie, Grandma Trusler's sister, went with Mum to buy me my first pair of proper shoes.

Auntie Edie, had worried Grandma Trusler when she had fallen pregnant as a young woman. Such a thing was thought a disgrace in those days. After her confinement in a Salvation Army home for young women, her son was adopted, but who later on as a young man, kept in touch with Aunt Edie and called her 'Mum'. Later on, Edie married Albert Furlow and they settled down and had a daughter, Sylvia.

When the flat upstairs next door at Number 1 Goldsmith Road became vacant, Mum spoke to the landlord who was kind enough to let Auntie May (Maisie) and Uncle Pete have it; their daughter Betty had just begun walking and the rooms where they had lived in at East Finchley had been very dirty. After they moved in, Uncle Pete made a wooden gate for the top of the stairs, so that Betty could play in safety. Uncle Pete, being disabled, could not go into the Army, but he had a night job at a local factory.

Chapter Seven

1939

Early in 1939, things were looking black. Germany was mobilising, war seemed inevitable and my grandad was far from well. In April, while air raid shelters were being built and gas masks issued, my mother, realising she was pregnant again, tried to forget about the talk of conflict.

One afternoon her dad was busy sowing seeds in the garden at Hamilton Road.

'How are you, girl?' he said, looking up at Mum. 'These are bad times.' He watched me as I toddled around the garden. 'You're not planning on having any more little ones yet, are you, duck? I should wait and see until all this stuff has blown over.'

Mum had not the heart to tell him about the child she was carrying.

One summer afternoon, Mum was startled by a loud knocking on the door at Goldsmith Road where she found her sister Maisie standing white-faced.

'Oh, Elsie. Dad has gone, he's died. He collapsed and died while Pete and I were there.'

Mum was shocked. She remembered her dad saying he wondered if he ever would see the seeds that he had planted come up. It seemed ironic now.

In September war was declared. The Germans had marched into Poland, despite the warnings from England. Although nothing happened at first, the black-out had been placed in the windows and children from St Mary's, London, had been evacuated.

My dad went with a building company to construct street shelters in Liverpool, but the threat of enemy aircraft never came about. This was the so-called Phoney War.

'All be over by Christmas,' many people said. Mum hoped it would be because the baby was due about that time.

By that time I was two years old. Mum loved me very much, but I was a big child and heavy to carry. An abscess developed on my bottom, which meant I should have to go to the hospital to have it lanced.

It was a great struggle getting me into the out-patient clinic, and although we arrived early, by lunchtime we were still waiting. Mum enquired as to why her daughter had not yet been seen by the doctor.

'Oh, they've all gone for their dinner,' she was told. 'Come back after two o'clock.'

At last, after a whole day spent hanging around the hospital, I was seen and the abscess dealt with. Mum was especially tired after the journey home.

Dad soon came back from Liverpool, which was just as well because events were about to take a surprising turn. On December 22nd, a freezing night, Mum began having back pains. They both knew what was happening as Dad rushed out to phone for the midwife.

'Hurry!' Mum shouted.

A fire had been lit in the bedroom, but the baby was coming too quickly, much sooner than was expected. Mum hung on and soon the Midwife knocked on the front door.

'Tell her to be quick, Frank,' Mum called as he hurried to let her in.

'Have you got an old blanket or an old coat or something to put over the car?' was all the midwife said.

There was no time. Mum called out and almost by the time the nurse had washed her hands the baby arrived. It was a little girl, arriving in a rush,

the way she always seemed to be all her life. Barbara Evelyn Lawrence, always close, always in a hurry, my best friend and only sister.

As my father had to work, a helper for new mothers from the Town Hall Welfare Office arrived, but she seemed to spend most of the time drinking tea. 'Busy doing nothing,' as Mum said.

'I'll change young Elsie's cot,' said the helper. 'It's bound to be wet.'

'Oh, she's dry at night now,' Mum said.

'Oh, that's a blessing, now you have the new baby.'

We had an Ideal boiler that ran on coal or coke, with a tank that rattled noisily when it became too hot. The helper, being a silly woman, loaded it with coal and left without a word. Mum, who was supposed to stay in bed (new mothers had to lie in for at least five days at that time), heard the hot water tank banging so had to get out of bed to turn the taps and release the steam. Needless to say, Mum said she could manage on her own after that.

By this time, I was two years and three months old, but quite clever since I could put the key through the letter box for the Midwife and visiting neighbours, including Miss Limma, who together with her sister bought Mum flowers as congratulations.

My sister was a good baby and slept most of the time. She was breastfed and well looked after, which was to stand her in good stead later on. Mum was up and about again, chatting to the tenants living upstairs at No. 3, who were worried about what might happen if bombing started. Mrs Cooper, was anxious.

'We're going,' she said. 'Hope you get someone nice to live upstairs.'

The two old ladies who moved in had loads of old mahogany Victorian furniture. The elder of the two, Mrs Barker, was blind and relied on her sister, Mrs Pearson, who happened to be very deaf.

Miss Limma, the lady next door, was a bit, well... masculine. She rode around on a bike wearing green corduroy shorts and shared the house with someone who was apparently her sister. Although these were two unmarried ladies living together for company, the love of their lives was an old tabby cat called Neegle.

Unfortunately, there was a bad epidemic of whooping cough in Friern Barnet at the time. Mum became worried and had little sleep once she realised baby Barbara was showing signs of the symptoms. Every time the baby went into a spasm of coughing, she had to be lifted in order that she could get her breath. After the coughing and sickness passed, she had to be fed straight away and could only keep a little food down.

Several young mothers had lost their babies to the deadly disease, which worried Mum sick as Barbara was thin and weak. However, with loving care and encouragement, she coaxed the baby to feed and at last the crisis was over. I was the next victim, but fortunately being strong and healthy I was soon better again.

Chapter Eight

1940-1941

Everyone had been issued with Anderson bomb shelters, which were erected in the back gardens. Although there was hope that they would never be used, the dreaded air raids began in 1940 during the cold and wet weather. The first air raid warnings sent everyone down to the shelter, but water had seeped into ours and made everything feel damp.

Worrying about the effect on the children's health, Mum decided to stay in the house, so Dad dismantled the shelter and put half of it in the corner of our bedroom, arched over the beds. Whether it would have prevented us getting killed we never knew, because a new type of indoor shelter was decided upon by the government. This came in the form of a large table made of iron and steel, useful during the day for eating meals and as a refuge at night. Dad put some floor covering down inside and Mum put a tablecloth on top to hide the ugly iron work. You knew it if you accidentally cracked your leg against the hard metal. This was the Morrison shelter.^[17]

By now I was beginning to get up to things. Some of them I remember and others are what Mum told me. I do remember my sister's pram and the blue wicker cot that she slept in, which had a round canopy threaded through with ribbon. One day, being excited about something or other, I leaned too far over the cot, which was on high legs with castors, causing it to tip over and almost throw my sister^[18] out on a pile of blankets. A lucky escape, it's a wonder she survived!

On another occasion, I tipped some brown iodine into her eyes, which being a strong antiseptic, burned, making the child scream. Mum flew with her to the doctors after rinsing her eyes out with warm water.

'You've done right, Mother,' the doctor said. 'No harm done.'

Then to cap it all, I upset a bowl of water into the armchair when I was being readied for bed. I must have been a real horror.

One day, when Barbara was about two, Mum was getting ready to go shopping but had run back in the house to get her keys. While she wasn't looking, I wheeled the pram away down the road. What a panic, as she caught up and stopped me just as I paused to cross the road. We could have both been knocked down.

About this time, my father was called up by the Army to serve in the Royal Artillery Regiment. His brothers were also called up, except Harry and Phil. Harry drove for London Transport as a bus driver, and Philip was not eighteen yet, but the others—Jim, Stanley and Len—went into the Army while Victor went into the Navy. Like us, it must have been a worry for poor Grandma Lawrence. She had a shelter in her garden, camouflaged by a rockery with a colourful display of flowers.

Now, I was old enough to remember some of the things that were happening. Mum's sister Ada's husband, Tom, once sat me on his knee and I still remember the funny antiseptic smell of his khaki uniform. Auntie Ada was pregnant at the time but Tom was sent out to the Middle East, so he was not to see his child until the end of the war when she was almost five years old.

Auntie Ada had a dangerous and difficult birth at my grandma's in Hamilton Road with the added terror of the air raids, which did not help. She was a young woman, but of small build and the child was large. It was touch-and-go, but she pulled through and my cousin Violet was born. I was three at the time and my sister had been walking for just a year.

By now the raids were getting bad. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the summer evenings that were often spent with Grandma Lawrence at Summers Lane, the garden all full of flowers where I would sit making daisy chains on

the lawn. The deckchairs would be out and sometimes we would have lemonade and crisps. Smelling the lovely scent of the garden, it would not seem that there was a war on, but then came twilight and the first chill of the evening.

Retreating to the house, it would not be long afterwards that we heard the dreaded sound, the wail of the air raid siren, sending a chill through every mother's heart. A lot of young married women would feel alone because their husbands were away in the Army, and a few lucky ones would stay with their parents for company. If they had children, what would become of them? Suppose there was to be a direct hit? Suppose they died and the children were left alone? My mum was lucky in having the two old ladies upstairs, but in a way they too were her responsibility, one being deaf, the other blind.

When the sirens sounded, we were usually all asleep. I can always recall Mum shaking my shoulder to wake me, as she quickly got up and lit a small oil lamp with a match. We had electric light, but the dim glow of the lamp was safer because of the black-out, and the thick blinds at the window always had to be drawn so there was not even a chink of light showing outside. With blankets and pillows, we would go into the Morrison Shelter in the kitchen as Mum nervously lit herself a cigarette. To this day, the smell of matches still reminds me of that time, long ago.

Mrs Pearson and Mrs Barker, being elderly, declined having to crouch down and get underneath the table shelter, instead standing under the stairs where they stored their coal. The cupboard door would be open, as would the kitchen door, and Mum would stand with them smoking one cigarette after another.

After the sound of the siren had died away there would be silence, except for the sound of the old ladies shuffling and crunching about on the coal. Then I heard the noise of local gun fire from Sweets Nursery anti-

aircraft battery at Whetstone. It always sounded as though someone was dropping large planks of wood from a great height. The aircraft, when they came, made a heavy droning sound, easily recognised as enemy aircraft. As a small child, I had slept through it inside the Morrison Shelter, but as I grew I became aware of the danger and felt a funny feeling in my stomach.

Our house was about half a mile from the main line railway from King's Cross to Scotland, the local station being New Southgate where a lot of bombs fell. At the side of the railway line, just north of the station, was a large factory called Standard Telephones and Cables Ltd[19] and we think this was the target. A near hit would shake the ground and rattle every window in the house.

There was one bad raid, when a bomb fell close by and frightened us all! The blast blew the kitchen windows in and the frame as well. Mum said that the black-out curtains blew almost vertical, showering everything with glass. Fortunately, we were not hurt, but the bathroom window cracked and so did the toilet pan.

Just before a daytime raid, Mum had taken us to East Finchley for a visit to Grandma Trusler's in Hamilton Road. We returned from Finchley to find Friern Barnet cordoned off, with air raid wardens stopping everyone going through. They asked Mum where we were going, so she explained we had got off the bus from Finchley and were on our way home to Goldsmith Road.

'There's a raid on and an unexploded landmine in Kennard Road,' said the warden. 'If you hurry and go round by Friern Barnet Road, you can pick up some things from your house and go straight to the church hall[20] in Bellevue Road in New Southgate.'

Out of breath, Mum arrived home to find the two old ladies upstairs in a flap, gathering their policies and valuables. It had started raining and the old pram was prepared with pillows, blankets and other essentials. My sister

sat on the top as we all hurried to the church hall as fast as we could, with poor Mrs Barker and Mrs Pearson out of breath trying to keep dry under their umbrellas.

I remember the church hall well. It smelt musty. Young women were looking after the children, handing out paper and pencils to keep them occupied, which was when I first saw a desk pencil sharpener in use. A lady was winding the handle as the curly bits came out the end with the pencil sharpened to a fine point. The adults were given tea and biscuits by members of the Women's Voluntary Services (WVS) and the children were given milk. Fortunately, we did not have to stay all night because the bomb disposal team soon had the landmine dismantled and we were able to go home.

In Goldsmith Road there were two public shelters, one at each end of the road. I remember on one occasion the air raid warden from our street bang loudly on the bedroom window. Mum went to the front door.

'We are expecting a bad raid,' he said. 'For your own safety it would be best to use the street shelter tonight.'

We pulled on some warm outdoor clothing. The shelter was dim inside, and almost all the street seemed to be there, children crying about having to come out in the night. The only toilet was a tin bucket behind a curtain of sacking material. I was helped onto a high bunk.

'Go to sleep,' Mum whispered.

How could I go to sleep? By now the siren was wailing and me and my sister were very frightened. Women were talking in low tones and the smell of cigarette smoke, concrete and dust filled the air, but worst of all, a large black spider crept down the wall towards me. I screamed.

'Mum, I want to go home!'

It was a bad raid, but Goldsmith Road escaped intact. We did not go back to the shelter in the street, or at least I do not remember going there again.

Probably during the very early part of the war, before the Blitz, as it was known, my mum recalled that once, while hanging washing in the garden, a loan enemy fighter plane flew across the back gardens of Goldsmith Road and fired its guns.

'It flew very low towards me and opened-fire along the gardens. It scared the daylights out of me and I ran indoors. It was so low that I could see his face. He was grinning. I think he was just trying to frighten me.'

Chapter Nine

St John's School

When I was almost five, I started attending St John's School.^[21] Happy days, those I spent there at the little church school for boys and girls, just across the road from our house, on the bend of Goldsmith and Stanford Road. Boys attended only until seven, when they either went on to Holly Park or St James in Friern Barnet Lane. Between the school and the nearby Scout's Hut^[22] was an alleyway leading to Glenthorne Road.

My earliest days are clear. The first day, a lady in a flowered smock overall greeted us and showed me to Mrs Lewis' class where we played with bricks, sand trays and round shiny coloured counters. At break we had milk and in the afternoon we had to lie down on the floor for a nap on raffia mats. When Mrs Lewis drew on the blackboard with her chalk, it turned out to be white although the outside of the chalk was yellow. I found this very strange.

'Now who would like to go to the offices?' she asked us.

This sounded interesting so I put my hand up, only to find out that it was a trip to the lavatories, housed in the cold windy building in the playground. The little toilets were draughty and not always clean, not a place to linger in on a cold winter's day.

At the back of the playground was a built up rockery with shrubs and small trees, and at the edge were slanting flat stones we would sit upon if the weather was warm. Often we would play five stones or cat's cradle.

The school itself was small, just six classrooms and mostly run by single ladies. Miss Bradley was Headmistress when I first started, and the other staff were Mrs Lewis, Miss Scoley, Miss Howard, Miss Parker and Mrs Diver. I will always remember the avenue of almond trees leading from the

gate on Glenthorne Road, and a large Prunus tree on the Stanford Road front side. In the small playground, a huge heap of coal piled against the Stanford Road fence was a great attraction for the small boys, who clambered onto it at every opportunity, only to be told off by a stern teacher.

Being a church school, religious festivals were strictly kept, so most of us had learnt the hymns by heart. One of my favourites was the stirring 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. We would walk in a crocodile formation—a two-by-two arrangement—with the teachers at the rear, up Stanford Road towards St John's Church on Friern Barnet Road.

On Friday mornings the vicar would come to school to deliver a long session of prayers and hymns, which we didn't mind too much, because that afternoon we would have something called 'choosing' which meant taking a toy or book of our choice to school or reading from the school library.

During the war years, we were given cod liver oil and extra milk to supplement the poor diet of rationing. Each child would line up for the fishy-tasting oil on a spoon, while the bottles of milk were left to warm by the coke boilers, which were stoked by the caretaker to heat the classrooms in cold weather.

If there was a raid during lessons, we had to stand quietly and leave the classroom single file, collecting our coats and gas masks as we left. Out of the school gate we went, across the alleyway and past the scout's hut to a field at the back where underground shelters awaited us, bulging slightly under a grassy mound. On entering, we found ourselves inside a large concrete tunnel with wooden seats on either side, our feet on slatted wood covering the ground in case it rained, as it did get very wet being underground.

Once we were all assembled, the teachers would lead us into singing songs, the louder the better, to drown any noise of the raid going on

overhead. 'Ten Green Bottles Hanging on the Wall' was a rousing song. 'Ten in the Bed and the Little One Said Roll Over' was another, as was 'One Man Went to Mow'. We thought it all very good fun! Well, we did at the time.

When I was seven, I had to go to a different shelter located just beside the school. My sister Barbara told me years later how scared she was, because we were not in the same shelter together. Another of her worries was for our mum being at home. She was so afraid that our house would be bombed while we were at school, that she once went home at lunchtime instead of going into the school dining hall. Mum was surprised to see her, gently told her not to worry and took her back. My sister was of a more nervous nature than I was, suffering from nightmares and walking in her sleep.

We both settled down well at St John's school. One of the teachers, an ageing lady called Miss Scoley, was very interested in Nature Study, as it was called then, so anyone who happened to bring tadpoles, newts or frogs was soon a great friend of hers. She was a very old-fashioned lady, even for that time, and definitely past retirement age, as teaching staff were needed and in short supply because of the war. I remember, her hair pinned back in a bun with straggling grey hairs coming out here and there, her mostly grey baggy cardigans worn over long skirts, and a blouse pinned at the throat with a cameo brooch. She seldom wore anything in fashion. My sister was a favourite of hers.

'What have you there for me today Barbara?' she would ask, kindly.

'I've got some flowers for you Miss Scoley.' A bunch of buttercups and dandelions with some old wild grasses would be handed to the teacher, who lovingly arranged them in a glass jam jar on the windowsill.

My favourite teacher was Miss Howard. She always looked so neat. I can see her now in a wine-coloured skirt and jacket, a string of beads at her throat, hair neatly brushed into place, a little lipstick, and powder for make-

up. When she smiled her eyes crinkled at the edges. Always patient and kindly, she was also a wonderful storyteller.

I was a bit scared of Mrs Diver, who took us for History. Dressed in purple and grey, and with pince-nez glasses, I thought that she had a rather cross-looking face, but she could hold us spellbound with tales of the Saxons and Normans, King Harold and 1066.

I did get to like Mrs Diver eventually, because after the war, she selected myself and my cousin Jean to go with an older class (Year 1) on a day trip to Westminster Abbey. It was my first school trip and we had to draw a plan of the abbey before we visited, so that we understood every part of the building. We had a picnic sitting on the stone benches in The Cloisters and one of my friends was sick in Poet's Corner.

After Miss Bradley left, Miss Courtney became Headmistress and there was not too many who liked her. She was tall and thin with a sharp nose, pink at the end, and her eyes protruded when she became angry. During one school dinner she stopped and spoke to my cousin Jean Lawrence.

'What is that you are eating for dessert, Jean?'

'It's lemon turd cart and custard,' my tongue-tied cousin replied, going red as a beetroot, really meaning to have said 'lemon curd tart'. Miss Courtney moved on without a word, her lips tightly pressed together.

Once I had the misfortune to pass on a note that was being sent from one girl to another, and all those involved in this supposedly wicked deed had their hands slapped on the back until they stung. Miss Courtney's eyes bulged as she ordered us to stand outside the classroom door. I usually behaved in class, so this was a terrible thing for me, but when I was outside in the playground, I would shout and act silly, the same as all the others.

We loved Christmas at St John's School. Somehow, at the two other schools I attended when I was older, Christmas time never seemed the same. Perhaps being younger had something to do with it.

One particular Christmas, after the war ended, it was decided to have a pantomime. *A Christmas Carol* was chosen. I was disappointed at being chosen as a carol singer, because my friends had been selected for Tiny Tim, Christmas crackers, a Christmas pudding, ghosts, snowflakes and other much more exciting things. Oh well! As carol singers, we were asked to borrow top hats from wherever we could. Mum did not know anyone, so I ended up with a trilby and I felt so silly. Regardless, the show was a great success.

As soon as the foggy-weathered afternoons drew to a close, Mr Raymond, the caretaker, would come around with a long wax candle taper for the gas lights. He climbed onto the desk seats to reach each gas mantel, turning on the gas until it lit with a hiss and a pop. This ritual often distracted us from our lesson for a few minutes, but we soon paid attention again when the teacher clapped her hands to restore normal service.

But going back to the war, with the seemingly endless air raids and our usual strict home routine involving the sturdy Morrison shelter, we did get a shock one night. During one of the many skirmishes with the enemy, something heavy broke through the roof and bounced loudly down the stairs. Mum, scared out of her wits, pulled our coats on over our night things and we ran out into the street, thinking an unexploded bomb was in the house. Fortunately, it was only a very large piece of shrapnel, specifically, a lump of shell casing from one of our own guns at Whetstone.

Worse was to come: the V1 and V2 rockets. The V1, known as the Doodlebug,^[23] could be clearly heard as a vibrant chugging sound, but did not always come during an air raid alert, and so many people were killed going to work during the day or at night when it was thought safe. If a V1 stopped suddenly overhead, that was it, and a whole street could be destroyed. Wherever we were, it was best to take cover if one was heard approaching. If that was not terrifying enough, the V2 had no sound and could not be seen.

During that time we were evacuated. The first I remember of it, was when Mum took us to Finchley to buy new things from Timothy Whites, the chemist, who sold almost anything beside the medicines. New underwear, shoes and two pixie hats made from silver mackintosh material were selected for us. It was like preparing for a very long holiday.

Chapter Ten

Evacuation

Due to the German rockets, the borough of North Finchley and Friern Barnet began planning the evacuation of children in the area, and Mothers would be allowed to go too if they wished. Mum decided we [24] would go together along with quite a few families in the street.

After all the usual arrangements were made, the day arrived. Although it poured with rain—a miserable grey day—it was one of excitement as we assembled with our luggage at the Friern Barnet Town Hall. [25][25a] Uncle Bill, my Grandma Lawrence's brother, was there in his air raid warden uniform, ready to help organise the throng of mothers and children. Each of us had to have a label pinned on our coats with name, address, and destination on it.

'Make sure you have your gas masks,' the WVS ladies called.

A line of trolleybuses stood outside the Town Hall. One by one, checked and doubled checked, we were loaded on with the luggage, then took our seats on the top deck. Mum's friend Mrs Fuller had brought sweets and comics for us and her children, bless her. I remember it like it was yesterday, and I know we enjoyed the experience. The trolleybuses began moving down Friern Barnet Road towards the Railway Hotel, then, after the railway bridge went right on towards Bounds Green, Wood Green, Holloway and finally to King's Cross Station.

The rain was still pouring as we entered the station and we hung onto Mum, afraid of getting lost in the crowds of people. Helping hands guided us onto the train and it began moving soon enough. We had travelled

all day it seemed, the journey broken up only by a lunch of sandwiches, milk and biscuits. We did enjoy the experience.

On arrival at our destination, the seaside town of Scarborough, Yorkshire, we were transferred to buses and driven to a girls' school which would be our home for the next two or three days. The residents of the town were not too happy about having Londoners hoisted on them, and only a few came forward with offers of places to stay. They had heard that London people were dirty and had head-lice, so you could not blame them for being wary of us. True, some families were poor and hard-up, but those of us in our group were clean and respectable.

The police took some of the evacuees in one of their own cars, making enquiries, asking how many rooms were to spare, and *please would they take some in?* There was no idea for how long this arrangement was expected to last, because as far as anyone knew, the war could have gone on longer than it did.

A pleasant semi-detached house was found for us, although the lady living there was not too keen on taking us. She had a kitchen maid who came in each day to help around the house and her husband was in the Army. 'Children should be kept in their place', was her opinion. My sister found and ate some green apples from the garden and suffered from colic. From that point we seemed to get one thing after another.

The weather was bad, Mum felt home sick and there was an argument with a council official—which ended in tears—resulting in preparations soon being made so we could return to London. We only stayed in Scarborough for a few weeks. The rail trip home meant changing trains at Doncaster Station, which at the time was full of troops. On the last train home, some Canadian soldiers gave us their seats and were kind enough to share their sandwiches with us.

Arriving back in London, we took a taxi from King's Cross to Grandma Lawrence's where we stayed the night, going home to Goldsmith Road the next day. One detail that sticks in my mind is that when we got back to London, at some point, I lost a red beret I had been wearing.

Chapter Eleven

Christmas in the War

Although the war dragged on for us as children, nothing could spoil Christmas. Though the presents were few, it did not spoil the magic, as Grandma Lawrence, Auntie Maud and Aunt Lucy always made Christmas Day teatime special.

Earlier in the morning I would have awoken in darkness, immediately feeling for the pillowcase at the bottom of my bed and the rustle of paper and lumpy objects inside. Santa Claus had been! Barbara would wake up and though it was still dark, we would beg Mum to put the light on so we could see the surprises. There was a sewing set and a shiny new book for me, as well as a rag doll made by Auntie Lucy, which lay in a painted doll's bed. Barbara had a similar doll, books and paints. These things were treasures to us.

Christmas dinner was often a small chicken or a rabbit, and, no matter how hard-up we were, Mum always made a pudding. About 4 o'clock me and my sister would get ready to spend the afternoon at Grandma Lawrence's, putting on our best freshly ironed frocks, each of us wearing a hair ribbon to match our dress. New clothes were in short supply, so we took great pride in our white socks and polished shoes.

When we arrived, the living room would look festive, with decorations and paper chains that Grandma had dusted off and hung up, used year upon year, Christmas after Christmas. Auntie Maud and Lucy would have been busy most of the day making jellies, sandwiches, sausage rolls and mince pies for the big spread we always looked forward to. After a blowout

of a huge tea, and refusing the offers of another piece of Christmas cake, we flopped down on the sofa wishing we had not eaten so much.

Maud and Lucy organised games for us, one of them being called the 'Bishops Hat', which began with Grandma sitting on a chair wearing a wide brimmed hat. We would be told to wait outside the door while the brim of the hat was filled with water and Grandma draped herself in a curtain. After the light was turned off and two candles lit, we were summoned one at a time and told to confess our sins while kneeling on a cushion in front of Grandma. She then bent over to bless us, and as she did so we were dowsed in the water from the hat, amid laughing in the background.

Then, a jelly game, as two uncles were blindfolded and a teacloth put around each of their necks. Sitting on chairs opposite each other, they tried to spoon the jelly to each other. What a laugh! We thought we would die laughing at the mess.

Later in the evening, the uncles and Dad went to the pub, sometimes accompanied by Aunt Maud and Lucy. There would be a quieter period of a time, spent eating nuts, crisps and drinking lemonade while Grandma talked about old times. Then the revellers returned from the pub, the radiogram was turned on, and the party would go with a swing, the air thick with tobacco smoke. One Christmas we stayed the night, sleeping in Grandma's feathered bed. Because some of the uncles were away in the Army, there was plenty of room.

My Auntie Barbara—Dad's youngest sister—was a lovely person, about eighteen towards the end of the war, fair-haired, attractive, and always kind to us girls. Once, when we were at Grandma's, an early evening air raid began, so Barbara, thinking of how to distract us from feeling nervous, found some scrap books and drawing paper to occupy our minds.

When the war was over she went out with a sailor called Lucky, but Norman Crumpton was the man she fell for and married. They went to live at

Wembley Park in London where they had three children, Jeffrey, Susan and Tessa. Jeffrey became a guitarist, working in television and often travelling with bands supporting famous singers.

In 1943, a day or two before Christmas Eve, Auntie May and Betty stayed the night with us while Dad was away in the Army. I was half asleep, when I heard the front door open and a strange tinkling sound. Peeking through half-closed eyes I saw Mum and Auntie May carrying a small Christmas tree into the bedroom, gingerly placing it onto a small table by the fireplace.

They had kept it a secret, but when I awoke in the morning I pretended to be surprised. Mum had sewn little bags out of crepe paper and filled them with sweets, while Auntie May had hung on some Christmas tree ornaments, handed down from Uncle Pete's mum. It really did look wonderful to me and my sister.

Chapter Twelve

Grandma Trusler's

Whenever we spent Christmas Day at Grandma Lawrence's, we nearly always went to Grandma Trusler's on Boxing Day. The buses would be running in the afternoon, which meant we could travel easily to her house in Hamilton Road East Finchley.

The house was always crowded with relatives, and we had a great time as our cousins were there for us to play with. The front room looked festive every time we visited, with a small Christmas tree twinkling in the corner, dressed with tinsel and delicate glass baubles Grandma had carefully reused year after year. Also nestled within the branches of the tree were small gifts for us children: mostly whistles, games and drawing books.

Among the family present were Auntie Ada and her daughter Violet, Auntie May and Uncle Pete, Betty, Auntie Florrie and Charlie (they were considered a bit nutty and over the top), Uncle Jim, and Uncle Harold. Being young, Harold had a wind-up gramophone with a good selection of records such as Bing Crosby, while dear old aunt Lou would be dressed in black as always, despite the cheerful occasion. There was hardly ever enough room around the table for teatime. Auntie Edie—Grandma's sister—together with her husband Charlie and their daughter Sylvia also came. Sylvia, being one of the older girls, took charge of us.

It was a time for laughing, and for trying to forget about the grim reality waiting for us on the other side of the festivities. Fortunately, there are few Christmas times I can recall during the war where there were air raids. Even the Germans accepted it to be a time for peace.

Grandma Trusler—or Nanny as we called her—was normally wrapped in a floral apron, sleeves rolled up and ready to rush to do the chores. She was not a wonderful cook (everything was plain, but acceptable) so we had many shop-bought Christmas puddings, Piper's[26] steak and kidney pud's, tins of herrings in tomato, spam and corned beef. Mind you, that is what most of us families lived on during war time.

Nanny had a black cat called Minnie, who almost always seemed to be sitting in a basket surrounded by kittens. Once during a bad air raid, we all squeezed in under the stairs and the kittens were climbing all over us in confusion.

We did stay the night at Hamilton Road once. It had been freezing cold and so Nanny suggested we bed down there instead along with Auntie May, Uncle Pete and Betty. Mum, May and Nanny went upstairs to fetch down a mattress so that we could sleep on the floor in the front room. A lot of giggling and laughing went on upstairs, and after some scuffling and screams, Mum and Auntie May came thumping down the stairs, ending up at the bottom step on the mattress. The only thing broken was their fall, thank God. They burst out laughing.

We loved going to Grandma Trusler's. She always made us welcome and was never disagreeable or in a bad mood. All her life she was involved with children, first her own and then having Violet while Uncle Tom was away full-time in the Army and Ada was working day shifts at the Simms Motor Units factory making ammunition. After the war, when Tom came home from abroad, they managed to get a council flat on the Red Hill Estate in North Finchley. Before that, however, Grandma Trusler received a letter from Harold, who was serving in the Army in Germany and had met a girl in Lüneburg. He had got her into 'trouble' and they were getting married. Later, she had the baby.

Harold wanted to come home to England with his new family, but there was not a lot of room at Hamilton Road. Auntie Ada, Tom and Violet were still living there, and young Jimmy was still in his teens. However, being the person that she was, Nanny made room for the new German bride Anna, together with their young son Harold, who were welcomed by all the family. After a while, things became difficult. Anna would become moody and she and Ada would have arguments about sharing the kitchen. Fortunately, Ada and Tom moved to their new flat so things did get better.

Nanny looked after young Harold so that Anna could go to work to save up for when she and Uncle Harold had a home of their own. However, sadly for Harold, Anna met a man at the factory where she worked, packed her bags and left, taking his son with her.

Harold loved the little boy, and in despair he became ill and depressed, staying in bed for days on end and gradually becoming worse. After that, and during his life, he attended hospital for depression, never keeping a full-time job. Who knows, if fate had not dealt the cruel blow he might have been a different man.

Chapter Thirteen

Home

Number 3 Goldsmith Road may have seemed a drab place by today's standards, but Mum always kept the brass knocker, bell and letterbox gleaming with Bluebell metal polish. However, the hall inside was dark and unwelcoming, the walls still having the old brown Victorian varnish paper that had been there for years. The only bright thing was the blue lino floor coverings, and these were frequently polished until they shone using Mansion wax polish. There were two small slip mats which Mum had made, one outside the bedroom door and the other outside the living room.

The bathroom at the end of the hall downstairs had a pink frosted glass window. There was a toilet with a polished wooden seat and a bath standing on its own four legs, but because in those early days it had no surround, it looked very stark compared to today's fitted suites. There was a paper shortage too, so there was no soft toilet tissue, just very hard shiny squared sheets, which did not seem to do the job properly. If Mum ran out, then to make do, she would cut out squares of newspaper, which were suspended from the toilet system on a piece of string. God knows what our rear ends would have been like using today's newspapers? The ink comes off so easily, so we would have been permanently black.

During the dark winter months, our lives were spent in the living room. I always recollected it as being painted green, the walls coated in cream-coloured distemper stippled with pale green. Uncle Pete, despite his poor disabled leg, had decorated the room while Dad was away in the Army, but a few months later, after a bad frost, the water tank in the loft burst and flooded everywhere, leaving a stain on the newly-painted ceiling.

There was an Ideal boiler in the chimney cavity, which heated the hot water in a tank contained in a cupboard next to it. Our clothes were always warmed and well aired in the cupboard, including our winceyette nightdresses that we wore at bedtime. Mum saw to it that after we'd had a good scrub with Lifebuoy soap, we went to bed with a hot water bottle each. The bedroom was always freezing cold so it was just as well she did.

In the living room was a large built-in dresser where the cups hung on hooks and rows of plates and saucers overlapped. It was a bit difficult getting down the plates without breaking any (well it was for me, anyway). There were short supplies of things at this time, and at one point we only had about half a dozen of anything left.

The two drawers in the dresser were mostly filled with odds and ends which, on occasions after the war, became a place of storage for apples or pears given to Dad that needed ripening. Wrapped in newspapers, they were a great temptation to us, so naturally, one or two would disappear now and then. Under the drawers were the cupboards for our few toys—mostly rag dolls, books and old boxes of paints. These spaces were cleared out now and then but still always a jumble.

Then there was the larder. This was a large walk-in cupboard with a marble shelf. We had no fridge, and as the milk went off quite a lot in the summer months, Mum would put it in a bucket of water with a damp cloth over it. The floorboards of the cupboard had become so rotten, that I once went straight through the worm-eaten wood, screaming so loudly that my Mum must have thought I was being murdered. I knew we had mice in the house and the thought of encountering them beneath the floor frightened me.

Mum did most of the chores in the small kitchen, or scullery as we knew it, and this was badly in need of repair because the hot steam from the washing in the winter had made the distempered walls peel and the woodwork soft and rotten. There used to be a concrete copper (which Dad

had taken out in later years) and this was a marble top table, under which stood a tin bath where soiled clothes were left ready for the washing. There was an ancient enamelled-metal cooking stove which Mum had a job to keep clean, and a shelf high above on which aluminium saucepans were kept in rows, always shiny and well-scoured.

Under the window, covered by a small piece of laced curtain, was a deep ceramic Butler sink. Mum always seemed to be standing over it, sleeves rolled up to her elbows with a wood and glass scrubbing board and a brand of soap called Sunlight, mixed with plenty of washing soda. Her hands would be red and sore, her wrapped-round floral apron wet at the front and hair limp and straggling out of the hair net she wore to try to keep it in place.

Poor Mum! If only she had known then that better things were to come to her, that one day she would fly to Majorca, as well as visit Italy and Ibiza; perhaps it would have given her some hope. As it was, she accepted our humble existence the way many others in the same boat did. Life was drab. There were no holidays. Just wet washday Mondays, scrubbing the doorstep, polishing and making ends meet.

Us girls though, we did not worry too much about domestic things. On fine days there was the back garden, the old coal shed in one corner and a large plum tree with worn off bark that my sister loved to climb. It only ever seemed to bear half a dozen plums at one time and no one ever thought to prune it.

After the war, Dad became interested in growing tomatoes and for this he whitewashed a wall on one side of the garden to reflect the sunlight. The old metal cauldron-like liner of our demolished copper served as a mixing vessel for a mixture of horse manure, the contents of the chamber pot and rabbit's droppings from the larger shed at the bottom of the garden. On a warm day the smell could be obnoxious.

'It's good stuff,' Dad would say. Indeed, the tomato plants under the whitewashed wall thrived on it, as he said they would. He also was good at growing lettuce and carrots, and we loved those carrots. In fact, we got into trouble for pulling and eating them, and then sticking the tops back in the soil, hoping he wouldn't notice!

We had picnics in the garden with china tea pots from the doll's tea set filled with water, biscuits, or bread and butter cut into squares. There was a large old privet hedge with a gaping hole in the middle where we would push our way inside. An old piece of carpet would do to sit on, and with an old curtain hanging over it, it made a house, a tent... well, anything we liked to imagine.

Barbara had a tortoise. There was a hole in one corner of its shell, through which we had tied a piece of string, which in turn was secured to an old gramophone cabinet the tortoise lived inside of, with beds of straw and a supply of cabbage leaves and lettuce. The doors of the cabinet would be lifted open for the creature to wander about at will, but only as far as the string. One day he went missing. Holding the tortoise up with one hand, the man next door called my sister.

'Is this your animal, Barbara? It's eaten half my strawberries.' The tortoise had a satisfied look on its face, juice dripping from its mouth, and the chewed piece of string hanging down.

My Dad often had funny ideas, such as the time he made the mistake of buying a small fox terrier puppy from someone at the pub.

'This is my dog,' he said. 'I don't want anyone messing it about and spoiling it.'

Judie was decided on for a name. It was a pretty little thing, but seemed totally mad from the moment it came. She was put out in the garden shed at night, but after neighbours complained of it yapping and crying, Mum said she could come inside. Next morning, we found our slippers chewed, the

newspapers destroyed, mess inside Mum's shoe and a chunk torn out of my sister's pyjamas. The curtains were also ripped, not that they were anything to write home about.

'That's it,' said Mum. 'It will have to go.'

Dad gave Judie to one of his mates down the pub and she was never seen again.

In later years, Dad bought a ferret called Joey. He and Uncle Phil would take it down to Auntie Dorothy's in Kent to catch rabbits. Mum did not like the animal. Besides the smell, it had a nasty gleam in its little red eyes. One day it escaped from the cage and Mum frantically looked for it among the cabbages in the garden. She found it alright. It snapped at her, and as she lifted her hand, I saw the ferret hanging on the end of one of her fingers.

Chapter Fourteen

The Library

At home there was not a lot to do in the winter, except drawing or painting at the kitchen table, perhaps a game of Ludo or Snakes and Ladders. Well, there was the radio, but that was something we enjoyed when we were older.

When I was about six, Mum borrowed a library book for me. It was called *The Golden Goat*. I had been to the library lots of times before because Mum read a lot when Dad was away in the Army. To me it was a place I will always remember.

Walking up Macdonald Road and turning right, the library[27] stood alone on Friern Barnet Road, almost opposite St John's Church. Inside it was warm and friendly, smelling of furniture polish while everyone talked in whispers. The library ladies used to look a bit severe, but once I grew older and got to know them, I found them very helpful in locating any books I was looking for.

The library was exciting. Children's books opened up a whole new world for me, which were first read to us by Mum while we looked at the pictures, then came the easy-to-read stories. I loved *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Hans Anderson and Enid Blyton. My reading at school improved... and that was it! Hooked. I read at every opportunity, even to my sister Barbara. Curled up in the corner of the chair my mind would be far away, concentrating fully on the words but eventually becoming aware that someone was talking to me.

'How many more times have I got to say it's time for bed?' Mum would be saying.

The library was like a second home and I was happy to spend hours there by myself, once reading a whole book in one afternoon and an evening. To add to the delight, Perrin's Sweet Shop was just along from the library. It always made my day, to be armed with a bag of mixed toffees for sixpence and some sweet coupons Mum had given us.

When there was an eye test at school, it was suggested that I should have reading glasses. I would hate wearing them. The optician placed drops in my eyes to enlarge the pupil while he conducted his examination. For three days after I could not see to do my work at school and had to play with plasticine or sand trays instead. The wire part of my glasses made my ears and the bridge of my nose sore and my friends laughed when I put them on. That was that! I would not wear them, and Mum had a terrible time of it. My eyesight did not stop me from reading though.

Chapter Fifteen

Rationing

At the onset of war, every family was issued with coloured ration books, beige for adults, blue for children over five and green for small children and babies. How Mum managed on our small rations is a mystery.

We were registered at Mr Goble's grocery shop, which meant that we could only fetch our shopping from there. It stood opposite the town hall on Queen's Parade,^{[28][29]} always with a queue right outside, while inside, several assistants would be busy weighing up small pieces of cheese, butter, lard and margarine cut from large blocks on a marble shelf.

Amongst the shop's fascinating aroma of ground coffee, fresh cheese and bacon, each portion was cut, weighed and carefully folded in greaseproof paper. Loose tea and sugar were weighed likewise and put into blue paper bags, while bacon was cut on a slicer which whizzed back and forth at great speed. Biscuits were in large tin boxes with glass tops, so you could see inside to choose. The only things that weren't weighed and packed was tinned food.

At one time, we were only allowed an egg each a week. To supplement this, dried egg powder could be bought which Mum beat up with milk to make omelettes or to put into cakes. Lack of food was always of concern. There was a large sack of dog biscuits as you entered the shop, and once, Barbara and I could not resist having a nibble of one, but they tasted awful.

At the back of the shop was the Post Office, where large posters hung telling us to 'Dig for Victory'[30] and 'Save Saving Stamps' to help the war effort.

Most families that were hard up used something called a provident cheque to make ends meet, which Mum was lucky enough to get. Using this method, we had new clothes and shoes bought for us from Madame Flora's, the first shop on the corner of Hollyfield Avenue. A lady visited us every Saturday to collect money to gradually pay for the cheque, so that when one was paid for Mum would get a new one.

The trip to Madame Flora's was always exciting, as we really valued a new pair of shoes, a coat or a dress. I once had a new wine-coloured crepe dress with a white Peter Pan collar, the same as Barbara. We also had a pair of brown crepe sandals and several pairs of white socks. With our mostly knitted cardigans, we felt smart when we went round to Grandma's on a Sunday. Madame Flora had a good stock of coloured wools and patterns, which Mum would bring home to sit and knit with in the evenings, needles clicking away.

Next to Madame Flora's was a radio shop, and next to that was Carter's the Newsagent, the inside of which was musty and grim. Mr Carter, balding in a dark suit and crisp white collar, had bottled sweets on one side of the counter, newspapers on the other.

Goble's was next, followed by Freeman's the Baker's. Poor Mum could not walk past without buying us a cake each, though I don't think she could afford it. My very first ice cream cornet came from there, probably not real dairy ice cream, but the taste was wonderful. I am still reminded of it to this day whenever I am in a baker's shop. The smell brings back the delightfulness of that particular ice cream.

Wooding Greengrocers was next. Sometimes the word would go round that they had some oranges and then a queue would form right down

the street, but if you didn't have a green ration book or young children you could be unlucky. When strawberries were once in season, Mr Wooding asked Mum if she fancied some with cream for tea. Although we were very hard up, he insisted.

'Go on, here,' have these at the bottom of the box'. He tipped them out into a bag and sold them to Mum for a shilling. How we enjoyed this luxury with tinned Nestlé cream.

After Wooding's was the boot menders. They were always busy, because shoes had to last longer in those days, and it was a good job that most soles were made of leather because they were easily repaired. As we opened the shop door, a bell rang and the boot mender would stop with his hammer in mid air with a few nails sticking out of his mouth. Piles of shoes were stacked on a counter at the side, some already mended, some waiting for their turn. With blackened hands, he would take from us the shoes to be repaired, then continue hammering and cutting out leather. Sometimes a red-faced boy would be helping him.

Goodman's Butchers was next door, with its sawdust covered floor and tiled walls with pictures of cows and sheep. Large posters advertising Benedict peas and Bovril adorned the walls. Arthur and George were the butchers, cheerful and jolly, smiling to the women queuing at the door, making wisecracks, nodding and winking as they chopped up scrag ends and other tiny portions of rationed meat. Once I laughed at Arthur and said something cheeky to him.

'Here,' he said, 'In you go!' He opened the door to the giant freezer and pretended he was going to shut me inside. After that I kept quiet in the butchers.

Win was the large comfortable woman who sat in the butcher's kiosk.

'How are you today, dear?' she would ask, smiling and giving out change. 'What a bad raid it was last night. I didn't sleep a wink.' Everyone knew Winnie and would tell her their troubles.

After Win left, a very young and smiling girl called Margaret took her place. It must have taken hours each night to put the curlers in her hair. She sat in the little kiosk like a queen, her head covered in brown curls, eyebrows plucked and drawn in with a pencil, her full lips pink with fresh lipstick. She stayed for about a year. There was gossip.

'That Margaret at the butchers, she's getting married. It had to be quick, you know? You know what I mean?' Auntie May and Mum gave each other knowing looks. I had no idea what they meant at the time, but later we saw Margaret with a shiny pram and a very new baby, which I thought wonderful. I loved tiny babies.

Chapter Sixteen

Chelwood

I must tell you about Chelwood.^[31] It was the name of the house in Whetstone, North London, where my aunts Maud and Lucy, Uncle Fred and Bobby lived during the war years.

Prior to that, and before I was born, Maud and Fred had lived at No. 3 Goldsmith Road, later deciding on a whim to move so that Maud could take the job as a householder and live-in caretaker at Chelwood. Set back against towering cedar trees at the end of a long sweeping drive within two large wooden five bar gates, Maud had the task of managing what looked like something from a fairytale.

We loved it. We'd take the bus up Friern Barnet Lane, get off, walk along Myddelton Park and finally reach Oakleigh Road where the house was. From the moment we arrived, opening the heavy gate and entering the grounds, walking down the gravel drive with the tall trees either side, there was a feeling of something wonderful and mysterious.

The gardens had been mostly left to nature. There were toadstools, strangling periwinkles, roses, holly, rhododendrons and wild grasses growing everywhere. Around the back of the house was a big garden—lovely to hide and play games in.

The upper part of the building was used for the training of Air Force cadets. In the huge garden there was a light aircraft for their instructional drills, which I used to tell the children at school about. I'd say, 'There's an aeroplane in my garden', but they didn't believe me.

If we were invited to Chelwood for tea, Barbara and I became particularly excited. One of our visits was on my birthday, so Mum had got

out our best dresses. We looked very smart with our white cuffs and Peter Pan collars, polished shoes and new hair ribbons.

We always knocked on the side door, which was the entrance to the part of the house Aunt Maud lived in. As soon as we entered, we were greeted not only by the wonderful smell of baking, but by cousin Bob whispering, telling me to come and look in the larder where I spied a sponge birthday cake, obviously meant for me. We all laughed, but I think aunt Maud was furious, as she had wanted to light the candles and bring it in without me knowing as a surprise. There was salad with ham and trifle for tea, then the lovely cake. I had a lot of cards too; it had been a very special day.

One night, after we had stayed for tea and had left it a bit late going home, Mum and Dad (on leave at the time) said that we would walk down Oakleigh Road to Whetstone High Road where we would get the bus. Moments before the bus arrived, there began the familiar dreaded wailing sound we'd come to fear so much: an air raid alert. How we hated it. What should we do?

Just then the bus came and we were soon back at North Finchley making our way to our street on foot. But it was dangerous to be out, not only because of the enemy bombs but also because of falling metal shrapnel from shells fired by the local guns. It meant danger, especially if you weren't wearing a tin hat. Dad sat Barbara on his shoulders so that we could hurry along, the stars twinkling brightly in the night sky while the streets around us were under one of the many blackouts. We were glad to get home.

Chapter Seventeen

Victory: 1945

People celebrated everywhere as, at last, the war came to an end. Our street organised a party for the children during the day, and later that evening the adults had a knees-up after lighting a small bonfire. The street party for us children was planned down to the last detail, with all the mothers helping to make cakes and sandwiches, while a long, long table was set up. Each child was given a small Union Jack as a gift.

As evening fell, pianos, accordions and any musical instruments were brought out in the spirit of good cheer and occasion. Then under the Union Jack flags decorating the street, everyone let their hair down and danced, carefree.

No more air raid sirens, no more bombs. The young men and women in the services would be coming home to their families and final peace. Although everyone was hard-up, VE-Day had been a positively exciting day for all, which Mum said was particularly warm and had ended with a thunderstorm.

Some weeks later, the school arranged a trip for us to go to the Gaumont Cinema[32] at North Finchley. There we saw a film of the Victory Parade in which all the troops marched before the King and Queen along The Mall in London.

With hostilities over, life began to open up for us, with more trips to the park at Friern Barnet. Just a walk away down from Friern Barnet Lane, there were many happy hours spent at the park, such as fishing for tiddlers or sailing homemade wooden boats made out of bits of wood on the boating

pond. We always enjoyed our trips there, entering through the iron gate and taking up any number of activities, whether digging in the sandpit, hanging off the roundabouts, whooshing down the slides or finding our way up and down the monkey climber.

Time seemed so slow for us during this period and we loved it. There were endless opportunities to investigate the brook at the bottom end of the park, where we jumped over stepping stones and looked for frogs, or, if we felt like it, a sit down on the seats at the bowling green. There, we'd idle away, looking on as ladies and men in white straw hats stooped to roll the balls, the silence punctuated with an occasional *crack* as each collided. Should we have been lucky enough to have a sixpence, there was always the treat of buying ice creams from a cafeteria in an old house in the middle of the park.

Mum took on a small cleaning job for a nice lady called Mrs Beer, who lived in one of the posh mock Tudor style houses on Friern Barnet Lane. Inside her house was one of the first real televisions I'd ever seen. Sometimes during the school holidays, we played in the park directly opposite for a couple of hours until Mum called us after finishing her work. If it rained, Mrs Beer let us go in her kitchen where we were given lemonade and biscuits. On one occasion she gave Mum almost a whole Christmas cake which was carried home like a prize.

Mum's job at Mrs Beer's meant that we had money to go to the swimming pool or the pictures at Finchley. I liked swimming, but it had to be a really warm day for me to enjoy going in the water as the pool was an open air one. Looking through the railings at the adult pool, you could see a large water cascade and a smaller pool below, as the two levels were joined by a sloping pathway leading down to the children's pool.

Either side of the shallow end of the children's pool were two large stone lions that had water pumped from their mouths, and at the entrance to

the adult pool was two large water fountains. We loved to go, rushing backwards and forwards into the water while Mum sat patiently in a deck chair with the towels and lunch. She often took our cousin Betty, who lived next door, which meant there were more of us to dry.

Going to the pictures meant a very special night for us, especially as Walt Disney films were great favourites. Someone at school would say, 'Have you seen *The Wizard of Oz* or *Bambi*?'

If Mum had enough money from her cleaning job she would agree to take us.

'Alright,' she'd say. 'We'll go if you behave yourselves.'

Rushing home from school on Friday, with a quick wash of hands and face before gulping down our tea, we were soon ready. First, there was a slow walk up Goldsmith Road, and then we'd wait for the trolley bus which would finally arrive conducted by its overhead wires and always giving off an electric hum.

The Finchley Gaumont was a large lovely building, richly carpeted and with a high well-lit ceiling. There was usually a wait in the queue for the shilling seats. We were not well off enough to go in the 2/ 6's, or the 1/ 9's, but it didn't matter. The commissionaire, looking very important in his peaked hat, white gloves and uniform in red and gold braid, counted us, letting in the right amount of people for the vacant seats inside. As we paid for our seats, the box office ticket machine made an exciting mechanical *clunk clunk* sound, while rows of paper shot out with tear-off perforated edges. Escorted by an usherette, also in a smart uniform, we made our way into the darkness, musty with cigarette smoke, following the light of the torch.

As I watch the television today, I feel nothing can match those treasured outings to the pictures. Children today have so much yet we had so little but enjoyed everything. There were usually the films, the news, a

cartoon, and a short burst of music from the in-house cinema organ; a great night out.

After arriving home, we would have a cup of cocoa, bread and jam or dripping on toast. If it was a cold night, Mum filled up a hot water bottle for us to take to bed, where we fell into a pleasant slumber filled with those images from the big screen.

Chapter Eighteen

Our holiday in Kent 1947

When I was about ten years old we went on our first holiday. My Father's cousin, George Cheeks, was married to a woman called Eva whose brother Bert lived in Kent with his wife Dorothy. A couple years after the war, Dorothy and Bert came to stay with George and Eva for a week.

During that week, Mum took us round to Auntie Eva's for tea where Auntie Dorothy (as we were to call her) told us about the village of Aldington where they lived. To our delight, she asked Mum if she thought we would like to go and stay with them for a week in the summer.

'Of course!' We were so excited and could not stop talking about it.

The big day arrived. We were to leave after dinner to get the bus to Charing Cross Station in Central London, from where we would catch the train to Ashford in Kent. The idea of a railway journey in itself filled us with great excitement. Because it was a Saturday, Dad was at the pub and late home as usual. Mum was mad and sent us to the Triumph in Summers Lane to hurry him up, because he was supposed to be coming with us to the station. Needless, he was not too pleased to see us. One of Dad's mates laughed as someone called to him from the pub doorway.

'Here, Frank! Your kids are calling you to go home.'

We got to the station in time, but I think Dad was a bit sad to say goodbye. Barbara and I ended up with juice down our clean frocks because of a big peach he had bought each of us from the fruit stall in the station front. The huge steam locomotives hissed and whistled while Mum found us a

compartment with windows facing the platform. Among the great noise and bustle we waved to Dad from our seats. Then, we were off.

The old corridor trains were the best. Sliding open the compartment door and standing by the window rail in the narrow passages meant having a better view of the countryside, and of course, there were a lot of tunnels to go through which sent plumes of smoke through the open windows.

After what seemed like ages and with many stops, we finally arrived at Ashford in Kent. There was a scramble to get the cases and gather our things together from the overhead rack. As we walked into the ticket hall we saw Auntie Dorothy getting up from a bench, her jolly round face beaming, hair tucked up at the back in a bun and a small hat perched on her head.

'We are just in time for the bus,' she said. This was good news as they were not too frequent. 'How are you Elsie? Did you have a good journey?' Mum, tired, just nodded.

The little country bus was almost full. Shoppers held wicker baskets and young women balanced children upon their knees as we passed pretty cottages and fields of hops as far as the eyes could see. There were orchards of ripening apples, wildflowers in the hedgerows and air sweet with the smell of hay.

Arriving at Mill Road, we got off where two roads crossed, one winding up the hill and the other downward. Mum and Auntie chatted on as we all climbed the hill toward Mill Cottages, [33] the home of Dorothy and Bert.

'Here we are my dears,' Auntie said, in the lovely Kentish accent.

The terrace of three small cottages stood at the top of the hill, next to the house of Jack Prebble, the man who owned the small mill just up at the turn of the road where Uncle Bert worked as a lorry driver. We walked down the little front path to the unmarked 'No. 1' cottage with its small narrow shed up against a hedge.

The inside of the cottage was most welcoming. Closing the latched front door, we found ourselves immediately in the living room. A small dresser was to our left upon which were bright plates, cups and saucers and several pretty teapots. There was also a black iron kitchen range which Auntie did all her cooking on. The steps behind a cupboard-like door leading upstairs became the place we were to sit and listen to Mum and Auntie talking into the evening.

The kitchen sink was under the window, overlooking a tiny front garden with a narrow lawn, but giving a view of the vast country beyond. All washing was done at the sink as there was no bathroom and, as we were to find out, no inside toilet.

Throughout the living room and sitting room was old-fashioned black leather furniture that, together with the brass fire iron and a polished fire screen, gave the house a Victorian atmosphere. On the table in the middle of the room, producing a fragrant aroma, was a vase of sweet peas recently cut from Uncle Bert's back garden.

After we had taken off our things and unpacked the cases, Auntie called us down from the bedroom for tea. We had eggs and bacon cooked on a portable Primus stove that smelt of methylated spirit, followed by a currant cake. Auntie was a plain cook, but we enjoyed it all.

Uncle Bert, arriving home from work was pleased to see us, his smiling face tanned with the country sun and showing the lines of a man getting on in years. He was as small in build as aunt Dorothy was big and comfortable. They were a lovely couple, and, having no children of their own, were glad to have two little girls stay for a week.

We were tired after the long day and went to bed fairly early, but first there was a visit to the little shed at the side of the front garden. Dark and gloomy inside, with a bench and bucket underneath, I sat down while looking for the toilet paper. Above my head were cobwebs, at which point my

fear of spiders returned and I was glad to leave the outside privy, hoping that I would not have to go back during the night. There was no need to worry, because a large chamber pot was under the brass-knobbed bed which Mum and Barbara shared. I had the single bed by the window.

I was awoken by someone gently nudging me. It was Auntie Dorothy, and it was already morning. We had slept well.

'Here you are, Elsie. I brought some tea.' On a tray were three cups of tea and some triangle shaped pastry biscuits with currants in. They were Auntie's 'sweetie pastries', as she called them. I sat up, rubbing the sleep from my eyes before sipping the tea.

Kneeling before the window, I drew back the curtains and was greeted by a truly wonderful sight, at least for a child from bombed-out, war-torn London. As far as the eyes could see were fields of sheep and cows, and glinting on the distant horizon, a thin line of brilliant blue sea at Hythe. The window framed the scene as though it were a landscape painting, with the bottom third of the image showing Uncle Bert's tiny garden, full of flowers, vegetables and clucking chickens. Upon opening the window, the clear pure smell of country air was immediately noticeable.

After breakfast and a quick wash at the kitchen sink, Barbara and I went out exploring. Opposite the cottages was a large meadow with a gate we climbed up and over, running through the grass still with its morning dew. There were toadstools and gorse bushes, small wild flowers and daisies, speedwell, vetch and clover. Later in the day Barbara was thrilled to find a small lizard basking in the warm sunshine.

All morning we made more discoveries. At the side of Mill Cottages was a tiny path leading to a place called Beggars Roost, where we chanced upon a farm with a large pigsty, orchards, sheep and poultry. Naturally, the pigsty attracted us at once. Barbara, always curious, sat on the edge of the stone wall dangling her legs over. The largest pig was a sow that had a lot of

young piglets, but she must have found us an intrusion because she bit Barbara through her black wellington boot. Luckily there was no wound, but we learned to view the pigs with caution. They were very amusing to watch though.

Auntie had a sleep most afternoons so Mum took us for a walk down to Aldington village.

'Look out for the walnut tree,' Auntie said laughing, as we left the cottage.

The Walnut Tree[34] turned out to be a local pub. From miles around, the locals came to sit outside on summer evenings or to play dominoes or skittles.

Further into the village was the butcher's shop, and then the only other shop with a Post Office inside at the back. It sold absolutely everything and smelled wonderful: of paraffin, sweets, animal food stuff and coffee. Mum bought and sent home some postcards, and we had sweets, biscuits and a few things for Auntie Dorothy. It seemed longer walking uphill to the cottage, so we were glad of the cool drink of dandelion and burdock when we returned.

The two cottages next to Auntie's were occupied by families with children, one of whom was the Crumlin family in the end property. One of their daughters, Roda, who I thought was very clever, could walk on her hands down Auntie's front lawn. Mrs Crumlin, who was probably hard up, did Dorothy's washing and seemed glad of the extra money.

While on holiday we had a trip to Folkestone, as Auntie had some relations there who owned a restaurant on the seafront. She packed a couple of bags of sugar into her basket and we wondered what they were for. Rationing was still on and the sugar, it turned out, was for a sweet shop that would sell you sweets off-ration if you had sugar to exchange.

We had a lovely day out and were made to feel very welcome by Dorothy's nice relations. We went upstairs over the café where we had fish and chips, and in the afternoon we all went down to the beach for a paddle and an ice cream.

In the middle of the week a trip to Dymchurch was planned. The trip to Hythe was by bus, and there on arrival we waited at a very small station for a train trip on the miniature Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway. The train carriages were just big enough for an adult to sit in comfortably, so we sat facing each other, two by two, enjoying a journey that took us over Romney Marshes. We got off in Dymchurch, but we could have gone on to Dungeness.

We had a great time changing into our swimsuits and going into the sea, which seemed cold to me, but Barbara did not notice. She enjoyed every minute despite not being not a strong swimmer, but she was to learn to swim long before I could. These memories are kept with some photos of us at Dymchurch.

One evening, Uncle Bert told us he was going to take a delivery of maze corn to Whitstable the next day.

'Bring some sandwiches and I will squeeze you into the lorry,' he said. Auntie Dorothy did not come, as being such a large person she didn't want to be squeezed in.

Off we went prepared for a nice day by the sea, but it poured with rain all day and we ended up going to the pictures in the afternoon. Never mind; we did manage to go to the airport and watch the planes coming and going.

We had a nice long walk to a place called The Knoll. This large mound had been a Second World War look out post with an underground system, bunkers and passages. It was easy to see why, as it was the highest

point for miles and on a clear day, the coast of France could be seen through binoculars as well as quite a long stretch of the Kent coastline.

We took a shortcut on the way back to Auntie's, and after climbing over a five-bar gate into a field, we were chased by a flock of turkeys which sounded like a mass of people having an argument. We were terrified of getting pecked and Mum tore her stockings climbing over the stile at the far end of the field. Afterwards we had a good laugh about it.

One evening we all went down to the Walnut Tree. Barbara and I sat in the children's room and had crisps and lemonade, while Uncle Bert played dominoes and Mum and Auntie chatted with the local ladies. On the way back it was pitch black except for the stars, and we saw glow-worms in the hedgerows and small bats darting across the road. The air was soft and warm and a few crickets chirped in the long grass at the side of the narrow country road.

The days flew by, and it was soon time to go home. It was a holiday we were to remember all our lives. We did visit again when I was thirteen, and once more when I was married with my husband Arthur and young son David. That first holiday with Mum and Barbara will always be remembered as my first real holiday.

We enjoyed the journey home on the train. Barbara had collected wild flowers which she had pressed in a book, and we sucked sticks of clove rock as we watched the countryside whizz by the train window. Then the grey and smoke of London reappeared together with school on Monday.

Chapter Nineteen

The Bombed Garden

A part from visiting the park and playing in the street, there was another favourite place of ours. Most of the children nearby knew about the Bombed Garden at Kennard Road where three houses had once stood. These were damaged during the war, so were pulled down and the rubble cleared away, leaving three gardens at the back of the site.

All types of flowers grew there: sunflowers, buddleias and roses. A large apple tree, with its bark worn smooth, stood large in the centre garden as boys climbed to the top to pick and aim tiny green apples at the kids playing below. In late summer, Barbara and I took bunches of flowers or raspberries home for Mum, and in autumn, garden spiders would weave their webs which got tangled in our hair.

It was quite safe for us to play there. In those days, as soon as someone's mum shouted them in for dinner, all the kids would disappear as if by magic, giving in to the welcome reminder that they were hungry.

One Christmas, during the war, Barbara and I had a china doll each from Mum (or from Father Christmas, as we thought). Mum had made their little hats and dresses carefully by hand, sewing them when we were in bed. Barbara's doll had a rose silk taffeta dress, and my doll, which I named Daisy, had a blue hat and dress. Poor old Daisy had her head cracked on the light switch when we were hurrying to get into the Morrison shelter during an air raid, but Mum put a sticking plaster on it and you could not tell when the doll's hat was on. Barbara loved her doll and took it everywhere with her, but unfortunately she left it in a nearby bush when playing in the Bombed

Garden. Suddenly remembering it when we got home, we rushed back, but someone had taken it.

I should imagine the garden we used to play in has been built on by now. The way things are today, children are not usually seen playing in the street as we used to. Apart from the increased traffic, there is an uneasiness toward the strange society we live in, where small children cannot be left to play alone outside their own homes.

Chapter Twenty

Holly Park and Ealing Art School

Although I had done quite well at St John's primary school—my first school—I was about tenth in my class. I failed the 11+ exam, known back then as the *Scholarship to Grammar School*, and it was probably my maths that let me down. Besides which, I felt very nervous on the exam day. You can imagine my disappointment when a lot of my friends had places at Finchley County Grammar School, Woodhouse Grammar School, or Toynton Park. Never mind.

Although I had to go to Secondary Holly Park, I was to love it there, partly because the teachers were ambitious for us all and strove to bring out the best in us. I was lucky enough to be in the first year, comprising of three classes with about thirty five pupils in each.

A lot of new friends were made and it was a happy time for me. In the second year I met a new girl, Alvis Britton, who, coming from a better off family, had moved with her parents into a house on our road which must have had at least four bedrooms. Alvis seemed older for her age and it was true to say her parents were getting on a bit. We were to sit for the scholarship for art school together.

After passing the initial general education test at Holly Park, we took an exam for a place at Ealing Art School, which we both passed. Alvis' father drove us to Ealing in their car, and again for the final interview. I was in the Holly Park playground when a girl told me the headmaster was asking my whereabouts.

'Mr Greeves wants you to go and see him,' she said. Feeling worried, I thought something might be wrong, but as I approached him I could see he was smiling.

'Congratulations Elsie! You have won a place at Ealing Art School.'

This was wonderful. Up until then there had been no news for me despite the other girls at school having already had their results, with some preparing for secretarial college and some getting ready for needle work school. I felt that I had probably failed, so it was a real achievement for me to discover the exact opposite. Mum was so pleased, but then came all the worrying about my uniform and getting to Ealing each day, which turned out to be a journey of about an hour and a quarter. There was a parent's evening at the Art School, which Mum and I attended one sunny evening in early July, and we were told I was entitled to a free bus pass which came as a relief to Mum.

The school uniform could be bought at a shop at Ealing Broadway. The winter uniform was a navy tunic, white blouse, green tie, navy blazer and beret with a badge bearing what might have been a coat of arms. A gabardine raincoat cost Mum a lot of money, but it was paid for with a provident cheque. The shop also supplied the pale green material for the girls' school summer dresses which we had to make ourselves. The outfit was to be finished with white Peter Pan collars and white cuffs, so Mum and I got stuck in to make them. Because we did not have a sewing machine, we unpicked a dress I already had and used that as a pattern to make the new dresses by hand. It took us a while but we were pleased with the results.

Mum had to go to hospital with appendicitis, so Dad took me to buy school shoes. He chose bright yellow leather ones from a cheap shoe shop that sold end-of-line and sample footwear in Wood Green, despite my protests. These were dyed black, but whenever it rained I constantly had stained socks.

My first day of Art School began quite early. I had to leave our house about 7:30 to be able to get two buses; the 134 from The Orange Tree pub at Friern Barnet to the North Circular Road, and from there the 112 to Ealing. I had arranged to call on the way for my school friend Alvis who had passed the scholarship too. She was not quite ready and seemed a bit flustered, but nevertheless, we were still in good time for the first bus and we arrived at the school with about ten minutes to spare. The journey seemed long on the first day, but it soon became quite routine and we quite enjoyed the trip.

Feeling smart in our navy uniforms, Alvis and I liked being at art school. There was quite a lot to carry, including a small Bible, a dictionary, water and poster colours, brushes, a mixing pallet, pens, pencils and geometry equipment. Later there were library books, textbooks and gym stuff.

The morning was taken up by a general education class with Miss Mills, who had previously studied at Oxford... and didn't we know it! She spent so much time telling us about her life as an undergraduate that a lot of lesson time was wasted. After this there was illustration, lettering, geometry, dressmaking, dress design, plant drawing, weaving and spinning. Everybody enjoyed it.

Our part of the art school was J.A.D. (Junior Art Department). Upstairs was for the full-time students who, despite only a few years difference, seemed quite old to us. Most of the young men had beards and wore cord trousers and duffle coats, while the girls were very arty with hooped earrings, loads of make-up and bat-winged tight jumpers. I would have liked a loose-backed coat, the same as they had with a collar that stood up, but of course Mum could not afford it, so school uniforms were all I was able to wear at school and at home.

One particular classroom would occasionally have papers stuck over the glass for privacy reasons. Of course, we knew a nude life model was posing for an art class that was in session.

During the school holidays there was a sketch club in which everyone was expected to produce a painting. If it was good enough, it would be framed and hung on the approach to the stairs and considered a great honour. I was lucky enough to have one of my own creations displayed there, which was encouraging.[35]

In the winter of 1952, just before Christmas, there was the Great Smog. A thick dense fog came down early in the week and worsened by the day. It became so bad that on the Friday afternoon, the school advised that anyone who had a long journey home could leave early. Alvis and I hurried to Ealing Broadway for the 112 bus, but by now, it had become so very murky that the bus crept along the route at a snail's pace.

Finally, reaching our stop at the bottom of Colney Hatch Lane, we alighted and blindly searched ahead, trying to make out what was road and what was pavement. We usually crossed the North Circular Road to get to the stop that would be the last stage of our journey on the 134 to Friern Barnet. We could hardly make out where the main road was! Unable to get to the other side with any certainty, we decided to play safe and walk up Colney Hatch Lane which was on our side. Most of the walk involved passing the Friern Hospital[36] with its high wall. Because it was a mental hospital designed to keep the inmates in, you can imagine our shock when we saw a rope descending from the trees within the grounds... but luckily was followed by two small boys who would have only been looking for conkers. I was so glad to get home, and my mum was relieved to see me.

The weekend had even worse fog and I remember walking along Woodhouse Road with my mum and Barbara. As it was safer to keep as far from the busy road as possible, we walked across a setback lawned area in

front of Woodhouse Grammar School, only to be alarmed when a trolleybus had come off its overhead cables and was careering across the grass straight behind us; we had to sharply jump back out the way to avoid being run over.

Quite a few people with chest problems became ill during the smog, and the chemist sold masks to filter some of the particles the fog left afterwards. For several days everything was covered in a grey residue.

Chapter Twenty One

1953

I had to leave school in this year, because my parents couldn't afford to let me stay on as I had wanted to do. I really enjoyed going to art school at Ealing, but unfortunately my dad said that I had to end my education and leave when I was sixteen. My friend Alvis, however, was allowed to continue her education which was a shame for me, but my life did turn out well later on. After leaving Ealing Art School I accepted a job with Boots the Chemists as an assistant.

It was the Coronation year. I remember going to see Barbara off on a trip (organised for many London school children) to see the spectacular parade of the Queen's Coach and procession, from seats which I believe were in the Mall. Later on we all watched the crowning on Auntie May's television.

Later that year on November 5th, we moved from Goldsmith Road to Arundel Court,^[37] a newly built block of flats on Woodhouse Road, just inside North Finchley and just up the road from my Grandma Lawrence's home in Summers Lane. Because of the date, we were able to get rid of a load of our old furniture as well as some from Auntie May's. It was all piled up into a huge bonfire with a Guy sitting on top.

My Mum was expecting at this time, but had no idea she was carrying two babies. She had been having a lot of pains, so I went with her to Barnet Hospital for a check up where it was decided to keep her in for observation. Just before Christmas, I can remember a telephone call for me while at work; it was the hospital saying that Mum was having twins and that they needed to reduce the high amount of fluid she was carrying. But another

call from the hospital at teatime said that they had moved Mum to Victoria Maternity Hospital at High Barnet.

It was so sad, as Mum gave birth to two tiny little twin girls on the bed. They were so small, and Mum said that she saw them moving on her legs. Of course, at that time, things were not so advanced for births, and they were not to survive, yet the babies were christened and the births registered. Mum in her haste named them 'Jenny' and 'Jennifer' and then they were taken away.

Mum was in hospital all over the Christmas period, so Barbara and I had to make it as bright for our dad as possible, helping with the cooking and other things at home. He had gone to Wood Green, buying an enormous turkey which wouldn't even fit in the oven and had to be cut in half. Besides all the mess that Barbara and I had made and had to clear up, the turkey was tough and even Grandma Lawrence's cat turned its nose up at it.

Nanny Trusler and Auntie Ada came over to see us on Boxing Day when the buses were running. Uncle Jim came too—which was very nice of him—along with cousin Violet.

Some time later, Mum became very depressed over losing the babies and was admitted to hospital for a time, but fortunately, she did recover well. 1953 was an important year and one to remember in many ways for me.

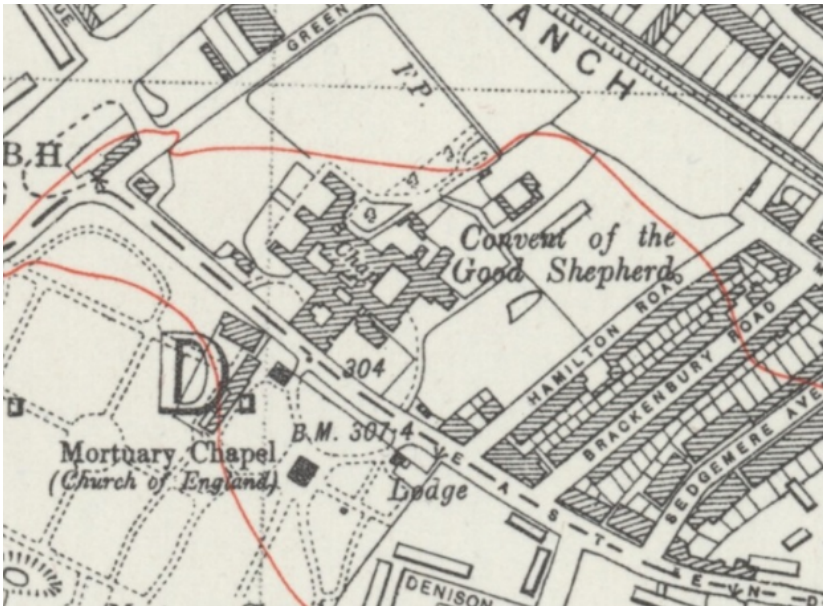
There was so much that happened thereafter, with different jobs, meeting my husband Arthur and having children and a family of my own. It would deserve another book.

Gallery

The people and places shown in the following photographs and illustrations, turn up throughout my story.



[1] This is my Grandma Florence Trusler with my mother Elsie on her lap. My mum was born in 1913 and she is about one year old here in 1914. I believe that my Grandfather carried this picture, taken in a studio, with him when he went to fight in WW1. My mum was the second of the daughters, there being six girls and two boys in total.



[2] Map showing Hamilton Road and Good Shepherd Convent.



[3] Number 44 (left) Hamilton Road, East Finchley c2018, with the generator, on the right, still present today.



[4] Sunlight Soap advert.



[5] These are the six girls of Florence and Jim Trusler. They were on holiday, but I cannot recall where. My Grandfather saved his money to take his family on holiday. The dresses the girls are wearing, were all carefully made by Grandma Trusler on her sewing machine. From the left: Elsie, Rosie, Florence with baby Ada on her lap, Ethel and then Maisie. I believe my mum (Elsie) born in 1913, was about eight years old here. Photo taken circa 1921.



[6] The Trusler family on holiday at the seaside at later date. From left to right back row: Grandfather Jim, Edith (sister to my Grandma), Grandma Florence, daughters—Rosie, Florence, baby Ada. Front row left to right: Ethel, Maisie and my mum Elsie.



[7] Jim and Florence Trusler on holiday with the family in 1929, the year that Jim was born. Left to right: Harold with his ice cream, Florence, Maisie, Ada, Elsie (my mum), Grandma Trusler carrying Jim and Grandfather Trusler. By this time the family had lost Ethel and Rosie.



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[8] The Royal Sovereign in August 1928.

Courtesy of The Paddle Steamer Preservation Society.



[10] Centre: my paternal Grandmother, Lucy Lawrence. Left and right: my father's sisters, Lucy and Maud the eldest.

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[11] Local haunt of the Lawrences'.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.



[12] 179 Summers Lane (on the corner) home of the Lawrences'. Photo 2021.



[13] In the garden at Summers Lane Finchley, circa 1935. Right: Grandmother Lucy Lawrence; left: my Mother Elsie Trusler. My mum was 24 when she married my father; she was 22 or 23 when this photo was taken.



[14] My father Frank Lawrence, taken at the beginning of the Second World War, aged 26-27.

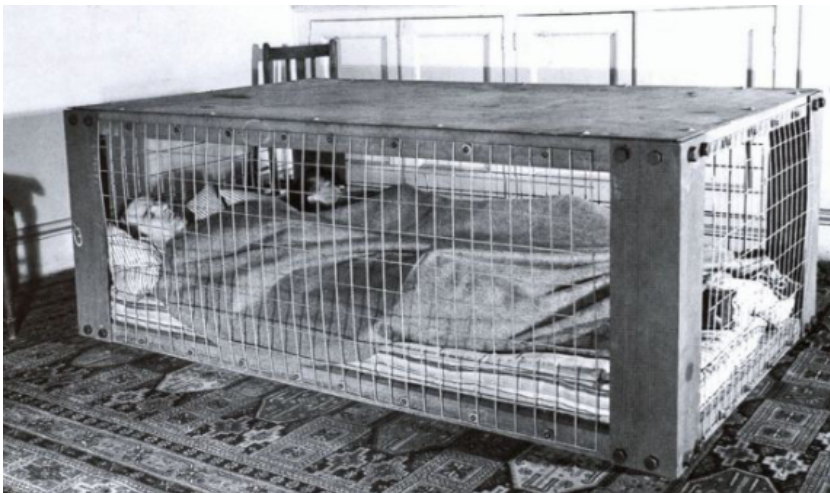


[15] The Orange Tree Public House, Friern Barnet.

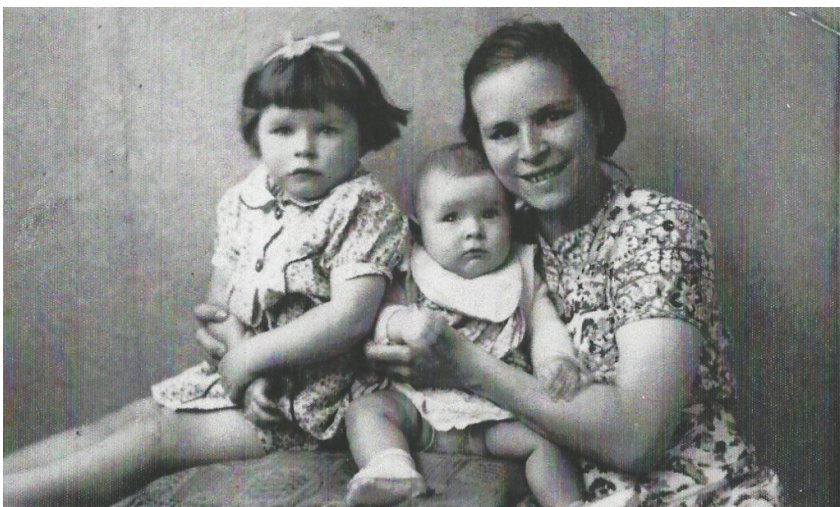
Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.



[16] Number 3 Goldsmith Road (centre) Photo c2017.



[17] The Morrison Shelter (that I used to crack my leg on).



[18] This is me Elsie (left) with my sister Barbara and mum Elsie Lawrence, taken about June 1940.



[19] Standard Telephones New Southgate 1938.

Image courtesy of IET Archives (The Institution of Engineering and Technology).



[20] Church Hall in Bellevue Road, where my mum took my sister, myself and the upstairs neighbours to shelter during an air raid.



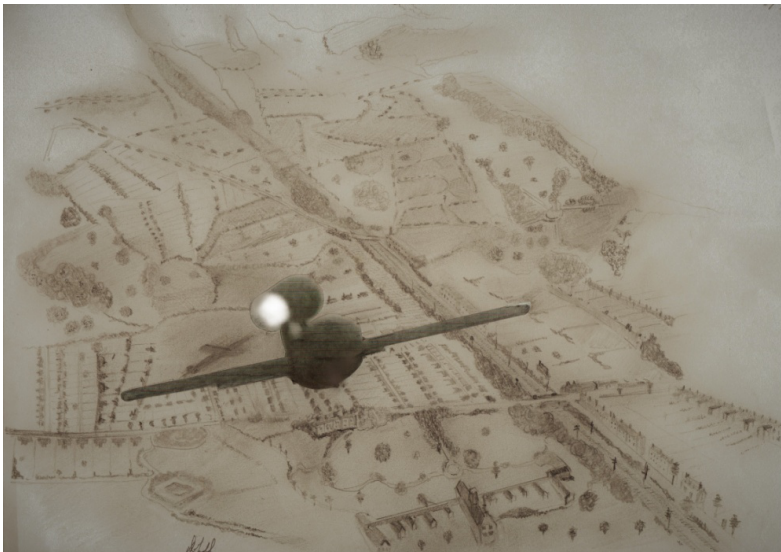
[21] St John's Primary School, Friern Barnet 1955.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.



[22] Scouts Hut on corner with Goldsmith Road 1952.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.



[23] *Doodlebug Over Friern Barnet, 1944.* Nazi V1 rocket on its final approach before exploding in East Barnet.

Illustration by David Mudd.



[24] Me left and sister Barbara c1943.



[25] Friern Barnet new Town Hall 1940.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.

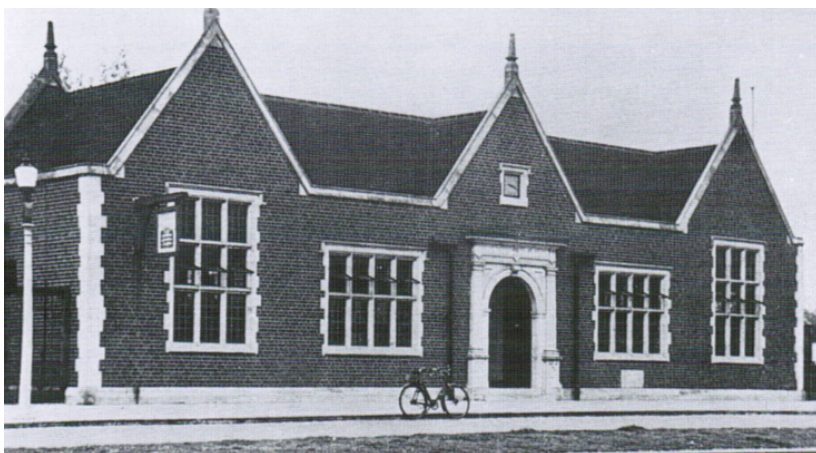


[25a] *Wet Morning Outside The Town Hall*: A depiction of families outside Friern Barnet Town Hall, waiting to be transported to King's Cross for evacuation to Scarborough, summer 1944.

Illustration by David Mudd.

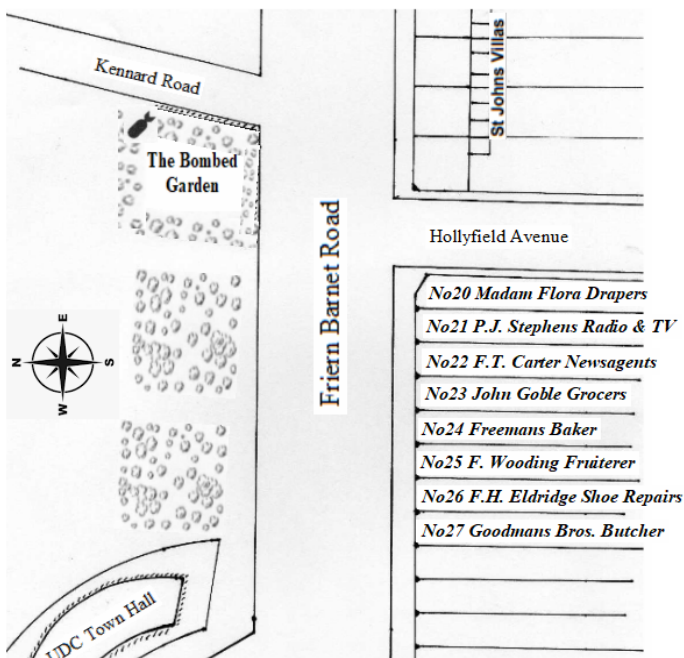


[26]



[27] Friern Barnet Library.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.



[28] 1940's Street plan showing local traders along 'Queens Parade', Friern Barnet Road. Note the 'Bombed Garden', top left.

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[31] Chelwood House on Oakleigh Road, Whetstone, where aunts Maud and Lucy lived.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.



[32] The Gaumont North Finchley.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.

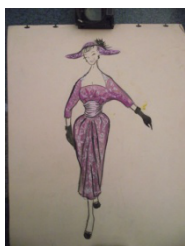


[33] Mill Cottages, Aldington, Kent: My Auntie Dorothy's cottage (No. 1) was the 2nd from left in this 2021 photo. When I holidayed here the cottages were a terrace of three, the two outer dwellings being added later.



[34] The Walnut Tree, Aldington, Kent 1952.

Courtesy of Dover Kent Archives.



[35] Some of my fashion design work produced while at Ealing Art School.



[36] Friern Barnet Hospital.

Courtesy of Friern Barnet & District Local History Society.



[37] Arundel Court, the last home with my parents and sister.

*“My story, telling the lives and times
of the Trusler & Lawrence families
of Finchley and Friern Barnet, 1913-1953.”*

by

Elsie Lawrence Mudd

