

My Story



by Florrie Morriss

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I was born in Kentish Town in the heart of London in 1909. My Dad was William Marter and Mum's name was Ellen (nee Cobb). Dad called her Nell and he was Bill. Before I was a year old they moved to Walthamstow, East London. Sister Nell was five and Nancy three.

We lived in number 18 Parkstone Road in a row of houses all exactly alike. I lived there until I was married. The street was our play-ground and the centre of our lives while we were children.

Every Monday morning, a man with a barrel organ came. I know it was Monday because it was washing day, also the day that Ethel came - to collect goods to take to the pawn shop. It was so regular, we took it for granted. Ethel would pawn watches, Sunday clothes and even wedding rings for the neighbours for a few shillings and they would each give her a few pence.

We watched for the organ-man, and waited where we knew he would stop. As he turned a handle the music (?) would grind out and us little girls held hands and danced around. If Ethel was back Mum would give me a penny or even half-penny for the man. I think he must have timed it just right.

The street was quite safe. There were no cars. The coal-man would come with his huge draught horse and cart just plodding along. He was black all over. The coal bags were black too, like the coal. Each bag held 1 cwt (1 hundred weight). He carried the bag through the house and tipped it into the coal-cellar which was only a cupboard under the stairs. There was never much coal in our cellar.

I think we were very poor but it didn't bother us. If we were hungry we could always get a piece of bread and dripping. I think jam was a treat, also treacle. Only Dad had cheese and I don't remember any other spreads, like peanut butter and honey.

Every day the milk-man came. He had a lighter kind of horse, with a huge metal milk churn on his cart. He had long handled measures which hooked inside the rim of the milk churn. He had a half pint and a one pint measure. We took a jug or metal milk can to him and he measured the milk out in the street. It wasn't pasteurised.

Sometimes the knife grinder man would come. He had a bicycle with a box-like contraption on one side. Somehow he used one wheel and the bicycle pedals to turn the grind stone. He sharpened knives and scissors and mended kettles and saucepans.

On Sunday afternoon the "comic-man" would come. He sold comics. If we were lucky Dad gave us a penny each for a comic. My favourite was the "Rainbow". Tiger Tim was always on the front page. Perhaps I didn't read any further because I can't remember any other characters. Our real Sunday treat was two shillings to buy fruit. We always got apples, oranges and bananas and took them to eat round the fire. On some winter Sundays we'd buy chestnuts and roast them on the coal stove.

In 1914 war was declared on Germany. Dad joined up and was soon on France fighting in the trenches. Early in 1915 he was wounded, and afterwards one leg was always quite stiff. I remember going with Mum to Middlesex Hospital in London to visit him, and handing out packets of Woodbine cigarettes to the wounded in the other beds and getting kissed.

I saw the first German Zeppelin come down in flames. I think we all cheered. Mrs Tilling, a widowed neighbour had taken refuge in our house with her children. She had hysterics. I thought Dad was hurting her when he slapped her face.

A policeman on a bicycle rode around with a sign on his back and chest saying "Take cover", when there was an air-raid, and then again when it was "All clear".

When Dad was discharged from the army he took a pedal off his bike, made it into a fixed wheel and rode many miles with one leg dangling - to work in a munitions factory. When the Armistice was signed we decorated our houses and had a party in the street.

As I grew bigger I joined in lots of street games. The girls made grottos on the pavement and played five stones. We joined the boys with marbles, "pitching" cigarette cards, cricket, footy, leap frog and rounders. The lucky owners of scooters sometimes shared them.

At the Hollow Pond, which had once been gravel pits, we bathed in the summer and skated in the winter. We roamed in Epping Forest in the school holidays, where the "common" folk still have the ancient right, granted to them by Queen Elizabeth 1st, of grazing their cattle. We were ruthless in picking the bluebells but they still re-appeared every spring. We also had Lloyd's park to play in. It had a mansion where William Morris the famous designer of tapestries used to live.

We seemed to have lots of uncles, aunts and cousins. Grandad played a banjo. He had a handle-bar moustache and lovely blue eyes which seemed to be always laughing. His son, Uncle Fred, and he were so alike. Uncle Jim was a soldier. When he came on leave he always stayed with us and told us tales of Burma and India. He did a lot of knitting. He would cut off the feet of old army socks, unravel the tops and make wonderful pullovers in cable-stitch. He became a Chelsea pensioner, and lived in the exclusive palace in Chelsea which I think Charles 1st endowed. They wear a distinctive red uniform.

My 14th birthday came in the school holidays. I never went back. Dad sent me to apply for a job in London's West End. I had to say I was 15. I got the job and it was there my education really began.

The Gobelins Restaurant in London's Regent St was so named because its walls were lined with copies of the famous tapestries. It was a high class exclusive place and I had never seen anything like it before. I was interviewed by the head waiter, an unbending, severe Italian, and given a job as coffee waitress. I had to make and serve fresh pots of coffee for each table. My sister Nell already worked there as a waitress.

Where I had to make the coffee was a small area between the restaurant and huge kitchen where the chefs were Greek, French, Italian and Chinese. Most of the waitresses were Italian. It was like being tossed into a world of alien adults. The chefs would speak to me in English, then to each other in their language and often laugh rudely. I was aware that there were things secret and not attractive that I did not know about. The kitchen didn't seem very clean but wonderfully attractive dishes were produced. The trays of Petit Fours made by the pastry cook looked delightful. Everything was served up with much elegance. The soup was always consommé, beautifully clear. I never tasted it. I had seen cockroaches running round the walls and often wondered if any fell into the open cauldron.

I never told Mum that a Chinaman had tried to hug me. Or that when I had to take coffee to the head chef he tried to lure me into his office. Or that on the way home at night men in the street would leer at me and I felt they were following me. I would run all the way to the Underground station where on the crowded train I felt safe.

Between lunch and dinner we had two or three hours off. It was too far to go home. Nell used to take me to the British Museum day after day. There were and are lots of more interesting museums in London but Nell just love the British Museum. I don't mind if I never see it again.

I don't remember what our wages were but I think it was a help to Mum. There were five children by then. Then suddenly Dad would not let us go back any more. I never knew why.

I next got a job in a small restaurant in Walthamstow. Marjorie Morriss worked there and soon I met her parents and brother Dick. He had lovely black curls and to me was handsome, charming and a cut above the other boys I knew. I was not yet fifteen. It wasn't long before he was waiting for me to walk me home when I finished work.

I started going to Wood St Baptist Chapel with the family. Previously I had only been to Sunday school in the Anglican Church because it was obligatory as a girl guide. The Baptist folk were very strict. I remember hearing sermons denouncing Roman Catholics and being preached to about the evil of cinemas and silk stockings. A girl friend at the church was not allowed to come with me to the Public Library or to read a book. I learned a lot about their religion but little about Christianity. I was baptised there. When Dick asked me to go to the pictures I was very unsure what to do. Previously I had often gone to the local cinema Saturday afternoon matinee with girls and boys from our street. Now I felt something awful, I didn't know what would happen to me if I went. But Dick said that *he* didn't think it was wrong, so I went, and felt guilty for years afterwards every time I went to the pictures.

The next two years I don't recall very well. Dad made me leave my job because of long hours and small pay. I think 10/- per week (\$1). Dick had left home. I went out with boys I knew, mostly just for walks. They never seemed to have much money. My sister Nancy and I were good pals and some times we were allowed to have a party. It was a very small house but a good number squeezed in and we drank ginger beer with cocoa for supper. Sometimes we all bought fish and chips and waltzed to music on the gramophone.

I got a job at a factory. The Micanite and Insulator Company in Walthamstow. I was in the part that stamped put segments from mica for insulation. Dick returned home and got a job in the same place. He helped to make hard board from mica, asbestos and shellac. We resumed our friendship.

I remember well my seventeenth birthday. I got my very first box of flowers, in a long box. They were chrysants and to this day I remember the perfume of them. I remember being told I had grown up; and immediately grew up. That was a happy year. Dick and I were courting and in love. I was made charge-hand at work, my boss telling the management I was nineteen. I was happy with the work and still have the reference they gave me when I left to marry. But there was no money to save. It was harder I think then to get a home than it is now in the 1980's.

Then the depression came and Dick was out of work. He did all sorts of jobs to earn money. I was now twenty. There was no hope of getting a home of our own. There were now nine children in the family but Nell had married. I longed for a room of my own and a place to keep my personal things. Nance, Lily and I were all courting. We used to "borrow" each others underwear, stockings and shoes. Lily was the worst offender. She would help herself to whatever she could find, dress up and go out with her boyfriend. It made no difference how angry we were with her she would sweetly apologise and repeat the performance the next night.

It was March 1931 when I was called to the phone in the manager's office. It was Dick. He had been for an interview in Berkley Square, after a job as a cook. The lady wanted a married couple to live in. So he rang asking me to marry him and take the job. As I hesitated, the manager, needing the one and only phone tossed a coin. He did not know of the decision I had to make. I said "Heads I do", and it was heads. We had to have a special licence to get married in three days. The ceremony was at Wood St Baptist Chapel. The manager and his wife came and gave us a gift.

We had lots of good wishes but not many presents. It was such short notice. Dick's mum lent us ten pounds. We had two days honeymoon and were ready to start our new life together, I think without a care or worry for the future.

Our new job was at "Ipsden House", the manor house of the small village of Ipsden in Berkshire. When I look back it seemed like one long summer. After living in a densely populated area I loved the pleasant country side with the gentle Berkshire hills, the corn fields and the charming, centuries old manor house.

Mr and Mrs Wogan Phillips were our employers. She was a writer using her maiden name of Beatrice Lehmann. Wogan was an artist. In his studios were what we thought were very weird paintings. Maybe futuristic or abstract but to us, peculiar. A man named John Banting often came to stay. He was a student of Picasso. We cooked for, and waited on several well known people. William Walton was one. He became "Master of the Queen's music" and wrote the score for Bellshazar's Feast at Ipsden House. Oswald Mosely who formed the "Black Shirts" the first Nazi organisation in England was also a guest.

Mr and Mrs Phillips went away a lot to the south of France leaving us as caretakers. We had bikes and explored the country side. We found a rabbit warren, where if you peeped over the bank you could see dozens of little cotton tails disappearing into their holes. We found the lovely bluebell woods and pheasants sitting on their eggs. We fed baby birds in their nests in the garden. It was an idyllic honeymoon. We made friends with the gardener and his wife and often visited them in their cottage. They were incredibly poor.

One time when our employers were away we had Dick's sister Marjorie and her husband Bob to stay for a week or so. It still seemed forever summer. Captain Siegfried Sassoon, another writer, was staying at the house. He took Marjorie and me one day in his two-seater car, Marjorie in the "Dicky" seat behind, the two miles to the nearest bus stop. Dick and Bob rode the bikes. We left the bikes in the hedge and got the bus into Reading where we went to the pictures and dined out. It wasn't until we were on our way home in the bus we realised we had no means of getting Marjorie the two miles home up and down the hills. She was very short winded, and after walking up one small hill was out of breath. There were no lights and no moon. Dick told us to wait and went off on his bike. It seemed like hours later we saw a twinkling light in the distance. When Dick arrived back he was towing an old wicker or cane wheelchair that had a steering wheel on a long rod. Marjorie climbed into it like a Queen and Dick towed her. She had no idea of steering. It was only by some miracle she got down the hills. When we got home Dick was wet through with perspiration. Only Marjorie was cool. Poor Dick. Although he is now in a wheelchair himself he can still laugh over the incident all those years ago.

We were very happy there, I think because we were free. After about a year the lease on the house expired and we had to go. Mrs Phillips obtained another place for us with a Lady Clarke-Hutchinson. She was very severe. I had to get up very early and work very hard. I felt like a slave. It was just like "Upstairs Downstairs" only we had been spoiled and were not servile. We went back to Walthamstow, got a flat and both got jobs.

In 1934 Peter was born, in a hug Salvation Army Hospital in London. He was the first grandchild on the Morriss side. Dick's dad was so excited about him and he was showered with love. When Peter was two days old Dick's job finished up. We had no money and no income. We had to accept help from both our families. Somehow we survived until Dick got another job; but it was not long before he became ill. It was discovered he had Silicosis - asbestos on his lungs. He was told to get a job in the open air. He went to Bedford, 50 miles from London. It seemed a long way away

with no transport. He got a job in the brick yards and was able to rent a couple of rooms for us in a very ancient cottage in Kempston, a small country town outside Bedford. Soon after we moved in he was up-graded and got better wages.

We saw some attractive bungalows being built for sale, but as times were so hard, they were not selling so we were allowed to rent one. It was unheard of to take out a mortgage. Dad had always said they were a millstone round your neck. It was good to have a place of our own with a large garden and view of pleasant country side. We took in a lodger and the money helped us get some much needed furnishings. Dick made Peter's first cot. His pram was second-hand which we ourselves restored. Next door a newly-married couple came to live, Queenie and Fred Miles. We became firm friends and when we came to Australia they went to South Africa and now, in 1989 we are still corresponding. The river Ouse runs through Kempston and Bedford. We were near an old water-mill which was still in use. Peter loved to sit in the shallows while we went in for a swim. Our lives were very simple but we were happy.

In 1936 Margaret was born at home with the help of a mid-wife only. Our parents were able to come and stay and often my sisters came for a holiday. At two and a half years Peter knew his alphabet and could sing in perfect tune, memorising words of songs. When grandad Morriss was dying he asked Peter to sing to him. He sang "There is a green hill far away", and had us all in tears. He had not been at school long before he could read and when Margaret was able to hold a paint brush he showed her how to colour in pictures.

Early in 1939 we had the chance to move into a larger bungalow across the road. It had more rooms. It was to become a well used haven during the war for family, friends, evacuees and soldiers.

As often as I could I took Peter and Margaret to Walthamstow for the day, to visit their grandparents and some of the family. They loved going on the express steam train to London - then on a road bus to Walthamstow.

My youngest sister Jessie and brother John were still at school. They talked of Hitler and war and how every day they had to take extra lunch and a change of underwear with them to school. (They already had gas masks.) This was in case they were suddenly evacuated. The destinations were supposed to be secret but they had heard rumours of going to Bedfordshire. Peter came home singing rude songs about the Fuhrer, giving the Nazi salute and goose-stepping like the German soldiers as he had seen John and the other boys doing.

Soon the "Home Guard" was being organised and people trained (me included) for "Air Raid Precautions" (The ARP). We had to black out our homes. If only a tiny chink of light was showing the air raid warden on duty would alert you.

On Sunday September 3rd 1939 the British Prime Minister announced over the air that we were at war with Germany. Before he had finished, air raid sirens were sounding. I remember the horrible feeling in my tummy. However it was a false alarm and soon we heard the "all clear".

On Monday morning we heard on the radio that the evacuation of London had commenced. I wheeled Peter and Margaret in the pram into Bedford. I learned that the schools were closed and had been taken over, also the buses commandeered. Private cars were pressed into service to meet the trains coming into Bedford Station from London.

No sooner had I got there than a train came puffing to a halt, jam packed with school children. Boy scouts were waiting with placards with the names of schools. I knew them all. They were from Walthamstow and the surrounding districts. Kindly police shepherded the children to their groups making sure brothers and sisters kept

together. Some were enjoying it, some were excited, and others were upset and crying.

They were put into the buses and taken to what was known as the fair ground. Here, huge marquees had been erected and volunteers all ready to help the kids and give them food and drink and a bag of rations.

It had all been so efficiently planned. From this centre point the children were taken to schools in the outlying villages and towns and from there found homes.

We had been told we would be expected to take in evacuees, but where we lived was reserved for soldiers.

I walked back with Peter and Margaret to Kempston School, now crowded with children and officials taking them in cars to find billets. All the time more children were arriving and later, mothers with young children.

I went back in the evening when Dick was home. There were still some to be housed. They looked so tired, but had been given bags of refreshments. One official told me they were now finding it difficult to place them. He asked if I had taken any, and I reminded him that Chantry Avenue was reserved for soldiers and we were both struck with the same idea. We soon got several car loads settled in. It was getting dusk when he asked me to take a woman with her elderly mother and two small children. "We can't separate them" he said, "and no-one will take four." He promised me all the bedding I needed so I ended up with this family, all so tired, me too.

We made them a drink and then the woman opened her bag and gave me a pencilled note. On it was my name and address. "Is it you?" she said. My sister Nancy had given it to her as they were leaving, telling her to enquire for me if they landed in Bedford and assuring her that we would help her. It was pure coincidence.

We all had to do our "bit" towards the war effort. There was plenty for all of us to do. Later in the week I found that Jessie and John were not far away, also my sister Nell and her two small boys.

We had expected air raids on London. So far it was quiet, so evacuated family and relations from London all converged on us at the weekend. We didn't know where to put them, but managed somehow to feed them all.

As Christmas drew near and there were no bombs Mum and Dad took Jessie and John home. My brother-in-law Nell's husband bought a house in a "safe" area and took his family home, and our four evacuees went too. We had a good clean up and sorted ourselves out and prepared for a quiet family Christmas.

On Christmas Eve two army officers called on us. They said they knew our evacuees had gone so in a few days time we would be getting four soldiers. Oh! Those hobnail boots on my shining floors, the boot polish and brasso, but also the fun and laughter.

We watched them go on parade each morning in our road. We watched them drill and march and learn to run a bayonet through a straw dummy. After a few weeks they were sent to France. Altogether we had 14 of these 18-20 year old lads. When they said good-bye they all promised to visit us when they came back. We never heard from any of them again. "With a sad heart from thee I part" one wrote in my autograph album. I still have it.

With 1940 came the air-raids; the Battle of Britain; rationing and the tightening of our belts; Jessie and John back to stay with us, also Dick's mum and grand-daughter Janet. Dick was sent to work in an ordinance factory which had gone up almost overnight. He was kept busy after work as despatch rider for the Home Guard, as he had a motor bike. There was Dunkirk; one of my brothers-in-law taken prisoner; parcels from Australia from Dick's stamp club contact there. So many never-to-be-forgotten happenings. We often heard German bombers going over all night and

wondered where they were heading. There seemed to be no resistance or opposition. I don't remember how long it was before we saw the sky dotted with British bombers going in the opposite direction. We watched with mixed feelings.

From my family we got news of the devastation of London; of the nightly rush to the air-raid shelters; of the thousands who spent every night on the Underground station platforms. We heard of the bravery and wonderful good fellowship and humour mixed with the sadness of loss of homes and death.

The BBC were wonderful. We felt we knew the announcers personally, and listened to every bulletin. They had to fragment headquarters in London and disperse it round the country. One transmitting station was in St Mary's Church, Bedford. Every night we listened to a beautiful Epilogue from there. It was not uncommon to stand in a queue for food and rub shoulders with famous radio personalities or musicians. We all got the same treatment.

I trained as an air-raid warden learning how to douse incendiary bombs and crawl into burning buildings, but never had to.

In 1944 the owner of our bungalow wanted it. I was pregnant. We got a place in Bedford but the day we were to move I was taken into hospital and Richard was born. I came home to a new place which Dick's work mates had repainted and cleaned for us.

I loved Bedford town. On Saturdays we often went to the cattle market. How Peter loved it. Soon the town began to be crowded with American airmen. They were very friendly and would use any ruse to speak to any female, young or old, and loved to show us photos of the families they had left behind.

That Christmas we saved our meat ration coupons to be sure of meat for Christmas day. When I got to the butchers he had not got any meat. By this time the billeted soldiers had gone. We had befriended a Belgium airman and lent him a bike. He came whenever he was free. Imagine our joy when he turned up with a leg of mutton which we gratefully accepted and asked no questions.

I could never in a short space tell how we felt when Mr Churchill told us over the air it was D-Day. How we waited for every bit of news. No need for silence now. The allied troops were landing on Normandy beaches; were holding their position; were advancing; destroying the rocket launching sites and stopping the flying bombs. Prisoners set free; the discovery of the dreadful concentration camps. And at last the lights came on again all over London and the bells, silent for four years, joyfully rang once again all over the British Isles.

Bedford is a lovely town. We lived near the river and close to a beautiful park. Peter loved the river. One day an elderly gentleman neighbour came to tell me he had seen Peter dive off the town suspension bridge into the river causing a crowd to gather. He was very perturbed. When Peter came home he explained that his fishing hook had got entangled and he didn't want to lose it, it had cost 3d. He and Margaret both won scholarships to High schools.

In 1947 Dick went to Canada to try it out. He got a job with Westinghouse. We were still on rations so he sent us welcome food parcels, but came home after six months. I was glad. I didn't want to go overseas and certainly not to a cold climate.

Someone in the Ministry of Works heard he was home and wrote offering him a job which he took. The Ministry had taken over a large country mansion with lots of land for agricultural research. Dick had to set up a machine shop and was in charge. He was happy there so I don't know why he still wanted to emigrate. But he was keen to try Australia. The King had broadcast that Australia needed immigrants. My family thought we were mad. They felt it was disloyal to leave the land of our birth. I was unwilling to leave. Peter and Margaret thought it would be a great adventure.

It seemed, according to the brochures, that you spent most of your time on a beach in the sun and all the children went to school on horse back.

Dick's stamp club contact in Australia, Ray Russell, had offered to sponsor us. His elderly mother-in-law, Mrs Martin, wanted us to share her home. She was very pro-English.

In December 1948 we boarded the steam ship Chitral and were on our way. The voyage took 5 weeks. Richard got measles and I had to move into the ship's hospital with him. Margaret and Peter thoroughly enjoyed life on board. They made friends with some of the lascars employed by the P&O Line.

For the first time we came across racism. Some English people, for no reason at all, were abusive to the Indian deck-hands. I felt ashamed. We found them friendly and dignified. For several years on of the Lascars, Mohammed Latif, and some of his friends visited us every time his ship put into Port Melbourne. It's sad that passenger ships no longer come.

We enjoyed our voyage so much. The ship had been completely re-fitted and was very comfortable. It was a treat to have abundance and variety of food.

We were met by Ray Russell and neighbours of Mrs Martin. The Russell family had prepared a sumptuous meal. We had a lovely welcome.

Dick had no trouble getting work. I soon found we were better off financially than we were in England. I loved the sunshine and getting the washing dry, and shopping for food once more and easily adapted to the new life in Mont Albert Road, Surrey Hills. What a pleasant road it its. Mrs Martin told us her brother had built some of the fine houses there. The one she owned had come out in parts from England on a sailing ship. When she went to it as a bride it was just two rooms. She said she could see across to Camberwell. There were no buildings in between.

Margaret and Peter were accepted into high schools. Peter at Box Hill and Margaret at Canterbury Girls School. There were no problems with them settling, but Richard, after starting at primary school couldn't understand why he had no aunts and uncles like other children, and cried for his swing in the garden he had left behind. The children certainly did miss out on Christmas and birthday presents.

The neighbours and Russells gave us our first introduction to the Dandenongs and Nan Martin to the beach which she loved. She has four daughters, three married and all very kind to us. Eva, her unmarried daughter offered us a loan, interest free, to start building a home. We had bought a block of land in East Ringwood with a 90 foot frontage for 185 pounds. We joined a building society and after we had done about 200 pounds worth of work they advanced what they called a progress payment. We never paid more than $4\frac{1}{2}$ % interest.

We worked hard clearing the land. We dug the trees out roots and all by hand and cut up the wood with a cross cut saw. It was a real family project, even little Richard shovelling earth out of the holes.

With Ray's guidance we started on the foundations. When we could afford to pay him Ray put in extra hours and we saw our house grow. Before our second Christmas in Australia we had moved in. There was still a lot to do. We had to start off with second-hand furniture. I missed my family in England very much during that time. It would have been great to share their opinions and interest. I still miss the close ties we had.

The Baptist Church was the only church in East Ringwood. There we met and became close friends with Beryl and Rev Sam McKittrick and were soon involved in the church activities. Dad and I cooked for many camps and had happy fellowship.

There were after church suppers at our home with lots of young folk. Peter and Margaret both taught in Sunday School. We have happy memories of those first years in Australia. They helped us to feel we really belonged.

Looking back it didn't seem long before Margaret and Murray were courting and building a house in Heathmont. In 1958 Peter and Val married and later Margaret and Murray, leaving Richard at home. He was now at high school.

I decided to learn to drive. We bought a mini and Dad, Richard and I went on our first tour in Australia. I enjoyed the coast road to Sydney so much I can never understand why folk want to drive there in the shortest possible time. We went to Canberra from Sydney and for us Poms we felt we had been on a considerable tour.

We had a large shed in the garden which Murray had converted into a bungalow where he and Margaret lived for a while. A few years later Richard and Judy asked if they could marry and live there.

It was while they were still there we decided on a visit home to England. That was in 1968, nineteen years after we had left. It was all very exciting. We enjoyed that first flight home with stop-overs in Hong Kong and Singapore.

At Heathrow thirty members of my family were waiting to greet us - Mum, sisters, brothers and their husbands wives and children we had never seen. We had quite a party in the airport lounge. After making lots of plans of whom we were going to visit and when my brother Jim drove us to Walthamstow where we were to stay for a few days with Nancy.

It was grand to walk again in Epping Forest and see other familiar places and get on a red bus to London. Later we went to Oxford to stay with Jessie. They were preparing a large get-together in the local hall.

I have a pictorial diary I made of this trip home. In it I've written of the party: "Mum looked so proud. She danced with her sons and grandsons, and cut the Welcome Home cake. What a family! We managed to sort out who was who, but so many, just to see us. We had a lovely time."

I have had three more visits "home", two with Dad. So we have lots to talk about and remember in our old age. Our three children and all our grandchildren have married Australians, but Dad has remained English through and through.

My story is not finished. I hope someone will continue where I have left off, here in my 80th year. God bless you.