

PERSONAL STORIES – Eddy Wybrow – Part 2

Anyone who read the first part, would know we left the 'Stow in early April to go to Tonbridge in Kent, back to the country for me. After a week of trying to turn the garden over, new builders leave lots to be desired.

I thought it must be a lot easier to find work, I was given a place to try in Vale road, now quite famous for a big robbery recently, although the building that was attacked wasn't there while we lived there. The firm I was sent to were Kent Precision Electronics, after a chat to the chap in charge, he said: "If you are interested you'll work with another chap, in the back of the building, not on circuit boards", they was for the girls to do. This would be a much bigger type wiring work for air condition cabinets, going to Eastern Europe that was my next job, very different to Associated Fire Alarms!

I soon settled down to work again, and had to think about some of the things to do indoors and also the garden. Other people were moving in to various properties.

And it doesn't take long to get talking, and not long before we are all helping each other, laying lawns and any other things that wanted doing.

Time moved quickly and June came: Martin was baptized at a beautiful Church in Tonbridge. Driving through the lanes during the Summer Months was great, plenty of animals to see, and the Orchards, plus the peace and quiet away from the main roads.

We were also making trips to the 'Stow at various times. The year went by and we would see our Friends who lived a short drive away, and have trips out with them and go to a dance now and then - it get's awkward to go anywhere when you have a little one to think about. It was sometime in 1966 that KPE were taken over by a company in Essex, so we had to start looking for another job to do, some of us were directed to a firm in Tunbridge Well's called Jiskoots, so job number two had to be started, it was a longer journey to work which you soon get used to.

The job was alright for a while, but I knew it would not give me much interest for very long. I was chatting to one of our neighbours about general matters, when work crept into the conversation, "had I ever thought about insurance", he asked, a quick "no" didn't stop him and he wondered if I would be interested in being an agent?

I found this strange, but also intriguing, then he said a local round would be available soon. You've guessed it, I said I'll give it a try, and it wasn't long before I was calling on people, collecting their money and asking if they needed insurance of any kind.

It didn't take long to get to know people and half the time you would be the shoulder to lean on, in one instance I was asked if I would like to see this person's mother. I couldn't say no, went into the front room and her mother was laid on the bed waiting for the undertakers to take her away, I was very surprised but took it in my stride.

As 1967 was going by, Phyllis wanted to know if we could move, as walking to Tonbridge and back with the pram, to go shopping was getting to much to handle.

Then the question was: where would we go? It turned out that some Walthamstow friends had moved to Bournemouth, "could we go there", she said, we had been there for a week and knew it was very nice, so I went down to see what I could find, and found a three bedroomed house on the main road, being used for Bed and Breakfast, went home and said we have another house, so we had better go for a weekend to see if you like it. It passed examination, so it was time to get our place on the market, it took a few month's to sell, but finally the first of January came and it was time to go, leaving.

Snow on the ground and still falling, when we arrived in Bournemouth it was a glorious day, sun shining and after the snow quite warm.

There was going to be a lot of work that wanted doing, if we wanted to do Bed and Breakfast. It would seem that Easter should be the date to look at. One priority was to make sure the place had some Kerb appeal, which we started doing first of all, nice net curtains and clean paintwork the order of the day. I also had to start thinking of what to do for work, can't spend all day on the beach, so could I take on a Window cleaning round? Not really, but I could see if there were any insurance rounds on offer, I knew there wasn't any at United Friendly, because I checked before moving down here. But I heard that an Agent, whose round was my side of town, was being made up to an inspector, so I applied and given the round because I had already had some experience and now Liverpool Victoria joined my ever growing list of job's. This job is never going to make you rich, but does give you a feeling of freedom which is very pleasant on a nice summer day.

On one part of my round was a large Estate, where quite a few Londoners lived, having moved down with the wallpaper firm Shand Kidd, some families you get to know very well - nothing unusual to take home a couple of bottles of wine they had made themselves, cups of tea can be offered all over the place, which is lovely but some you had to tread very carefully, and watch what you said - it wasn't just tea on offer at some places!

I settled into my routine and Phyllis started getting people knocking for Bed & Breakfast, so I had to get rooms up to scratch as quickly as possible.

In the September of 1968 we were back in Walthamstow for Phyllis' niece was getting married, and Martin was to be a page boy and was a happy little chap doing it. Brenda and her husband moved to Bournemouth shortly after, and lived a few houses down from us. It wasn't long after they were here, we noticed that Martin was walking strangely, so into the Doctors and it wasn't long before he said to take him to the Hospital in Boscombe, where his leg had a weight fitted to keep the joint at the top of his leg apart, to give a chance to repair and to stop the leg coming out of the joint, (I hope I have explained it reasonably well).

After a few day's he came out and had a calliper fitted and a built up shoe, the caliper only came off at night, and back on in the morning, this must have been very uncomfortable, but he never complained and our worry was that he would be alright to start School in just a Year's time.

Getting along with the cash side of things was not easy. After two or three years the novelty of being on your own all the time starts to wear off, and one day talking to a customer, jobs became an issue and he mentioned that he drove for a London firm called STC and one of their operations was installing the equipment in telephone exchanges, and were always looking for staff. He tells me to ask for Albert in the STC office, after looking round the exchange and given an idea of what was required and we agreed a date I could start.

After putting all the paperwork together and all monies in order the time soon arrived to go back into a building - not any old building - this was Bournemouth Telephone Exchange, very big and the Sea wasn't far away, it was time to start reading wiring diagrams again, the work quite varied and it was important to have a good relationship with the permanent GPO staff, they didn't all like the outside people in their exchange.

The work in Bournemouth was quite plentiful and lasted a long time, you could also be asked to work in other exchanges in the area, which was alright as there were a lot of local exchanges, I think I worked in all of them during my time. But if work gets short then you can go to places like Honinton where you have to go in lodgings, to.

Much travelling to do each day, after a spell there it was off to Eastleigh, which was only 25 miles away, only trouble there was I slipped a disc while lifting and this put me on my back for a while. This would be 1976, the year previous a few of us went to a Hotel in the Finsbury Park area, we spent the days having lectures and answering questions a great time was had by all and we went home at the end of the week.

As the Years were going by, a lot of work was going on in the background, to change the system in Telephone Exchanges, which were all working with the Strowger system, this had stood the test of time, but a modern approach was being looked at. The old system often wanted repairs done, which called for a lot of staff, especially in an Exchange the size of Bournemouth, eventually this meant going to the firm that employed us, Standard Telephones, in Southgate, and spend a few weeks training in a new colour coding system, and a complete new way of wiring.

We were there for a few weeks, so, instead of going in lodgings, I travelled to Stevenage and stayed with my brother-in-law Ken, of course being winter months made driving dangerous at times, with heavy frosts being scraped off before you go anywhere. In the end we all passed our tests, and were prepared for the changes.

During 1979 rumours went round that cuts in staff could be made, everybody then started looking at options, with the obvious one staring at us. A few of us had a chat to Albert, being our Boss, he had most dealings with the Post Office so the idea was mentioned and the reply was hopeful.

One of our mates moved quickly and found employment with the GPO in their division that wired Post Office and other GPO buildings. So that was one suited with quite a few to go. After a while dates were set for us to have interviews,

not nice when you are in the late forties, and sit facing three people, trying your best to sound reasonably intelligent. Fortunately, we knew one of the questions that they were going to ask and when it came we knew how to work it out.

Needless to say, but we were all taken on, the devil you know syndrome applied I suspect, obviously you start at the lowest rank so your income is down each week, but time passes quickly and your wage's improve, and you get used to new workmates and also new managers etc.

We still worked in the Bournemouth Exchange, and one day Mick Harris and myself were asked to go to Edinburgh, for a course we agreed that it would be alright so started checking Flight times, we passed the information back to the top man, and next day he came back and said you will have to go by Train, they won't agree air fares so an impasse was reached, probably new employee's would not be expected to say no to the top man, eventually they decided to back down, and we never Edinburgh though I would have loved too, I had not been to Scotland for a few Years.

Work carried on for a couple of Years, then it became obvious that we have to go to other Exchanges for a while, which made a change of faces and new people to get used to. I know 1981 was the Year that our section of the organization changed from GPO to British Telecom, so in one sense another change of Employment, it has to be the last time now!

One Exchange local to me was Southbourne, not very large and had a smashing chap in charge, we soon got on very well a real pleasure going to work.

One day the local radio station was on and I heard the chap mention he was going to talk to a Doug Miller, who belonged to a local group called Ferndown Vaudeville, apparently Singing, Dancing, and various types of sketches etc.

I listened to this talk with great interest, thinking here is something for you to do at last, I had played local League Table Tennis, and also had lessons on Badminton and again played for a local club in the League until I slipped my disc.

But this was completely different, I may not be the best singer in the world, but learning words and holding a tune was not too difficult, so knowing men are reluctant to do this sort of thing and Doug hoping men would join him after his chat on the radio, I took his `phone number and decided to ring him later. That's when you start thinking, will I be able to do this or will I make myself look a right idiot? In the end I rang him, we had good chat and he said we can't get enough men, women are no problem and if you want to join, I'm sure you will be alright, then told me where they had rehearsals on a Tuesday night, it was a Hall in Ferndown.

The following week I took a deep breath jumped in the car and went to find the Hall, bit of a problem at first, but eventually found it tucked away between buildings, I walked in to find people going through a dance routine and singing at the same time - not easy to get breath in your lungs, but they seem to manage alright, I sat next to a chap who was watching and started chatting, he said he was thinking about rejoining after a break, I asked if it was alright and he said once you get used to going in front of people, there wasn't a thing

to worry about, he said if you're the one with the nerve to get up and do it, you'll have no trouble. Wise words I thought.

During the evening I was encouraged to join in, and for the rest of the season I went on in the last section and found if you remembered your words and all the movements it wasn't too difficult.

So by the time it came round to starting rehearsing the new material, I had quite a bit of clothing to wear and start level with the rest of the cast.

The sad part is there is only a Piano to work with, and before the next Season, I had introduced a drum kit as well, I don't think some of the older people were too enamoured, but when they heard timing coming through, they soon accepted it.

So for me began about ten Years or more, of visiting old people homes, Village Halls, Church Halls, Grammar Schools where they had some wonderful stages. We turned up at all different types of venues, but I suppose the best were when you had Royal British Legions, we were always well looked after and the favourite one became Ferdown, always packed with people of different ages, which was nice to see, of course our personnel changed as time went by, and some younger ones came along, which was better on the eye for the Audience. They did not want to see us old people trying to move round the stage in a hurry some times. By the way, getting back to the Ferdown Legion, we raised a substantial amount for the Poppy Fund. I have sped through those ten years very quickly, but in 1990, I read an article on a group looking for more people to join the cast, to appear in "Underneath the Arches" at the Regent Theatre in Christchurch, a lovely compact building, so I thought I have got to try and get a place a quick phone call told me where to go, it was called Pelham's a lovely old building which I believe is now listed. Having been there with our Group it wasn't any trouble to find, and when I arrived there, were a few people I knew.

So that was a good thing in my favour, had a quick run through a song, then we all sat around and given pieces of script to read, it then started dawning on me, that this was the show that Roy Hudd had helped to put together, life was getting more interesting by the minute. This went on for a few weeks until I was told you have the part of Naughton, who was the partner of Jimmy Gold in the Crazy Gang.

Now the panic begins: you had to be ready to run any out of work hours you could. This could mean Saturday and also Sunday and a lot of evenings. It was only when there was a spare Tuesday, that I could keep up with the Vaudeville good job at this stage in life I still had a good memory. It's only when you realise this company, called Footlights, booked all of August at the Regent, which is a long time for an Amateur group the expense must have been quite large, still that was not our concern just make sure know your words, your dance moves, when to come on stage and also where to go. This might not seem a lot to some people but this is done by people who love doing it, there is no commercial gain at all. Some of the women in the cast were also rehearsing "Stepping Out", some enthusiasm there then.

So when August came around, they had the first and third weeks, and we were second and finished with the last week, and the very next Day it was Acker Bilk's turn to perform.

They were brilliant and I don't say that lightly, I sat there thinking I hope we are as good next week! But we did alright, there were plenty of good audiences, and it was nice to hear the laughter. We had piano, organ, and drums in the pit, plus a musical Director, who was great for making sure you came in on time, and when to finish.

Some of the things we had to do were among the audience, most people enjoyed that, one of the things I found hard at times was doing a quick change. I think we had been Principal Girls, yes girls and some of us had to be in grey suits with top hats, I think most of us still had tights on, there wasn't enough time so we just carried on. Another time I had to be the Queen and having just about sat down when Allen said: "come on your in the next sketch", rest of the Crazy Gang were already in position up stage, so my cloak had to be removed, whatever was on my head had to stay and a flower sellers hat covered it. As you can see among the fun, it was very hectic at times.

The thing to remember is when you're on Stage it's not you, but the character you're supposed to be, get that in your mind and there is no reason to be embarrassed at all, just enjoy.

The very good thing to happen while all this was going on, after our first week, which was extremely hot, my breathing wasn't as good as it should be. So I went to see my Doctor, he said you probably had a little virus and with the extreme heat this didn't help your breathing, and of course he said it does not help while you are still smoking, I thought this is the kick up the backside you needed, so the next time I see him I can say I have stopped, and thankfully I did.

Another appointment I had to keep in October was to go into Hospital for a hernia operation, so I had plenty to look forward to. So when it came round for the last week, I decided to take the week off, it would save all the mad rushing to get home and get to the theatre, and it was a much better week all round, still very hot, but my breathing had improved, and when someone involved with the show comes up and they say, you were brilliant out there tonight you then feel quite proud and you then know it was all worthwhile.

The Month came to an end, and all the suits and other items of clothing had to go back to the Shop they had been hired from. So back to the rehearsals I had started on in the Spring, fortunately it soon came back and I started to look forward to our new Season and you just hope the Audiences will like the new material in the coming Weeks.

Time for my operation, go in on the Monday, operated on Tuesday, and back home on the Wednesday, it all seemed rather quick and thoughts went back to Christmas 1957, in those days you were in for Ten days, with a similar Operation: how times have changed! I only had to miss one Show which was very good.

The Year finished and I already knew my working Days had run their course, the Company had decided to put People off at 60, not at the time your

Government Pension started, which was still 65 then. They were already moving Staff to Southampton so our Office was being swallowed up, and one or two had already moved to other Positions, so there was no point in me taking my work to Southampton for Six Months, so they had lined up a Position for me at Romsey it was time for the Chap who worked there to leave.

This was a completely different Scenario, and one I had to pick up post haste I did managed to convince those in charge to let me take the Transit that came with the Position, to let me use it for travelling to work and back each Day, there was a Depot at Christchurch where I could park and also had Petrol Pumps for topping up when necessary, so if I had something to pick up in Weymouth, I could go first thing and go to Romsey later.

I had to admit I enjoyed my experience working in my new Position, and would have loved the chance to carry on, but there wasn't a chance even though I hadn't stopped in my effort to try and keep on working.

What happens now, only 60 and unemployed not very nice for someone who enjoys work, as it happened my Son was doing his best to buy a house to refurb and sell on, so the next thing is, if you're not working Dad, could you help me? At least I thought it's something to do, won't get rich but better than sitting around getting bored.

When I started I found out that I was going to work harder than I'd done in Years, only the two of us to start with, and we were doing everything, complete re-wires, building flat-pack's, installing the kitchen wiring, tiling, cutting worktops to fit the sink's and also the hob's, somebody came in to connect the gas, I would have been quite happy to do it, but Martin wasn't taking the chance.

We went to a local Auction and came away with van for me to use, and yes you have guessed it, an old BT van. SmallWorld isn't it.

After the first place had sold, Martin lined up the next one, some we papered wall's and ceiling's, other's just emulsioned also we tiled bathroom's and kitchen's, life went on one day B&Q, or the Electrical shop for wire etc, PVC window's were getting popular so it wasn't long before we tried our hand at that, Wasn't difficult at all, house's were being offered all the time by Estate Agent's trying to clear their book's if they could make a profit, it was game on. As things started to get busy, more people were needed, we couldn't keep up on our own, trouble is other people are not as interested as we had been all they thought about was getting some Beer and Fag money, so they came and they went.

I could go on a lot more about this time, but I don't want to bore you good people.

When the Day came for receiving my huge old age Pension, my mate Ken said what about doing some work together, as long as we don't have to pay tax I'm in, so we just did enough to keep the mind occupied, for a Year or two.

I'd better this on a bit now or John and Neil will think I'm writing a book.

In the meantime Phyll and myself had started doing some Coaching Holiday's, not to everyone's taste, but at least I did not have to drive, Ken and Rene started coming as well, we had some good time's going all over the Country. 1996 was our 40th Anniversary and we had a couple of get together's at local Hotel's

Pushing on a bit now we were off to Canada to Eileen and Pete's old Walthamstow friends. This would be 1999.

Who had lived there for a few Years, so with great excitement up to Heathrow, for a 3-15 flight with Air Canada, it was long and noisy but we finally arrived at about 5-oclock the same day, we had two wonderful weeks at Calgary, also going to Lake Louise, and Banff, the Rockie's I found fascinating, from there we flew to Winnipeg to catch up with some old family friend's of Phyll's Mum's, we already knew from the time's they to this country, a weekend there, next stop was Toronto, on the side Lake Ontario when we walked out of the Airport it was like an oven, couldn't believe how it was, we had three day's here before going home, while we were there we took a trip on a Greyhound Bus to Niagara Falls, if you have never been you should go.

Back home I had been having a slight breathing problem, so I saw one of our local GP's she said your Heart seems to be enlarged so I'll get you a Hospital appointment, which duly arrived and I saw a Dr Radvan who gave me a good look over, and said I'm booking you in for an Angiogram, which came through for the beginning of Oct, so into the Theatre for the Nurses to get you ready, you stay awake for this and Dr Radvan came in to operate, he pushed a flexible lead the top of the thigh through the vein to the Heart, and then they can see what's happening on the screen, I couldn't see the screen properly so missed the fun, anyway after it was done back to a ward, for constant Blood Pressure checks, while all the time you are trying to stem the flow of Blood, it was quite a problem to stop it, around the 5pm time my man was back and said your Pump isn't working properly so you will have to take Warfarin to thin the blood and give the Pump a chance to work easier.

It doesn't take long before more tablets start appearing, as there are different parts of your body that need to have certain levels, and conditions that Doctors work to, for instance my Cholesterol level needs to be under 4 to keep them happy. This also applies to Blood Pressure, and Warfarin, which are checked at regular intervals.

I carried on having check-ups and seemed to be going well, that was until we were at a Sainsbury's Christmas Dinner, I started feeling very hot, and as you look around everything start's to go round, and the people all vanished, the next thing I remember is having cold water dabbed on my forehead, as I came round. I was taken into another room sat in the open doorway, until I felt better. I think there was such a panic going on, that nobody thought of calling an Ambulance.

I sat indoor's relaxing, when Phyllis said I have managed to get you booked in at the Doctor's, it was no good protesting so we saw our Doctor told him what happened, and after some check's he said I'm going to get you an Hospital Appointment, which duly arrived, after being checked over by Dr Radvan, he said we'll do another Angiogram, from there it's decided to put in a Stent, an artery was stopping blood getting to the brain, that was the reason I collapsed. Once you have a Stent inserted, you will probably be asked if you want to join the Heart Club, it works within the N.H.S, but is self sufficient.

Once there they tell you that a seven week rehabilitation class has to be taken, and if you're fit enough one of the Heart Specialist will say yes or no. He seemed satisfied and said if you want to, let them know and you'll have a start date.

Phyllis had been with me all the time and she could join too, so we asked for the 9-30 class on Friday morning, reason being that Beryl a Walthamstow friend went with her Husband Don, who sadly had died, but they said she could carry on, so come Friday off we went did our floor exercises, and twice round the equipment, usual thing Rowers, Bike's, and others, back to the floor and slowly cool down.

The charge for this is fifteen Pound for a Yearly Subscription, and three Pound for each time that you go. I think that's good value.

So we go most weeks, my argument is that it's my only exercise, and it is not easy for me, I wear a support belt, take painkillers, but it's still painful.

Then came the 22nd of December 2006. I finish up on the Ground again, until I hear voice's asking me my name, slowly the Medical Staff come into view, after much testing and finally being put on a moving stretcher and Wheeled along to the A&E more test's, then Dr Radvan appears with his group of young Doctor's, after a little chat my Wife said can he come home now? I'm sorry he said I can't risk it, we'll find him a Bed in the Heart Ward. And it was my home for the next Sixteen Day's.

During this time quite a few Test's were carried out with a MRI scan, if you haven't had one, it's where you go into a tube very noisy and from the next room you get instruction's telling you what to do, after what seemed age's I was taken out, and told that I was having a Dye injected to spot any problem's. So back in again and doing the things I had done before, finally it was all over and I was wheeled back to the Ward.

During the second week the visits from Doctors and other Staff was increasing and, towards the end of the week, a nurse came round and said: "You are going to have an ICD, and I'm here to explain the Procedure". She had a chart showing where the Wire's were going into the Heart, from the Pacemaker. So Friday they get me ready and by lunchtime it was in your Bed and a Porter wheel's you down to the Theatre area, sign the form agreeing to the Operation, soon you are on their Bed with Nurse's getting everything ready for Doctor Sopher, he is the Pacemaker man.

He comes in, asks a few questions, and then gets started I can't see anything, but can hear any chat, as I laid there I started to hear another doctor's voice, it seems that a problem had arisen with the third Lead it was being awkward to get behind the Heart, they finally decided it was alright, and the chief Nurse said we are going to sedate you fully so we can test your Defibrillator so it was goodnight Nurse, and the next time I saw anyone it was 9-40, I must be an awkward sod.

The next Day I was told that by late afternoon I could go home, those sixteen Day's seemed a long time, the next Day Sunday we had a lovely roast dinner, great I must be home again.

Early evening I went to bed and as I laid quietly, I started to feel uncomfortable so I wandered into the Toilet and it wasn't long before I was very sick, this happened twice more, thinking all was alright I settled down again, the next time the toilet beckoned me it was time for a bad case of Diarrhoea, it was then that I realised I had returned Home with the Norvo Virus, which had been going round some wards.

After a couple of Day's I felt better and it was time to go for a check on the ICD, and have been back for a check every three Months.

Telling you about all the excitement of going to my second Home, I completely forgot to mention, that it was our 50th Wedding Anniversary a few Month's earlier.

There was only one place to go to, you're right, it was back to Calgary, this time it was the annual Stampede. Lots of fun and excitement, we saw races with covered wagons and, when that finished, a big stage was put in position just below us, and we enjoyed a wonderful show.

During the week there were places to go where Breakfast was being served, one place was the Car Park of a big Mall, one of the long trailer type Vehicle, which was big enough for a Western Band so you had Music with your food, quite a novel experience with lots of people everywhere. By the way this didn't cost any money at all, there was things going on all over the place, and one I wasn't too keen on was Canadian Football, Pete had booked places for us so I couldn't say no, it was alright but not my sort of thing. Also went to see Phantom of the Opera in Calgary, again something Phyll and myself would'nt want to see anymore.

On our actual Anniversarry, we went to a place called Stage West, where you have a meal, then see a Show afterwards, during the interval a bottle of Champagne and a pair of glasses were presented to us.

The next highlight was catching a plane to Vegas for a few Day's, the heat when we arrived was like an oven with people saying keep drinking something cold, we booked into the Alladin with big comfortable beds, and the usual noisy air conditioning.

It was something different to see, and a Show had been booked at the Wynns Hotel, it was something I had never seen before, and not easy to explain, set in water with the

Cast coming from all directions including the roof, and that was a very high place, before the start there were three chaps going round the Audience creating a laugh and looking for bald heads, which duly polishsed and finished of with a bright Red hat so if anyone tried to take it off they could see them, would be straight back to them again, alright if you were'nt bald. It was a brilliant evening, and as we left and went outside it was starting to blow up for a storm, fortunately we reached our Hotel,

And we were inside before the Storm started, all part of the fun really.

Our few Day's passed very quickly and back to Calgary again, nice to have some peace and quiet again. Off to see lovely Banff and all the other lovely places including a ride to the top of Sulphar Moutain, and from the lookout point Banff looked as if it were a Postage Stamp. After a busy time it was back to Calgary and have a meal.

The rest of our time with Eileen and Peter soon passed, and it was back to the Airport and the long trip home, when we arrived it wasn't long before the chap with the Car found us, and a couple of Hours later we were home again, a lovely way to spend our 50th Anniversary.

I'll close this Episode now, and tell you all more later, we have had a big worry for a time, and good or bad I will let you Know, bye for now.

Eddie Wybrow - email : e.wybrow@sky.com