

My story: bits and pieces of life

by Al Wildman

*I stood aghast at the gate of life
Preparing to enter this world of strife.*

*An angel of God stood by my side
Said he “what gift will you have to guide?”
“A sense of humour,” I replied*



The author, Al Wildman, centre, with his children Peter (left) Alison and Christopher (right.)

I was born in a small four-roomed house in Twickenham Street, Anfield, Liverpool, on 7 December 1914. The war to end all wars had been raging for five months. Apparently there had been an air of fear throughout the country at the time. Our house was rented for five shillings per week with the first two weeks free. This amount is equal to 25 pence today. The front of the house had a bay window downstairs, and a flat bedroom window in the front with a kitchen window and flat bedroom window at the back. You entered through the front door into a tiny vestibule, with another door with a top of red glass into a tiny room, with a cast iron grate with a large glass cupboard on each side and a sofa and two easy chairs. In front of the fireplace was a rug where I used to be laid down when the fire was lit on a Sunday.

Next room was the kitchen, which had a flight of stairs up to the bedrooms. There was a cast iron range incorporating a fireplace and oven; to cook with the oven you had to move the fire beneath it. On cold nights the oven shelf was taken out, wrapped in sheeting, taken upstairs, and put in the bed to warm it. In the far corner was a copper boiler, and a fire was lit every Monday. The boiler was filled with water and the weekly washing was done with Sunlight soap, dolly pegs and a lot of scrubbing. It was not unknown for me to be bathed in the boiler on occasion. Next to the boiler was a sink and draining board and, of course, there was only a cold tap for ordinary washing. Next was a fixture with shelves next to the back door on which my father hung his shaving mirror. Upstairs were two small bedrooms furnished in the style of the times with double beds, a washstand and a dressing table, together with a tall double mirrored Sheraton wardrobe on the side wall and fireplace in which a coal fire was lit when it was cold.

The kitchen door opened onto a small flagged backyard. On the left was a small lean-to shed, which contained an old-fashioned mangle with a pair of wooden rollers, a washtub and a pair of dolly pegs for washing day. Later I had my finger crushed in the rollers of the mangle. My aunt Marie was doing some washing; I held a towel in the rollers and said, "Mangle this," my right forefinger went into the rollers. Panic stations! My burst finger was wrapped in a towel and I was rushed across the road to Doctor Dunlop who bandaged me up. I still have the scar.

At the bottom of the yard was the toilet, which invariably froze up in the winter, meaning that we had to carry buckets of water from the kitchen to flush. Toilet paper was unheard of at that time and we had squares of newspaper, usually the Liverpool Echo, hanging on string from a nail in the wall. Our supply of coal was stored against the toilet wall and we had to go out into the cold to fill the coalscuttle from the pile. This was a dirty job, and we had to have a wash after each trip. The rubbish bin- a square one- was placed in a hole in the wall so that the bin men were able to remove it from outside in the entry- a passage ten feet wide between the rows of houses. The back entry was the centre of social life. The neighbours would gather to gossip and the children would play games. It was also a centre for commerce. The entry was well used by vendors, and we had people with handcarts selling firewood, vegetables and salt; one cart had a little roundabout and you could have a ride for a jam jar. There was also an entertainer who used to sing and do a soft shoe shuffle and then collect a few coppers.

Our house was lit by gas; there was no household electricity, just an incandescent gas mantle held up by a little clay fork over the gas jet. The fork used to break quite often. It was a relief when someone invented an inverted mantle, which was held on to a fitting, and did away with the need for forks. We had a gas meter in a cupboard in the parlour which we had to feed with money, and if you forgot to put money in, the gaslight would suddenly go out and you would flounder round in the dark trying to find the slot in the meter. It is said that some parents whose children had been given money would lead them to the meter and tell them to put their money in the moneybox. Such was the house in which I was brought up.

2

I have some early childhood memories. My first one is of little Andy Calder tottering across the street to see me, and I was so excited to see him that I fell out of my pram. I suppose there is a reason for everything. 1917 is the year I remember best; there was a blackout against Zeppelins. They did actually get as near as Bolton, and we had to use a little flash lamp to find our way across to the local cinema, the Cabbage Hall, which is now the Liverpool F.C. Supporters Club.

America had entered the war by this time and in 1917 their troops used to land at Huskisson Dock and march up Sandhills Lane, Lambeth Road, Everton Valley and Walton Breck Road on their way to barracks in Knotty Ash. At the bottom of our street in Walton Breck Road there were two water fountains, and the troops used to have a rest on the sidewalk and fill their water bottles before continuing their march to Knotty Ash. My mother used to send me down with a packet of biscuits to hand out to the troops. Also in 1917 a tramcar dressed overall as a tank stopped in Cabbage Hall with people selling War Bonds to finance the war effort. Often during the war my Mother used to get the tram to Aintree and walk round the farms trying to buy vegetables to eke out our food supplies as food was rationed.

The war was a very trying time for everybody. Every day there was depressing news. Thousands were killed in the battles of Mons and the Somme and the U boats were trying to cut off our supplies as they did in the war of 1939 to 1945. One particular atrocity outraged world opinion- the sinking of the S.S. Lusitania off Ireland with a lot of children on board. This incident helped towards bringing the USA into the war.

During the war my Mother used to work in a big house opposite Stanley Park. She was a buttonholer and used to put buttonholes in shirts for the army. Occasionally she would take me with her, but most times I would be taken to my Uncle Bill's sweetshop in Lower Breck Road by the bowling greens, to be minded by my Auntie Lil. I would spend my day drawing, as there was not much else to do. Sometimes I would be taken to see my Grandfather who always gave me some coppers, but he died before the end of the war.

My uncle used to play left back for Everton and West Ham round about 1910 but he received a very bad knee injury and had to retire, and he bought the shop with his compensation. My father contracted rheumatic fever early in the war, and was left with a bad heart, so he could not join the army. There were many recruiting campaigns at this stage of the war and one of the most famous was a picture of Lord Kitchener with the famous words "Your King and Country need YOU." Some people developed a nasty custom; if they saw a man of military age who was not in uniform they would give him a white feather, implying that he was a coward, otherwise he would be in uniform. My uncle Bob joined the Special Police. He was not very big, and one night a man rushed into the station shouting for a policeman. My uncle said, "I am a policeman." The bloke looked at him and said, "not you, I want a proper one." The war eventually ended on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 and there was great rejoicing, tinged with sadness for the thousands of people who died or who returned with terrible wounds or who had been blinded. The world was completely changed by the war, and the peace treaties contained the seeds of future conflict. This is the first of the bits.

3

I started school in January 1919 at Anfield Road Council School. My mother used to take me for the first twelve months but then I went by myself. As an only child I was very shy and it took me quite a while to adjust, but eventually I found my niche, and I quite enjoyed school. I was taught the usual things, writing and arithmetic and particularly reading. When I was seven I joined the Rawdon Library in Breck Road and I spent a lot of time there, as I was a quick reader. I was a good reader, and when I was a bit older I sat in front of the class to read to them. My favourite book to read was "The adventures of Brigadier Etienne Gerard," which the class also liked I was quite good at sport and played at Anfield in the final of the

under twelve competition. Our team won, and I was presented with a silver medal, which I still have. I was also good at cricket, and I opened the batting for the school. I also opened the bowling with my special off spinner deliveries. One teacher, Mr Browne, used to take another lad and I to the gym, and have us bowl to him for an hour or so, and he would reward us with sixpence each.

Two of my classmates made a name for themselves. Alex Scott played goalkeeper for Wolverhampton Wanderers in their glory days. It amazed me that he always got booed when he played at Anfield. Another boy, Raymond Crane, grew up to be Lord Mayor of Liverpool.

It was very handy. Our school was near the football ground, and when there was a match on a Wednesday, we would rush to the ground, and when they opened the gates at three quarter time, we would rush in to see the finish. Our Headmaster, Mr Bradley, remembered my uncle Bill, and he was always talking about the burly full back who would hit the right-wingers and knock them into touch. I was made a monitor, and I became unpopular with mums for booking their boys for coming in late.

One of the features of school was a football match between two classes; you could only join in with a member of the other class, and we would wait for people to arrive to join in the fray. This meant that, near the end of the game, about 50 boys would be chasing about trying to get a kick. We had a swimming pool, but I only went in once, we had to jump in. I slipped and nearly drowned, and it put me off for a long time, in fact I only learned to swim when I was 16. The other thing of note, was when I was picked to play the part of Malvolio in Twelfth Night. We had months of rehearsals in the gym, but the actual performance went down very well, and we got plenty of applause. At eleven at school we were segregated into seniors or advanced. I was put in the seniors, but after three months I was transferred to the advanced section where we took extra subjects such as French and Geometry. My Father's health was deteriorating at this time. He had a season ticket for Liverpool Football Club, but the time came when he could not walk to the ground. He was so ill that he had to give up work, and we had a difficult time. As I have said before, my Mother was a buttonholer, and she got some homework from a notable firm of outfitters, Watson Prickard in North John Street. I would come home from school, pick up a parcel of completed work, take it to the workroom and pick up another parcel with more work to take it home. The few shillings she earned were a great help, as my father was not earning. My Father had a great friend called Horatio Nelson who used to visit our house frequently; they would talk and argue for hours. Mr Nelson was a big man, over 6 feet and very broad with an iron-grey moustache. He supervised the entrance to the Boys Pen at Anfield, making sure no one over 14 tried to dodge in. It was four old pence to get in, but he would tell me to duck under the turnstile.

The boys' pen was in front of the Kemlyn Road stand, a triangle as far as the centre line. The scoreboard was across the corner by the Anfield Road stand; there were rows of letters and the half time scores were put alongside each letter, but you had to buy a programme to find out which letter referred to which match. The Spion Kop at that time was a heap of cinders with sections of wood here and there to form steps. At half time people would walk from one end to the other depending on which way Liverpool were kicking. There was a character in the boys' pen who wore a white coat and had a tray with a lamp over it, and he did a good trade selling brandy snaps. They were very popular. The boys' pen has now been moved to a different section of the ground. One match I remember was when Liverpool won the championship about 1924. They beat Stoke in the last match 3-1. Elisha Scott was carried off, Tommy Lucas went in goal, and Parson Jackson went from centre half to right full back. After the game Liverpool were presented with the Championship Shield. I was too small to climb over the wall and had to be lifted up to run across the field to see the ceremony.

4

The next street along from Twickenham Street was Hanwell Street, and across the top Taplow Street ran from Breck Road into Hanwell Street and across the bottom ran Lower

Breck Road. This gave a nice rectangle for playing. There were a lot of children about my age and we had good fun. There was a lamppost by the entry on our side; at dusk the lamplighter would come on his cycle and light the gas lamp with his pole with a hook on the end to pull down a little chain to allow more gas to the mantle. In the dark nights we all gathered to play across street games like "Sheep sheep come over" and Relievo. We used to skip and have races round the block, play cherry stones up the drainpipe and play drop with cigarette cards. It was a good meeting place. On the opposite side of the road were two entries with five houses between them. Both led into Taplow Street, but between them was a block consisting of a stable yard and a row of stables. This was owned by Mr Jones. He had a number of high-sided carts with very large wheels, which were pulled by two horses in tandem. He used to cart building materials around. Most of the transport was done by horse and cart, as there were very few lorries or motor cars. The coalman had a horse and cart, as did the baker, the fruiterer, furniture removers and the funeral directors. These latter had matched pairs of black horses decked out in black plumes pulling very ornate black hearses.

There was no cremation in those days, and all the dead were buried in cemeteries. Many people paid a weekly visit to place flowers on graves, and there would be flower sellers at each cemetery gate. The city transport was a system of electric trams, which covered the city, and on a Sunday my dad would take me to the landing stage at the Pier Head to see the boats. There were small paddle steamers, which ran to Eastham, Birkenhead ferries which ran to Birkenhead and Rock Ferry, and the Wallasey ferries that ran to Seacombe, Egmont and New Brighton. We occasionally went to New Brighton for a day, and walking up the gangway we would hear the cry "don't forget the diver". The diver was a man with one leg, and when he had an audience he would plunge about thirty feet into the water while one of his mates took a collection. New Brighton was lively in those days, with a Tower Ballroom and a huge fun fair with more attractions along the prom, a boating lake, another fun fair and other attractions such as bowling and tennis. It made a good day out. People from Lancashire and the Midlands regularly went there for holidays.

Friday was a good day to go to the landing stage; you would see the Elder Dempster boats ready to sail to West Africa, a Canadian Pacific Duchess boat going to Canada, a Cunard liner and a White Star liner ready to sail to the United States. On other occasions you would see in the river the deep-sea cargo boats, Clan Line, Harrison Line, Blue Star Line, Bibby Line, Booth Line, Booker Line, Blue Funnel Line, Alfred Holts, and Manchester Liners coming from the ship canal. At the Pier head you would see the Llandudno boats, St Elvies, St Tudno and La Margarete, and a tender. There were also The Flying Breeze, a tug Megs Merrilies and a selection of Isle of Man boats- and at night the Dublin and Belfast boats. Liverpool was a very busy port in those days. On Fridays you would also see what was called the Pier head jump. If one of the liners was short of a stoker or other crewmember they would come to the gate and ask if anyone wanted a job. There were always several seamen who had come down on the off chance, and they would go on board just as they were- without luggage or anything- just to get a job.

I suppose I should introduce my playmates. At No. 1 were Joan and Jackie Spilsbury; next John and Mercia Chilton, then came the Armstrongs, Reg, Jackie and Blanche. We were all fairly poor and sometimes Blanch would knock on our door and say "Mother says could you please lend her sixpence until Friday". Next was Arthur Peacock, then Norah, Jimmy and Beattie Greenlees, followed by George and Dolly Smallshaw. Next to them was Jimmy Ellames, and at the top Billy Galna. Opposite were the Oxtons. Mr Oxtan was Church Warden at our local Church, Holy Trinity. Next were John Bright, Dickie and Andy Calder, Jennie Hughes then the Elliots. They were a quite a poor family and every Christmas they got a food hamper from Robin Goodfellow, the Liverpool Echo charity. So you see I had plenty of company, although I could not invite them home to play because my Dad was poorly.

Along Lower Breck Road, next to my uncle's shop were three bowling greens and a large recreation ground. We played football and cricket for hours. The ground was used for baseball on Saturday afternoons, and had football pitches in the winter. The event of the year

was the annual May Procession. Horses from all over town richly decorated with plumes and garlands of flowers, with their harnesses and brasses gleaming, would process to the rec for judging. It was a great spectacle.

At the bottom of the rec, alongside the railway sidings, was a portion of raised land, which we called the red hills. There were a couple of small pools that had small fish in, and we played a lot round there. Later a greyhound-racing track was built there called Breck Park. We used to ask men to take us in, and it was quite exciting. The bookmakers had their stands by the track. The kennel maids would parade six dogs around for each race; they would be put in the kennels, then the electric hare would be released, go round once, then the dogs would be released and dash after it. It was exciting to watch. It was funny to watch the parade; if a dog stopped to relieve itself, some people would dash to bet on it thinking it was a lucky omen. It was good fun. When it closed later on, it became the Dockers club. At the bottom of the street there was a triangle of spare land, and we used to play there with tops and whips, marbles, and skipping ropes. At certain times of the year a large marquee would be erected, and we would have Christian mission weeks. One was called the "Four Square Gospel Mission", and our gang would pile into the tent and sing "The four square gospel is true, yes I believe it don't you, that Jesus came to forgive our sins and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within, and soon he is coming back again" etc. etc. It was quite lively. Another time there would be a healing mission conducted by Pastor Jeffries, and all the sick and infirm would come to the services in search of relief.

Most of the gang went to Sunday School, and the event of the year was the Sunday School Picnic. We assembled at Church and were marched down to Breck Road station, beyond Cabbage Hall. It was in the country, and we would find a special train waiting to take us to Helsby Hills. We played games, went for walks and picked flowers to take home. It was a great day out.

During the General Strike a local politician brought a choir of Welsh miners to sing on the spare land, and the local people gave them a good reception with food and money. Joe Cleary later became Lord Mayor of Liverpool.

On bonfire night we had a fire in the street, and if we were short of wood we would raid the local builders merchant for fresh supplies. I was a bit scared of fireworks, and I used to keep well away.

5

I left school at December 1928 in the height of the great recession to try and find a job. I found a temporary position with a firm of importers, Scoff Bros. It lasted six weeks, then I was out of work for six months until a neighbour who wanted an office boy sent for me and took me on at Cowan and Co Haulage Contractors in a wooden hut on the East side of no. 1 Canada Dock in Bootle, at the foot of Canada Dock Overhead Station.

There was little home entertainment in those days. We had a wind-up gramophone: you wound it up, put the needle in a groove on the record, and lo! You had music. You could buy records from Woolworths for 6 pence old money. In the early 20's radio crystal sets came out. There was a box with a large crystal in it, with a piece of thin wire called a "cats whisker". You put on a pair of headphones, and searched the crystal with the cat's whisker. When you found a sensitive point you would hear sound. I actually heard the famous cowboy film star Tom Mix speaking in 1922 when he was on a visit to England. Everybody had to make their own entertainment. At parties people would gather round the piano for a singsong. Some would sing, some would do turns. My auntie Lil had her own party piece: she would dance the "dying swan" from Swan Lake. It was a riot. Most people had their own party pieces and got upset if they were not asked to perform.

About 1930 electricity became available. We bought a wireless, and my cousin Frank said he would fit it. Very few people knew about electricity at that time, and Frank was not one of them. He found that the plug had three points, but there were only two wires on the set, so he blithely opened one of the set wires into two, connected the then three wires to the plug

and switched on. There was an almighty "bang", the lights went out and the meter fused. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

I have mentioned that I did a newspaper round for my uncle Bill, and one dark night in January 19311 was doing my round as usual. I reached Wolverton Street and put a paper through no. 27, at the same time as Alan Close was handing in the milk at no.29, which was on the same step. I carried on my round down into Redbourn Street and finished. The following morning it was announced that Mrs Julia Wallace of no. 29 had been brutally murdered. Murders were very rare in those days, and it caused quite a stir in the neighbourhood. That night I went to the Church club and, of course, there was a lot of talk about the murder. I casually mentioned to Doug Metcalf that I had seen Alan Close on the step the previous night, and thought no more of it.

Mr. Wallace stated that he had received a telephone call from a Mr. Qualtrough to his chess club in North John Street asking him to call at Menlove Gardens East regarding some Insurance business. He stated that he left home just before 7.00 p.m., took a tram to Smithdown Road, and another tram down to Menlove Avenue to search for Menlove Gardens East - which did not exist. He gave up the search and went home. He found the back door open, and being suspicious called on a neighbour. They went into the house and found Mrs Wallace in a pool of blood at the bottom of the stairs, with a bloodstained raincoat near by. Inspector Gold was in charge of the investigation. It was discovered that Mrs Wallace had been killed around 7.00 p.m., and time was an important factor. Doug Metcalf told the defence solicitors Herbert J Davies Berthen and Munro that I had seen Alan Close on the step on the night of the murder, and they came round to see me and took a statement which they passed on to the police. I was then interviewed at home by a detective.

The point was that Alan Close stated that he handed the milk in at 6.30 pm, but I knew it was later than that. The solicitors came with me on my paper round to check times, and to find out why I was so sure of the time I had given them. It so happened that I went up an entry from Twyford Street into Richmond Park, and I could see the clock on Holy Trinity. The time was showing 23 minutes to seven. It took me 3 minutes to walk to Wolverton Street to no. 27, making the time twenty minutes to seven. This discrepancy was most important. Had it been 6.30, Wallace might have had time to commit the murder and set up his alibis on the way to Menlove Gardens, but at twenty minutes to seven, it was not possible.

When the trial date arrived all the young witnesses were taken to a large games room at the top of St Georges Hall. We were allowed to go out for lunch, but other than that we were confined to the room. On Friday afternoon we were contemplating a further week of confinement, when Mr Justice Wright decided to conclude the case. I was rushed down to the courtroom, and sworn in. The defence read my statement for Wallace, but the jury found him guilty, and he was sentenced to death. However, he was later released on appeal, and became the only man in England to be released from the death cell. Mr Wallace moved to Bromborough, but only lived for two years. This was a famous murder case, and Dorothy L. Sayers wrote a book about it. It created worldwide interest.

Some years later I took part in a Radio Broadcast with Radio City, and they put forward a theory that the murder was committed by a colleague of Mr Wallace in the insurance business, a Mr Parry, who had been a frequent visitor to the Wallace house, and was short of money. They put up a good case, but of course it was not conclusive.

6

I have mentioned that Richard Lyon took me to be his office boy; the office was a little wooden hut at the foot of the Canada dock overhead station. Next door was another hut belonging to Ancliff and Co, another firm of Manchester carriers; it was run by Mr Lambert, and we answered his phone when he was out. One day a woman called. I said, "This is Bootle 919"; she said, "oh, I want 918, can you go next door and get him?"

Cowan & Co was the name of our firm. The head office was in Glasgow. They were railway carriers in Scotland, with depots in Edinburgh, Falkirk, and Stirling. The English depot was Manchester, and we ran a daily service between Manchester and Liverpool. The fleet consisted of six Super Sentinel steam lorries and trailers, with solid tyres, no windscreens, and illuminated with two oil lamps in the front, and an oil lamp swinging from the back of the trailer. The carrying capacity was 10 tons - 6 tons on the wagon, and 4 tons on the trailer. The loads had at all times to be sheeted and roped to make sure that sparks did not set the load alight. We also had 6 J- type Thorneycroft petrol lorries - also on solid tyres, with similar lighting. They had glass windscreens, but no wipers, and the petrol tanks were in the cab below the windscreen. They carried 6 tons.

Dick Lyon was the manager, and we had a foreman, Tommy Middleton, who came down from Manchester on the train every day. He was a chain smoker and when he arrived, my first job was to go and buy 40 Park Drive cigarettes for him, and again at 4.30 he would send me or another 40 for his homeward journey. He had a ginger moustache, and he would smoke his cigarettes to the last quarter inch - I kept expecting him to burn his moustache. A typical day's work for a steam lorry would be to bring a load often tons of barbed wire, kick it off at Sandon Dock for the Australia boat, go up to Brocklebank Dock, load 50 barrels of premier jus tallow; take it to the CWS margarine works at Irlam, unload, and go back to base, finishing near midnight. The second man would then have to be back about four in the morning to light the fire for the next day's work. The weekly wage was two guineas and there was no overtime.

Some drivers worked the Glasgow run; they would collect a load of canary tomatoes from Coburg dock, snatch a couple of hours sleep, drive overnight to Glasgow market, unload, pick up a return load, have a couple of hours sleep, and drive back overnight again. The common rhyme was:

"We work all day, and drive all night,
And do repairs on Sunday,
And all we get for overtime, is
Don't be late on Monday."

However, in 1933 the industry was regulated, and it became the law that no one would be allowed to work more than 11 hours per day, which was a great improvement. Some owner-drivers would haul loads all week, and at weekends, they would take off the platforms, fit charabanc seats, and do pleasure trips to the seaside.

We carried some peculiar traffic. One driver was told to go and collect 5 tons of dried flies from Gladstone dock. Half an hour later the foreman went out, and the driver was still there, and he said who are you kidding, 5 tons of dried flies indeed. However the foreman persuaded him finally to do as he was told; the flies were in fact tropical insects going to the works of Karswood Poultry foods. Drivers used to get an allowance of 6p per ton for dirty cargo such as carbon black. One day a black driver came in and was given a note to collect a load of flour; he said "where's my dirt money - white men get it for black stuff, I should get it for white stuff". Vehicles improved over the years, and the opening of the East Lancashire Road greatly improved travelling times between Manchester and Liverpool.

The docks were worked by casual labour, and when a ship was due to unload a "stand" would form: 50 to 80 men would stand round a gate, and the foreman would come out and tap men on the shoulder, and about 20 men would go in to work the ship. There were no mechanical aids and all the cargo was moved using two-wheeled trucks. Cargo was loaded on to lorries using a kind of stool: two men would lift copper bars on to the first part of the platform, and two more would lift it on to the vehicle. Bales of cotton and wool and heavy cases would all be loaded like this. There was a system on the docks known as the welt. A gang consisted of eight men; if at starting time there were only five present the five would

hang about until the foreman found another three but the eight did not start work – four would go for their breakfast, then the second four would go for theirs, then they would go for a break in turn, then it would be dinner time. When work was resumed, alternate breaks would go on during the afternoon. It meant that 8 men were being paid for 8 hours work each, but in fact were only working four hours each. Liverpool was one of the dearest ports in the country.

Vehicles developed quickly; balloon tyres superseded solid rubber tyres, and electric lighting systems took the place of the old oil lamps. Windscreen wipers were fitted, which were a boon; carrying capacity increased, first with six-wheeled lorries carrying 10 tons, then eight wheeled lorries carrying 14 tons. Articulated vehicles came on the scene. My company bought 6 Scammell mechanical horses of 6 tons carrying capacity, and they were very economical. Then along came diesel-engined vehicles, which were also economical, and gradually replaced petrol driven lorries. My company bought Foden diesels of varying carrying capacities, which served us well.

7

Richard Lyon was in the Boys Brigade at Holy Trinity Church, and he persuaded me to join. I was a shy withdrawn character, and I was called the hermit. However, being a member brought me out. I was made a corporal with my own squad and I was put in the football team at left back, and that was great. We played on Clubmoor Rec. Our pitch had a slight slope, and when it rained a large pool formed in the penalty area, and our tactic was to punt the ball into the pool, rush after it, kick the water into the defence's eyes, and score while they could not see. I became very interested in first aid, and I captained the team that won the Ambulance Shield. I was only able to go to one camp as Dick Lyon always went, but I had a good time at Scarborough, although I was always hungry, and spent my money mainly on food. We had trips out to Filey and other places on coast, and it was good. Altogether the BB was very good for me, and gave me a bit more confidence.

One curiosity in the twenties was a Scammell lorry that carried 250 tons. It was used for carrying locomotives from Newton le Willows to Gladstone Dock for the Indian Railways. In the summer it often sank into the tar on Queens Drive, causing a lot of traffic problems. When I left the BB, I was a bit lost, so I decided to learn to dance. I went and joined Campbells Dancing Class at a large house in Richmond Park. As I was a bit shy, I used to dodge from one room to another, to avoid being put on the dance floor by Mrs Campbell. However, after two weeks, I realised that I was only wasting money, so I plucked up my courage and went on the floor. I took my cousin Eileen a couple of times to give me confidence, but after a while I became very confident, and I became a very good dancer, and used to go dancing at least twice a week.

In 1937 Dick Lyon was sent to open a Depot in London, and I was left in charge for six months, then a Scot called Robertson came down to take charge. He was a charmer, but a rogue; he was a gambler and when any one came into the office he was always wanting to play toss for half a crown with them. He was also a whisky drinker, and was doing a line with a barmaid at Blundellsands Hotel. Things did not go too well, and after six months he was called to the Manchester office, and I was left on my own again. About this time people were being asked to join the ARP, Air Raid Precautions, as it seemed that war was coming. As I had done first aid in the Boys Brigade, I volunteered to do the first aid and home nursing course. I attended a lot of courses, and passed the exams.

I have mentioned Mr Lambert. When my father died he took me under his wing, and if I had a problem, he would always help me out. When I was going to get married he offered to let us live with him. When I was 16 I met my cousins, Jack and Eileen Byrne, and they induced me to join the Rovers Rambling Club. We used to do full day walks in the summer and half day trips in the winter. We walked all over the Wirral, and we did longer trips to Holywell, Corwen, Llangollen, and quite often we would get the train from Seacombe to Caergwle - there were lots of good walks around there. I liked the winter walks best. Often we would finish at Mrs Lumsden's Cafe at Irby Mill Hill; we would have our sandwiches, and

then sit round the fire roasting chestnuts. Then we would walk over Bidston Hill and through the woods back to Lower Bebington. On moonlit nights it was lovely to see the moon shining on the water of the Dee Estuary. If we were on the other side of the Wirral, we would finish up at Mrs Higgins' cottage at Raby Village. She would have a fire in the front room and when we had eaten, someone would get on the piano, and we would have a good singsong before we ventured out in the cold. We would go down the frosty moonlit roads singing all the current hit songs. One lad Herbie Collins always picked up the mat on his way in, and he would say "Is this yours Mrs Higgins, they are all wiping their feet on it out there". He was a wireless operator, and went down in the 5.5. Rawalpindi, an armed merchant ship.

I had a lot of happy times with the club although they were all a lot older than me. After a couple of years I was elected chairman. We used to have a social every Thursday in a dance studio on top of an old building in Cases Street, and when we were doing frantic dances like the military two-step or the Polka, the whole building used to shudder, and I would fear it collapsing. Two of my best mates for a while were George Davis, and Vie Edgar. We used to go rambling, and to shows and dances. Vic was a peculiar type. I once took him and two girls on a picnic to Raby Mere. We paired off, and afterwards the girl with Vic said he had spent the afternoon talking about tiling. Cecilie was a nice girl, but she had enough of Vic that day.

8

I met Raymond Crane about this time, early 1938, and he asked to join the Anfield Junior Conservatives. Later I became secretary. We used to meet on a Thursday night, have a meeting with a speaker or we would have debates. I featured in one debate: "Which was the best, cycling or hiking". I lost the vote, but won a moral victory because I organised a hiking section later on and all the cyclists joined. A couple of weeks before the war started, I organised a mixed party for the Whit weekend holiday - two nights in a farmhouse at Corwen. I had a delightful letter from Mrs. Lewis the farmer's wife. "Dear Mr. Williams, I will please to see your party coming here Whit Holidays at the same terms as the other party five shillings each for Tea Bed and Breakfast, 2 days ten shillings and I do myself exactly the same, but like to know how many ladies and gents is of each. Mrs. E. Lewis." We had a great weekend. On the Saturday night we lads went for a walk, down to the river Dee, and while we were away the girls stitched up our pyjamas, and made apple pie beds for us. We went to bed about ten p.m. and we discovered what had happened. We went down en masse to the girls' room intent on revenge, but when we go there they were talking, and we realised they were telling each other naughty stories, so we crept back to bed. At breakfast next morning we boys started talking: "I liked such and such story", "no I liked the other one best", "no the one about x was the best". The girls were petrified, and didn't know where to look. Revenge is sweet.

On the Monday morning we left the farm and climbed into the hills, and we walked over the tops all day, until we finally came off the tops, and down to Llangollen at 6:00 o'clock. It was a gruelling walk, and the lads were carrying the girls' haversacks. Most of the lads were in the Territorial Army, and they all said that that hike had really broken them in for the army. A week later a funny thing happened. We were walking back to Caergwle in the late afternoon; as we were passing an isolated cottage age, a little Welshman came and invited us in. It was a very hot day and we were amazed to see that he had a tremendous fire in the fireplace. We sat down, and he produced an accordion, and started playing welsh tunes. We stayed about half an hour, and then we said we would have to go. Bobbie Halliday said, "I have forgotten my haversack - I will go back and get it". I have never seen him since. He was not on the train, and did not come to the club the following Thursday. I still don't know what happened to him.

During the course of my business life, we carried for a firm called T. J. Wivell, and I got to know Reg Wivell quite well. He ran St Simon and St Jude's table tennis club in a big house in Priory Road, so I joined. We were in the Liverpool League, and we played five a side matches round the city at various boys' clubs. The Thursday before war was declared the Territorial Authority rang the club and ordered all the territorials to report to Barracks

immediately, so off went George Owen, Harry Lloyd, Wilf Davis and a couple of others. They were sent to Bolon Street off Green Lane.

My father died when I was 15 years old, and his funeral was an event for the whole neighbourhood. They all turned out as a mark of respect. The hearse was a black carriage pulled by team of black horses in black plumes. Dad was buried in the family plot at Anfield Cemetery. There was the usual reception of family and friends, one of the friends was Bob Connolly, who had married Mother's niece but was widowed at the time. He thanked us, and said he had really enjoyed himself. When the guests had gone we felt very lonely, and Mum and I were really upset. We had very little money and wondered what would happen. My Mum was a seamstress, and she obtained some homework from Watson Prickards. Twice a week I went on the tram to town taking a bundle of completed shirts to the workroom, and bringing another lot back. The few shillings Mum earned, together with my princely ten shillings a week, just about kept us going. The first Christmas was quite dismal, just the two of us. A bright spot was that I went to a whist drive at the Royal Liver Social club, in Menlove Avenue, and I was lucky enough to win a very large ham. My Mum was delighted; she swapped half of it for a chicken, so at least we had a good Christmas dinner.

The gang were in the table tennis club on the night before war was declared, and the newspapers were declaring that "The lights are going out all over Europe". We were all wondering what would happen, and discussing what we would like to do. The following morning we heard Chamberlain's historic speech, informing the country that we were now at war with Germany. Preparations were made for a complete blackout, and bomb shelters were built. On the Sunday night our local pub, the Cabbage Hall, was packed, and after it closed, being a bit merry, I put on my ARP badge on, and went around telling people to put out their lights.

A shelter was built in the centre of our street for protection. It was so good, that I had to obtain a large tarpaulin sheet to keep the rain out. The Germans got into the habit of sending a bomber over about half past six; we would get the air raid warning, and dive into the shelter. One night the Warden, Mrs Greenlees, ran down the street in a panic, shouting, "Get out of the shelter, there's a bomb!" All the ladies ran out of the shelter in order of size, my mum, a hefty fourteen stone, followed by Mrs Oxton, Mrs. Bright, Mrs. Spilsbury, Mrs Hughes and finally diminutive Mrs. Smallshaw: it was quite a sight. The bomb turned out to be a small section of a Molotov cocktail, which when we applied a stirrup pump to it barely raised steam.

I was allocated to Lister Drive School as my first aid post, and the drill was that, when the all clear siren went, you had to make your way as quickly as possible to the post. I used to cycle to the post along Lower Breck Road, through Newsham Park, and down Lister Drive. After a few weeks of this, it was decided it would be better for us to sleep there when we were on duty, and this was arranged. The team consisted of one doctor, two nurses, six ladies, and four men. A business friend Bill Worthington was on my shift and he was good company. When nurses Eccles and Watson were on we used to go and have supper with them. We were able to play Badminton a lot, and we played cards as we listened to Lord Haw Haw, James Joyce, broadcasting from Germany with Nazi Propaganda. After the war he was executed for treason. The table tennis club became our headquarters, and the members would gather there most nights. To keep the league functioning, the number of players was reduced to teams of three, each member playing the three of the opposing side. About this time a soldier named Charlie Seaman was posted to Liverpool, and he joined our club. He was Southern area champion, and of course a great asset to us. When we played a match he automatically won his three games and Fred Harris and I only had to win one each out of three and we won the match. We won the championship in 1940, but after that it became too dangerous to travel, so competitions were abandoned.

My soldier mates used to come to the club quite often. We were playing cards one night when we heard a bomb coming down; the two soldiers dived under the table while the civvies calmly played. Another night a couple of the lads went to Ma Pates pub for a drink;

they came in a bit later quite shaken. We asked, "What's the matter?" They said, "They are brushing a tramcar up on the corner". A bomb had hit it while they were drinking a few yards away. Another night the raid was getting heavy, so I said "come on, we had better go down into the cellar". I led the way, and as I was on the bottom step, a bomb fell quite close, and Jennie Adelsberg jumped from the middle of the steps into my arms. I stood there stroking her hair, and saying to myself, "send 'em down!" A stick of four bombs had dropped hitting Suburban Road, missing the next street, and hitting the next street. Another night we were sitting in the cellar; I was next to Kath Gow, and Fred Harris was on the other side. It was a heavy raid, and I was holding her hand - until she got up, and I found I was holding Freddy's hand.

Most of the children had been evacuated during the early stages of the war, and the rest of the population more or less got used to the bombing, although hundreds used to go out to the country around Knowsley, and sleep in the fields. However, the war strengthened the community spirit, and people looked after each other. If, after a raid, someone had not been in the shelter, people would go and make sure they were all right. In our area we formed a community centre over a shop in Breck Road, which was very popular, we ran concerts, dances, bingo - anything to take our minds off the war. Between work, first aid post, table tennis club, and community centre, time went quite quickly. I went to work one morning to find that my little wooden office in Canada dock was in bits - a heavy bomb had hit the railway warehouse on the opposite side of Regent Road, and completely demolished the six story building: the blast had also damaged the property on the quayside. However, Mr Wivell came to the rescue and offered me accommodation in his office in Stanley Street, so we were able to carry on trading with minimum disruption. A little later our house was damaged. The windows were blown out, and when I went to bed it was covered in glass; the window frame was nodding to me.

9

Bob Connolly's son Frank was away in the RAF, and he was on his own, so he invited us to go and live with him in Teynham Crescent in Norris Green. This was a district on the edge of the city, and had been bomb free, so we accepted his offer, and we moved in with him. September to December 1940 saw continuous raids culminating in the December blitz, which saw the heaviest raids so far. Many people were killed, and a lot of property destroyed. I was at a party in the height of the December blitz. We went outside, and Liverpool was on fire. Wherever we looked huge fires were burning, and it seemed that Liverpool would have to be pushed into the river to extinguish them. Around this time, a ship loading munitions in Huskisson dock was set on fire, and ultimately blew up. Some of the ship's plates were blown to the top of Sandhills Lane, so great was the explosion. It completely destroyed the dock, which had to be filled in. The ship was the "Malakand".

December the 21st saw the heaviest raid yet. Bombs fell from 7:00 p.m. until 10.30 and from about midnight until 4.00 a.m. There was a particularly bad incident during this raid. A shelter in Botanic Park was threatened by an aerial torpedo hanging from a tree, so the shelter was evacuated, and some of the people made their way to the shelter in a school in Durning Road. A tram stopped and the passengers also went into the shelter, and later on that night it received a direct hit, which burst the heating boilers. 180 people were killed. The May blitz lasted eight days of varying intensity, but one night was particularly severe. I was at a party in Esmond Street, off Breck Road. We came out about midnight to look round, and looking down to the railway sidings at Breck Road station, an ammunition train had caught fire, and we could see railway wagons being hurled 50 feet into the air. It was like a vision of hell. Two railwaymen were given decorations for gallantry for their work in trying to free wagonloads of sea mines from the burning train. Walking home the next morning, all the trees were covered in cotton, which had been blown over a wide area. Townsend Lane was impassable and I had to take a wide detour to get home. Most of our gang were in the army, and only George Tomlinson and I were left of the gang, so we became good pals. He was a

good pianist, and we got into the habit of going to Talacre for weekends, to have a rest from the bombing. There was a social club there where the people gathered, and we used to try and resist going to it, and try to have a rest, but inevitably we were pulled towards it. We would say, "oh well, we'll just go for an hour", but as soon as we got in, there would be a shout, "here's George", they would push him on the piano, and that would be it, another 1:00 a.m. finish. My party piece was the sand dance, and I had to do that every night. When any of the gang was on leave, they would come, and we had some good times.

I recall one night when George Tomlinson, Harry Lloyd, George Owen and I went to the Royal Court Theatre. We had a drink or two before we went in. The attendant was taking tickets at the door, and intoning "stalls to the left, balcony to the right". He took one look at us and said, "toilets downstairs." We had a few bad nights at the first aid post. Lister Drive Power Station was just behind the school, and repeated raids were made trying to knock it out. We went for a drink to a pub in Green Lane. The next night it was just a heap of rubble. The May blitz was the worst. The bombing was so heavy; we all lay down in the cloakroom and we could hear the bombs dropping in the coal piles. I was playing my mouth organ to keep our spirits up, but I still wonder if they all might have preferred the bombs. We had a lot of casualties and we were kept busy all night.

10

Road Transport was a reserved occupation, which was why I was not called up at the beginning of the war. However in April 1942, I received my call-up papers, and I duly reported to Catterick Camp, to the Royal Armoured Corps at Menin Lines. A dozen of us arrived at the same time; we were booked in, kitted out, and shown to our Barrack room. We were given shirts, underwear, boots and socks, and a uniform covered in white powder that took several weeks to wear off. We were given a "housewife", a small pack of needles, thread, buttons and pins, which had to be displayed at every inspection. The biggest problem was the fact that the braces had no elastic in them, and if you bent down suddenly, one of the metal buttons would come off. It took some getting used to, and we all got fed-up sewing on buttons.

We all soon got used to the army routine, up at 6.30a.m, a run before breakfast, then kit inspection, and on to the parade ground for drill. It was a sight to see the Sergeant Major with his pace stick, measuring where officers should stand while watching drill. It was difficult to get a formation to keep in time when doing arms drill. To get round the problem, the Sergeant would put someone in the middle of the platoon who would keep time with murmurs of "Up two three, down two three", "trail arms", and similar commands, enabling the squad to keep time, and look good to the onlooker. I was in that position for our passing out parade. We were all taught to drive, and we practised on the roads around Catterick. There were two routes - a red and a blue, but conveniently each had a café on the route, so we were able to have a break. We learned map reading, and to qualify we had to take a vehicle from Catterick to York using a map. When passing out as a driver, we drove from Catterick to Redcar and back. The best trip however was when we passed our signalling course. We had a trip to the Lake District. Our party climbed Helvellyn over Striding Edge, the other party climbed a mountain facing, and when we were near the top we signalled each other with Morse lamps. We slept in the open, making beds of bracken on the mountainside. The following day we had a trip to Egremont on the Cumberland coast, and had a nice day before going back to Catterick.

We used to go on a lot of route marches to toughen up, and one weekend there was a walking competition - the Catterick 20 mile walk for teams of four. The Sergeant had already marked three men for his first squad, people who had walked miles in their civilian jobs - one was a gamekeeper on the Derbyshire Dales. He looked round the squad and asked, "Does anyone feel fit to do twenty miles?" In a weak moment I said, "Yes, I feel all right", so he said, "All right, you are in". There was a huge field as all regiments had entered teams. It was quite a hot afternoon, and we all went off. I got a hint or two from an experienced walker and plodded on. After about two hours a couple of sergeants came out to see how I was doing, and

said the other three were well placed. I plodded on, and after more time had elapsed the sergeants came out again and said the others had got home, and if I completed the course our team would win, and to make sure they kept dowsing me with water. I don't know whether I walked or swam the last mile, however I managed it, and our team was first. We were presented with Savings Certificates for winning. I was so tired that I went to bed after tea. The following morning, we had to change barracks, and I could hardly walk I was so stiff I had to get some of the lads to carry my gear round, and a couple to help me walk round to the new billet.

If you were interested in sport, you could do quite well in the army. It was not long before I was picked for the Squadron table tennis team, which played the other units in the Catterick Area (a corporal saw me playing one night, and recruited me.) That was really good. We played matches against the RAY at Leeming Bar, and all round the area. After we completed our driving course we were put onto driving Bren gun carriers. We used to drive them up to the top of the moors. They were peculiar vehicles. If you did not concentrate on your driving, they would take charge and move violently to the left or right or go through a farmer's fence, which happened to me once. It was beautiful on the moors, with the purple of the heather and the golden yellow of the gorse, and a panorama of the Dales. It was a beautiful summer.

The time came to move, and we were moved down to Bovington on a signals course. Bovington was the training centre for tank driving and all types of tanks were running around. I had a go at driving a Valentine tank several times, but it was only a small one. However it was good experience. When we completed our course, the squadron moved over to Lulworth Cove, and we did normal training there. The year was coming to its close, and on my birthday, December the 7th, I went to the pictures with my two mates, Todd and Myers. After the show I said, "It's my birthday so I will take you for a drink". When we got in the pub, it was full of our mates, and ATS girls, so we had a real good session, and I was really drunk for the second time in my life. We reeled back to Camp shouting abuse at the sentries on the way in. We managed to get to the barrack room, and I got undressed. I was on the top bunk, and as I lay down I felt really sick. I slid in my bunk from one end, continued, and slid out of the other. I staggered to the toilets clad in my vest and underpants, in the cold December night, ploughing barefoot through the mud. When I arrived I was violently sick, and I was in the toilet for a long time. After half an hour one of my mates brought me my greatcoat, which was a great help. I was out about two and a half hours in all being sick most of the time. Surprisingly, I felt fine at breakfast time, and I could not find enough to eat - a memorable birthday. Later in the month we were told we were going abroad, so we packed our goods and chattels, and were loaded on to a train for Liverpool Pier Head. It was a train with old-fashioned carriages with no toilets, and it was an uncomfortable journey. It was rumoured that one of our lads dashed up the gangway and said to a seaman "where are the toilets?" The seaman said, "Port side"; the lad said, "Blimey, I can't wait that long!"

We were loaded on to the good ship Esperance Bay, and we pulled out into the river. I went on deck when it was dark, and I saw the lights at Seacombe move away. I thought, "Oh, we are off already, but next minute there was a big bang, and we hit a ship ahead of us - our ship had dragged its anchor. We were taken into Gladstone dock for damage inspection, and I could see people I knew on the quayside. Some of the troops got excited, and said, "We will get survivors' leave," but they were very disappointed.

The Officer-in-Charge asked for a volunteer to be the CO's batman, so weighing things up, hours off guard duty, P.T. and drills, I decided that batman would be a cushy number, so volunteered, and it turned out indeed to be a cushy number. I had not a lot to do, and I would sit in the CO's cabin, do a bit of tidying up, and then have tea and cakes, supplied by his steward. The first morning, one of the lads found he had been sleeping on a rat. Our mess deck consisted of a number of large tables, seating twelve, and at meal times we had to take turns to fight our way to the galley down below, and bring up the rations for our twelve.

It was funny when we set sail. It was cold, wet and windy December weather, and first one would be missing at meal times, then three or four more would be missing until after about ten days, there was nobody at all. However as they found their sea legs, they slowly drifted back. There was a canteen selling sweets and chocolate and such like, but it sold out completely inside forty-eight hours, so that was that. We did a fair amount of P.T. on deck, and to defeat boredom, we would have discussions on various topics. We sailed North from Liverpool, and picked up more ships for our convoy near the North of Scotland. We then sailed West, North of Ireland, for many days across the Atlantic. We then turned south and sailed towards Africa. At one stage, we met a fierce force 10 gale, which lasted two days. When we left Liverpool, the water line was nearly forty feet below us, but during the gale it was forty feet above us. We eventually arrived at Freetown on New Years Day, 1943, and we queued up for an hour to buy a bottle of beer to celebrate.

11

It is a completely different life in the army. You are given a number, which you never forget (mine was 7957437), and you lose your own identity. You just obey orders, and go wherever the authorities send you, you have no options, just obey orders, and it is surprising how some are lucky, and others are just unlucky, as will be illustrated later. On New Years Day 1943, we set sail for Durban. It was beautiful in the South Atlantic, blue skies and calm seas; we sunbathed on deck and watched the flying fish, and the porpoises having steeplechases around the ship. As we neared Durban, we were called to a meeting on deck, and we were informed we would get a fortnight's leave in Durban, but we would not get paid, as the good folk of Durban would provide us with accommodation and entertainment - parties, shows and hospitality- so we all looked forward to arriving at Durban. About this time it was found that the cooks had been short changing us on our rations, so we all got extra rations for the rest of the voyage.

We docked about noon in blazing sunshine and far from being entertained, were force-marched in full kit carrying our large and small packs and kitbags five miles along the docks, and straight on to another boat. We had been at sea six weeks and our legs were not up to that sort of walk. There was nearly a mutiny, soldiers were throwing down their kit and sitting by it exhausted, while the officers tried to make them get up and walk. It was a proper shambles. The only bright spot was the ship we were to join was the Nieuw Amsterdam, the flagship of the Holland American Line. It was a beautiful ship, and we were allocated four to a cabin, instead of hammocks. We had our meals in the impressive first class dining room, decorated with Dutch art. The food was very good too, and when we were on guard duty, the crew would leave coffee and sandwiches out for us. It was a pleasant voyage to Port Tewfick at the south end of the Suez Canal. We were put on a train standing on the quay for a run alongside the canal to Cairo. This was the first time I encountered mahomedan toilets, a hole in the floor, and two footprints, one each side, to enable you to squat.

We arrived at Cairo station, and were loaded on to tramcars to take us to Mena Camp, not far from the Pyramids. We were shown our tents, and proceeded to get organised. We were able to get into Cairo on the open sided trams, and when the conductor came for the fare, there would be a chorus of "Farouk will pay". The trains were open sided, with bench seats right across from side to side, and in rush hour people getting on one side, would push people off on the other side. It was something of an ordeal in Cairo. The boot boys, if you refused a shoeshine, would chase after you, and threaten to plaster you with black shoe polish. They were a real pest. Cairo was a busy, fascinating place full of all nations, and we had a good time there. There was a cinema in the desert in a big barn, and we could see rats running around the beams while the show was on. We visited the Pyramids but we were pestered by camel drivers and guides and souvenir sellers, so we did not go too often. I did go into the burial chamber in the centre of the large Pyramid, the Pyramid of Cheops, and I never realised how intense was the darkness. The guide put the lights out, and you could literally feel the

darkness. I would have hated to have been alone in there. The food and the conditions, sand and heat, conspired to give most of us gyp tummy, and the latrines were very popular until we settled down.

We were sent out originally as reinforcements for the 45th tank regiment, but it was badly hit during the Alamein battle and it was taken out of the line. By the time we got to Egypt, the battlefield was at the other side of Africa, and the staff were at a loss to decide what to do with us, so they decided to make up two drafts, one to go to India, and one to Iraq. It looked as if the posting to India would be the best, as the army was well established in India, but I was put on the Iraq draft, which was not very attractive. However those who went to India got mixed up in the Burma campaign, so I could consider myself lucky to go to Iraq.

We saw the draft off to India, and a couple of days later it was our turn. We were ferried to Tel el Kabir, where we collected a fleet of 3 ton Bedford trucks, and set out on our journey. We were then told we were going to Baghdad. We crossed the Suez Canal, and went into the Sinai desert, passing Mount Sinai on the way. A road had been built across the desert, and there was nothing to see but miles and miles of sand. The amazing thing is that, although you did not see anybody, as soon as the convoy stopped for a break, Arabs would appear out of the sand as if by magic, and we had to keep a close eye on all our equipment.

After a couple of days we arrived in Palestine. It was harvest time; people would throw oranges into the back of our trucks, and the troops would throw sweets and cigarettes in return. We motored through Palestine on to another desert, which led us to Iraq. We camped on the outskirts of Baghdad and were able to explore the developed new City, but it was the old city and Souk that was fascinating. The street of the silversmiths was full of craftsmen, each in his own little compartment making really amazing jewellery designs. Other parts had craftsmen making things from wood; others would be hammering metal dishes, howls, and baths. It was great to watch. I bought a star atlas, which was very useful. I used to study it when we were camped in the desert in Iraq.

12

We came again to the parting of the ways. A party was made up to take some of the trucks on to Iran, but I missed out on that one. Those who were left were told we were to go to Basra, to join a regiment. We were taken to Baghdad station and put on a train for Basra, an overnight journey. The train was very full, and I had to rope myself in a luggage rack to get some sleep. It was late night when we reached the Regiment, and we just went to bed on the desert floor. We wakened to find we were fully-fledged members of the 14th/20th Kings Hussars. We were allocated to tents, had a kit examination, and were allocated to duties. I was placed on the quartermaster's staff as he was in need of another clerk, which was a good move for me. The regiment had been in India for seven years, and they were all ready to go home to England when the war started, and they were diverted to Iraq. The regiment was pleased to see us, because it meant some of them would be able to go home on leave. As there was a shortage of officers a number of soldiers had been made up. The quartermaster, Captain Drew, was one of the lucky ones and he appreciated his position. My duties consisted of going to H.Q. for rations, beer and cigarettes, and occasionally chocolate, and distributing them to the messes, the Officers, the Sergeants, and other ranks. It kept me quite busy. After a few weeks, we got orders to move, and we joined an Indian division, just outside Mosul, where we were guarding the oil wells around the district. We were camped in the desert in tents, and it was amazing. As soon as the cooks put out the food for lunch, a dust devil, a small tornado-like wind, would lift dust all over the food. We were fed on Soya link sausages and corned beet and the diet was monotonous, but we could often buy melons, which was a help. It was very hot, and at noon your shadow was just a circle round your feet. The first parade, at 6:30 a.m., was salt parade; we took our mugs full of water, and a large tablespoon full of salt was dumped in it, and the mug had to be emptied. Towards afternoon your shirt would be covered in salt under the armpits.

It was not a very healthy place; at one time 50% of the Regiment were down with malaria or sand fly fever. We spent a lot of time exercising with the division. Some of the Indian drivers were not very good, and it was hair-raising to be driving up and down nullahs (dried water courses) wondering if the Indian driver behind would ram you. After 4:00 p.m., when the heat had diminished, we played football against the other squadrons. Sometimes teams would be picked according to name initials, and we would have a knockout competition with 8 teams. This was taken very seriously, and the games were good to watch, and to play in. It was a monotonous existence, and the only relief was a travelling cinema, which would put up a huge transparent screen. When it was an English film, the white troops would sit in front of the screen and the Indian troops would watch from the back, while when it was an Indian film, the positions would be reversed. After we had a shower or two of rain the desert started showing signs of green vegetation, including some flowers and grass, but that situation did not last long, as it attracted a plague of locusts. It was an awesome sight. The locusts were in the hopping stage, and for twenty-four hours over a front of more than three miles, they hopped in a dense mass. They got into our tents and kitbags, and whatever we did, they marched on. It was an incredible sight. Some days later, we went out on a scheme, the locusts were then flying, and for a whole day we ran through a storm of locusts up to fifty feet high. Needless to say there was not a shred of green to be seen after they passed over the desert.

One time the Quartermaster decided to have a break so we loaded a truck with supplies, and headed up north to a place called Ruandu Gorge, up in the hills. It was the place where an old film, *Lost Horizons*, was filmed. It was a cleft in the mountains, and we were driving along a narrow path about eight feet wide, with a two hundred feet drop down to the river on the driver's side - it was a bit scary. We had three days pottering about the countryside, and it was a change to see trees grass and rivers. On the way back we stopped at a little village, and were invited into one of the small houses for a cup of tea by Iraqis who proudly announced that they were Christians; they seemed quite glad to meet Christian brothers. We got back to camp, and resumed normal duties.

The next incident was a bit of a panic. Greek troops, who were in Mena camp in Egypt, waiting for transport to go to Italy, started fighting among themselves, the Greek Communists fighting the Greek Royalists. As our regiment was the only Armoured Regiment left in the Middle East, we had to make a swift dash to Egypt. We surrounded the camp with our tanks, quelled the fighting, and took the Greeks prisoner. We sorted them out, took the Communists to one prison camp, and the Royalists to another. Then we headed back to Iraq. It was quite a change from the usual boring routine. I played my part, taking beer and cigarettes to the troops doing the work.

Eventually we heard rumours that there was going to be a huge assault on Europe, and we played our part in a huge bluff. We were sent to a camp on the Mediterranean coast, near a huge airfield. The Taurus express ran near the airfield, which was filled with dummy planes and tanks, and when the train was due to pass a few real tanks would run round kicking up a fog of dust, so observers on the train would only see dimly what appeared to be regiments of tanks, and lots of aeroplanes. The regiment's part in the deception was a masterpiece. The tank crews were all issued with different tank regiment badges, we would put our tanks on a ship early in the morning, take them up to Aleppo, near the Turkish border, and discharge them on to the dockside. As soon as it was dark, they were loaded on to tank transporters, and taken overnight back to the sea-loading base. The tanks were then loaded back on to the ships, and again taken to Aleppo, where the procedure took place again, and the tanks were again moved back by road. This went on for several weeks, all to give the Germans the impression that we were preparing to push through Turkey. We heard later that the German High Command took the threat seriously, and did in fact move a division from the channel defences.

Eventually we moved to a camp between Tyre and Sidon. We organised a Regimental Dance in Beirut when we arrived at our new campsite, and the girls from the American University attended. It seemed funny attending a dance after so long, but it was a great

success. I made friends with a Polish girl, Anna Davidowitz, and I occasionally went in to see her at the University, and went to the cinema or for a coffee; it was a nice change. She took me to see her family who had suffered in a Russian refugee camp. When the Russians came into the war on our side, they just opened the gates of the refugee camps, and let the refugees out. They did not give them any help at all, and they had to make their way through Russia, and Iraq and some of them made their way down to Beirut. They suffered hardships on the way, and were very distressed when they arrived.

13

Our camp was beside the Mediterranean Sea, and I set up the regimental shop on a small hill overlooking the sea. I was able to swim every day, as there was a nice little bay at the foot of the hill. At this time the Brigadier came to the regiment, and told us that we would never get to war, as it would be over before we got anywhere near, so we started doing civilian courses - bricklaying, accountancy, woodwork, office work, and metal work - and we were all enjoying ourselves, with occasional trips to Beirut, and travels around the hills. We were all quite content, approaching Christmas 1944 except for our C.O. He was not satisfied; he jumped on to a plane, and went to GHQ Cairo. He went in and said, "I have a fully trained regiment dying to get into action". He came back on New Year's Eve, called us all into the mess room, and said proudly, "Gentlemen I have good news for you; we are going to Italy to fight". You could imagine the reaction: "You stupid B**** - why could you not keep your mouth shut!"

Anyway a few days later we were in Haifa, and the Sergeant Major said "I have been waiting years to say this: fall in facing the boat". We set sail across the Med, and a few days later we arrived in Taranto. It was bitterly cold, and we were in flower show-type marquees. Being on the quartermaster's staff, I was lucky enough to acquire a table to sleep on. Every night we would go for a half-mile run to get warm, then we would jump into bed. We were allocated trucks; I was given a three-ton Bedford with a canvas canopy. My first job was to go to a vinery outside the town, and collect three barrels of wine, which were placed across the back. I also acquired a stove, which kept me warm at night. I had a great surprise one afternoon; one of my mates from the Boys Brigade walked in -he was the Provost Marshall's clerk in Taranto, had seen my Regiment had arrived, and decided to visit. Well, he stayed the night; we made up two beds, one each side of the stove, got two pieces of hose pipe, placed the pipes in the barrels of wine, and lay back and sucked - it was a great night, what I can remember of it.

We soon got our marching orders; we set out from Taranto, and ran up through Italy, until we arrived outside Florence, to take over some dug-in tanks. I was stationed in a little village up in the hills overlooking Florence. It was a very pretty place. Every night an American convoy of about fifty trucks would dash through the village at a very high speed - they were all black drivers, and how they never had an accident I'll never know, they were absolutely mad. A little girl used to hang around my truck. The people were very poor, and I would occasionally give her some sweets and chocolate, and odd tins of food. I was asked into their cottage for a drink one night - her mother was a widow, and the Germans had shot her only son as a partisan. It was quite sad.

After a couple of weeks I was called in by the Quartermaster, given three hundred pounds, a truck and a driver, and instructions to go back to Taranto, and buy some more wine, so off we went. We decided to try and make Rome our first stop, so we stepped on it. We arrived in Rome about five thirty, and were looking for somewhere to stay. A South African soldier said, "come and stay in our transit camp", so we went with him to a square, which housed a rest camp as well as the transit camp. We parked up, and he asked, "Have you been to Rome before?" We said, "No", so he said, "I'll go and get the Colonel's car". He collected the car and proceeded to give us a tour of Rome - the Vatican, the squares, the pyramid, the Trevisi fountain. It was very interesting. When we got back to the camp, we found there was a

dance on, so we had a good night's entertainment. It was a lovely moonlight night, and I was sleeping on top of the truck.

At about half past one there was a bit of a commotion. A Scots Guard sergeant, about six foot four tall, dressed in his kilt, and stoned out of his mind was reeling across the square, shouting at the top of his voice: "there's a place up there called the Vatican, and there's a bloke there called the Pope, and he's a bloody Catholic, but I'll get him", and he swayed to his billet. The next day we ran as far as Foggia, where we stopped in an Italian army post. The next night we stopped at an American outpost, then we motored on to Taranto, where we stayed with my mate, Harry Lloyd. The next day Harry and I went out to the vineyard to buy the wine. Unfortunately, while Harry was backing me in, he gave me a wrong sign, and I hit the gatepost, and a marble ball fell off the top. The owner came bounding out swearing in Italian, but when I showed him the five hundred pounds we had to spend, he calmed down, and we spent a nice afternoon in the cellar. "Try this" - "very nice we will have a barrel of that". We spent about four hours tasting, and made a good selection of six barrels to take away. We spent another night in Taranto, and left the following morning. We had to go to Bari to collect a couple of our lads from hospital. We went back to Foggia, and picked up another casualty. We then made our way back to Florence, by-passing Rome. It was quite a nice ten-day trip.

In the early spring of 1945, the Regiment was ordered to move across country to Rimini on the Adriatic side, ready for the last push in Italy. We moved up to a little village called Ruffio, and after a couple of weeks, we organised a Saturday night dance in the village square, which helped to put us on good terms with the locals. My mate on the Q.M.'s staff had a portable gramophone; we palled in with three girls from a local farm, and on occasion, we would take it round and have an evening's dancing. We also had a singsong, and my party piece was "there was an old man who had an old sow". "Cantare questa!" they would say, and I had to sing it every time. The girls had a hard life; they were in the fields during the daylight, and ten had to do household chores in the evening. They were an Austrian family who moved down into Italy to improve their life style. We used to go to village dances, but the girls warned us not to speak to them there. As they said "we have to live here after you have gone, and the local lads would not have anything to do with us if they thought we were fraternising."

Eventually we moved out of Ruffio, and moved north to where we could hear sounds of gunfire. C.O. called us all together, and wished us all well and said goodbye. He had had a nervous breakdown, and went home to England, leaving us very near the front line. We moved up to north of Venice for the last push, and we were given an objective - to capture a village called Medicina, where the Germans were holding out. At that stage in the war, to take an objective, you would normally reconnoitre around the outskirts to find the strong points and plan your attack: not the 14th/20th Hussars! They decided on a frontal attack right up the main street; the Germans were taken completely by surprise, and the action was over very quickly, with a minimum of casualties.

While this was going on, I was fifty miles south with two lorries picking up our rations of beer, cigarettes, chocolate and suchlike. We loaded the two lorries, and set off. The road was very rough, and the back lorry ran into my truck, causing petrol to spill, and ignite in the engine. A Ghurka ran up with a fire extinguisher, and put the fire out without it causing any damage, but the rear truck had bashed his radiator, and could not drive, so I got a stout rope, hitched him to the back, and towed it nearly fifty miles on a very hot afternoon, along severely damaged roads and tracks which were covered in dust. We were absolutely exhausted when we caught up with the regiment, and looking forward to a rest and some food, but the Quartermaster said that the lads were eagerly awaiting their beer and cigarettes, so I was forced to unload the two trucks, and give each squadron their issue of beer, cigarettes and other things. It took over two hours to make the distribution, and I was out on my feet when I finished.

As the war was coming to a close, our Officers decided to try and get into Austria before hostilities ceased. In the event we ran out of petrol, and only got as far as Trieste, so we set up camp there. There was a bridge across the bay, which led to Yugoslavia; there was a Yugoslav soldier at one end, and an Italian soldier at the other, and we had to put one of our lads in the middle, to stop them shooting each other. There was a little place called Klagenfords near by, and I went there to see an open-air performance of the Barber of Seville. It was lovely sitting in a garden under the stars, and listening to beautiful singing, on a warm summer evening. An unforgettable experience.

14

The war was over now, and we moved across to Milan, where we lived in a block of flats in the city centre. Milan is a nice city, with beautiful shopping arcades, and a splendid cathedral. I saw the spot where Mussolini and his mistress were hanged by the citizens. My only regret was that the Opera House was closed - I would have loved to have seen an opera there. We then moved to a German army barracks in Luneberg for a spell. It was a nice place, except for the children spitting at you as they walked past. Our next move was to the channel coast, and the army sent out a call for clerks. I volunteered to go on the course, and being an office wallah, I had no difficulty passing the exam. I left the regiment on the coast, and went to a transit camp in Bielfeld, Germany. I went to the orderly office, told them I could type, and asked if they wanted any help; they accepted my offer and I settled in there. All the postings used to come through the office, and when we learned that the camp was to close in three weeks, there was a mad scatter to find ourselves good postings. One came in for a clerk wanted in the Intelligence Corps at Bad Oynhausen in the Black Forest. I said, "This will do me", so I duly posted myself to Bad Oynhausen. I had a successful interview there, and I was posted to the Intelligence Office in Bremen, which was in the American enclave.

There were ten of us housed in a villa, with a German cook, and two maids to look after us. After a few weeks, six men were transferred back to their regiments, and only the four of us were left. It was a good posting because we were able to use all the American facilities, a country club with a nine-hole golf course, 12 tennis courts and a swimming pool, together with a clubhouse with a dance floor, and a library. In the town there were ice cream parlours and cinemas, so we had plenty of diversions. We used to play nine holes of golf before breakfast. We worked office hours, nine until six. We had agents in the field searching for Nazi collaborators, particularly members of the SS, and all the reports came through our office, so we were kept very busy. After a while we got a new officer, a chap called Morgan from Blackburn. He took a shine to me and had me made up to Corporal, back dated twelve months, so I got a windfall in pay. We also had a Sergeant Lubbock, a member of the political family of the same name. It was a very pleasant life. However towards the end of 1946 it came to an end. The Control Commission for Europe was formed, and a Liverpool lad and girl, civilians, arrived to take over. I had the pleasure of teaching them the job, me on army pay, and they on substantial salaries. It all came to an end in December, when I was posted back to England, and sent to York for demobilisation. Thus ended my army career, four years and eight months after it began.

15

Looking through earlier chapters, I find I have missed several incidents, which are worth recalling. During my dancing days, I was at a dance at India Buildings, with a girl called Cecilie. At 11:00,clock she said, "I'll have to go and get my bus," so I volunteered to escort her. We arrived at the Pier Head to find that the last bus to Huyton had departed. After a little thought, we decided to get a Prescott tram, and get off at the Bluebell Pub and walk the two miles to Huyton. Fortunately it was dry. We arrived at her home at midnight, and I was faced with a four-mile walk to Norris Green. Cecilie then had a bright idea; she said I'd lend

you my bike. That was an inspiration. I was in evening dress, so I tucked my dress trousers into my socks, put my silk scarf around my ears, and pedalled off into the cold night. An unforgettable experience.

India Buildings Dance Hall was a bit unlucky for me. Another time, I was dancing with a girl named Iris Larkey, when someone tripped us up, so I felt duty bound to take her home. She lived off Upper Parliament Street, about two miles from the hall. I took her home, and then I was faced with a three-mile walk home to Norris Green, which, after a night's dancing, was hard work.

When we were stationed in Lebanon, a party was organised to go to Petra, in southern Jordan, and eight of us set off with a truck and rations. We stayed the first night in Jerusalem, and next day crossed the border into Jordan. We passed through Amaan, and went on into the desert. We stopped the night at El Salt, in a post run by Glubb Pasha's troops. The following day we ascended into the mountains, and threaded our way through passes, until we went down near to Petra. We had to leave our truck, and walk a couple of miles to the entrance. This was a gap in the hills about thirty feet wide, with towering pink sandstone cliffs on each side. Along one side a gutter had been carved out of the sandstone, and this was where the water supply to the city had entered'. The approach broadened, and on each side were buildings carved out of the pink rock. There was a vast excavation called the Treasury, another large cave was the triclinium or dining hall. There were steps to a first floor level, with scores of dwelling places all carved out of the sandstone; at the farther end of the city were the tombs, which merited a good look, and on top of a large cliff was a place of sacrifice. There was a stunning view from the top, and to look over the city, glowing in the sunshine shining on the pink stone, was a sight to remember, no wonder it is called Petra the rose red city, half as old as time. We spent a full day exploring, and we were loath to leave it. It was well worth the journey and hardship to get there, and it will live in my memory forever.

The Isle of Man was a very popular place for holidays before the war, and it was quite cheap. My mother would give me a £5 note for a week's holiday. This would be 12,6d for the boat trip, 2 guineas for a 9-week's accommodation at Cunningham's Camp and the balance would be your pocket money for the week. There was dancing every morning, a big games room, and of course the island to explore. Supper was great, you could have as much as you wanted every night and the food generally was very good; it was a great week's holiday. The best holiday however was in 1938. Howstrake Camp was opened as a mixed camp for the first time, and I went with George Tomlinson and Jack Morton. We palled in with three lads from Barnsley, who had a piano accordion and a set of drums. There was dancing every night and our gang made the camp hum with our music. After the dancing we would organise lines and do the conga through bedrooms and tents, and would have lines of more than 50 on each side playing daft games like here we come gathering nuts in May. It was hilarious. We went to see the camp manager on the Thursday morning to ask him if we could have an extra hours dancing if we provided the music. He said, you lads have made this camp go this week, you can certainly have extra time, and I will be there to watch, so everybody was pleased at the prospect of extra dancing. Friday night was concert night, so we composed a song for the occasion to open the show. It went like this,

O come down to Howstrake for your holiday,
 Where days are so happy and nights are so gay
 The staff are all cheerful, and full of good cheer
 And up in the Groudle there's lots of good beer.
 The headwaiter here is a very good chap,
 And helps to put Howstrake right on the map.
 Every morning at nine you will hear him say
 Is there anyone here going riding today?
 The night watchmen here have very good eyes
 It's no use telling a great deal of lies
 But really you'll find them very discreet
 For many's the time they've tripped over my feet.

It went down very well. It was a pity the war came along to spoil the fun. Howstrake was a romantic place, set on a hillside with grassy slopes leading down to the rocks and the sea, with a full moon shining from a cloudless sky over Douglas bay. It was quite inspiring:

When I see moonlight my thoughts to you turn,
 And to hold you again my arms sadly yearn.
 The moon was a silvery ship sailing by,
 And the sea was sighing a sweet lullaby.
 In the distance was heard a lonely birds cry
 'Twas its benediction on you and I.

The only trouble is, I can't remember the girl.

When I had my first leave from Milan, it was quite a good trip. We had an Italian train to Domodossala on the Swiss border. We went into the dining hall, and saw food we only had memories of. Bacon and eggs, roast beef, and lamb, roast potatoes, vegetables of every description, with sweets to finish. It was a memorable meal after the army rations we had been living on. A Swiss electric locomotive took over, and we saw all the gorgeous peaceful Swiss countryside until we arrived in France. A French train took us to Calais, and so on to the boat for England. A train to London, change stations to a Liverpool train, and home to a wrecked city of Liverpool. I found that my mates, George Owen, Harry Lloyd and Fred Wright were also on leave, so we decided to go to our week end retreat, Talacre, for the week end, we were on the platform at Rhyl, when the train came in, we saw a carriage with a young lady in it, so we piled into it. Fred was in a scotch regiment, and he sat down in his kilt, opposite to the girl, and she was a bit embarrassed. However I was very pleased to see that the girl also got off at Talacre.

We went down to the club after tea, and I was delighted to see the girl there. I danced with Myra all night, and over the week end we became very close, and it was a wrench when my leave was up, and I had to return to my regiment, however I promised to write every day to her, and I kept my promise, as I was really smitten. Myra kept all my letters and they are now with my daughter. That is how I came to meet my beloved wife.

It was strange coming back into civilian life, after being subject to army discipline. Liverpool had been badly damaged by bombing, and reconstruction was in full swing. My good friend Mr. Wivell had been true to his word, and had kept my job going through the war, so I was luckily able to go back to my job with Cowan & co. Office space was scarce, so I had to move from Mr Wivell's office and take up shared accommodation with a firm of flour importers in Old Hall Street. Most of the old customers stayed with the firm and very quickly it was business as usual. My greatest delight was that I was able to resume my friendship with Myra and call for her at her house. She lived in a large three-storey house, with cellars in Durning road. It had been a semi-detached house, but a bomb had detached the other house, and there was a blank space where it had stood,

There was a lot of land at the back, which was ideal for the family business of building and repairs; Myra came from a large family of four brothers and one sister. Her eldest brother was killed. He was an air gunner, and was shot down over Arnhem. It was quite disconcerting when calling on her, to see her young brothers John and David leering at me through the banisters. Mr. Hawkins took a fancy to me, and he would talk for hours, giving me little chance to talk to Myra, and many a night when we were finally alone, I would hear the last tram go past, and I would be faced with a four mile walk home to Norris Green. We were late coming home from a dance one night; we looked through the letter box and saw Myra's father waiting up for us, fortunately he was asleep, so we took the lid off the coal cellar, and I lowered Myra down through the coal hole. Next day when he enquired what time had she got in, she said oh I was quite early.

We went to the cinema, which usually meant queuing up for a while, and we went dancing a lot, so the time passed by happily enough. We often went to football matches queuing to stand on the Kop. At Manchester City's ground Myra told a City supporter off for using bad language in her hearing.

I was accepted in the family by now, and we used to go to stay with her relations in Handsworth and West Bromwich. Her Uncle was a manager at Kenrick & Jefferson, and lived in the company house next to the works, her cousins Harold and Steven were both married so we did not see much of them. Myra had a hard childhood. Her father brought the family from Birmingham to get a job on the building of Lewis' large store. They lived in a large house in Beaumont Street. They took in lodgers: on top were two ladies who had been in the Doyly Carte Opera Co, an uncle had another room, and a third was occupied by an Irish labourer called Mick. Mrs Hawkins also took in washing, and often Myra was sent up to the local barber to ask if he had any washing. When times were really hard Mrs Hawkins would go to the West Derby Board of Guardians for help, and would be given half a crown to feed the family for a week.

Myra was very clever, and was the only one of the family to be allowed to go to a high school. She went to Liverpool College for girls. She only had one blouse and had to wash it every night to be fresh for school. Myra's father was in the Royal Horse Artillery during the First World War and was promoted to Captain on the field, He used to tell tales, of horses mysteriously disappearing, and next day in the local butchers shop there would be a sign, Cheval aujourd'hui. When the war started he was made a captain in the Local Defence Volunteers, and worked closely with Mr. Jim Waterworth, the owner of a string of green grocery shops. His family was evacuated from Liverpool, John and David went to Wales, and Myra went to live with two maiden ladies, and their brother, in West Kirby. Willy played golf, and lunch was delayed every day until he came in, by which time the food was cold. They were then all treated to details of his round, "I did the first in five, went into the rough at five," etc. etc. This was the pattern every day, and Myra got so sick of golf that if at any time I mentioned I would like to play I got a lot of abuse, so I gave up trying.

Later on Mr. Hawkins took a house at Rhostrevon, behind Caernarvon, and he used to go up at weekends. He was a very kind man, and if any one in the neighbourhood got badly bombed, he would send them to stay with Lil in Rhostrevon, and consequently the house was always full. He had a habit of giving furniture to bombed families, and when they did get back to Liverpool, the house had been stripped. From Rhostrevon they moved to Talacre, which was much handier, as there was a direct rail link to Liverpool and Dad could visit more frequently. Myra joined the civil service, and worked in the Ministry of Works Financial Division in Queens Hotel, Rhyl. There she became friends with a Doris Broome, and it lasted all their lives.

And their friendship affected our lives. One day, Myra and I went for a day out at Southport, and while we were sitting on a seat by the lake, we decided it was time to think about getting married, so I formally proposed, and we were both very happy. I went home and told my mother, who was very pleased. We planned our wedding at our local church of St Cyprian, for the 3rd April the next year, 1948. It was a difficult time to marry. Rationing was

still in force, and you were only allowed a few docketts for furniture. Myra was very enterprising, and bought a parachute panel, and made her own silk underwear. We bought a three-piece suite, second-hand, and were able to obtain a new Axminster carpet, if we let the owner make covers for our suite. Myra was a genius; she took a day off work, to see how it was done, and set to and made a second pair. We had a double bed, a kitchen table with two chairs, some bedding, and linen, and a few pots and pans. It was a real struggle to acquire the necessities.

The biggest problem was trying to find somewhere to live; accommodation was at a premium, and as our wedding day drew near, we were in a bit of a panic. Luckily we had a friend, Betty Davis, and she came to tell us she had found a flat for us. One of her friends had taken a large house off Oriel Road, Bootle, and was prepared to let us have a first floor flat. This was a great relief, and we jumped at the offer. We were fortunate to be able to hire the Conservative hall, practically next to the Church for the reception and a firm of caterers supplied the food. One of Myra's uncles, Bert, wrote and said "I have not been invited. I suppose this is an oversight, so we are coming anyway." Myra had to get in touch with the caterers; to see if they could lay on for an extra four, but owing to tight rationing it was not possible. However we were pleased when he did not arrive. We slipped out of the reception, and went down town to the Stork Hotel, where we had our first night. The following morning, we boarded a bus for Hawkshead in the Lake District, where we stayed on a farm just outside the town. It had been recommended by a friend, Winstanley, and it was great. We had a lovely bedroom, our own sitting room, and being a farm we had food that we had not seen for a long time.

We used to walk round the hills; it was lovely, as the daffodils were just beginning to appear. We went to the cinema, and attended a fancy dress dance with the farmer and his wife. I won a prize for my pirate costume. We used to go to the local pub, and watch the antics of the old men playing dominoes. It was great fun. The week went quickly, and it was soon time to return and take up residence in our first home. At this time Myra was secretary to the Head of the Ministry of Works in Exchange Buildings, and I was based in Old Hall Street, so we travelled to work together on the train from Oriel Road Station, which was just around the corner from where we lived. We registered for rations at a grocer in Derby Road, J.J. Gordon. They had a lot of seamen registered with them, who sailed regularly to Ireland, and were able to get what they liked there, so often we were able to acquire extra rations, which was a big help.

The house was owned by Ted and Eileen Westcott, who had a four-year-old daughter, and a young son. Ted was learning to be a Vet at Liverpool University, and took a job as a tram conductor, to help pay for his studies. We became great friends, and on Saturday nights Ted started to teach us to play Bridge, and we would play until two or three o'clock in the morning. The little lad Martin fell ill, and Eileen was a bit perplexed. Myra had a look at him, and told Eileen to take him to the doctor right away, as she thought he had developed Pink's disease, which I had never heard of. However, Eileen took him to the doctor who confirmed that he did have Pink's disease, so that helped our friendship on.

Myra was of course working with Doris, and she and Harry Holt came to our wedding, and some months later Doris and Harry married and went to live in Rhyl. There was a girl in the office named Millicent, who had a senior position, but who got up everybody's nose with her airs and graces. The civil service exams came round, and Milly announced that she was going to enter, to regularise her position. Myra also decided to enter. In the event Milly did not pass, but Myra did, and every one was delighted, they encouraged Myra by saying, "you should demand her job", but at this time she was pregnant with our first child, and she knew she would soon have to leave. Shortly afterwards Milly applied for a transfer to the Manchester office.

There was an office cricket team called Traveaux, who played their matches in Long Lane, Aintree, they were short for one game, so Myra volunteered me to make up the numbers, and I had my first game for them. On occasion I would fill in vacancies, until after a

time I became a regular member. We played other offices in Leeds and Newcastle, and against Leeds I became a hero, coming in at seventh wicket down. I hung on until we had won the match, holding up one end while our star batsman hit off the runs. I finally worked my way down the order, until I finally opened the innings for them.

When the baby was due, Myra had to leave her job, and we were again at a crossroads, as we could not afford to continue to live with Ted and Eileen. Myra's Father solved our problem, he invited us to go and live in the big house at Durning Road. He made us a first floor flat, with a kitchen, and large dining-come-sitting room, and we had a bedroom on the top floor.

16

Peter was born on the 20th December 1950 in Smithdown Road Hospital. Myra was upset at having to be in hospital, and miss Christmas with her family, because they always made a big thing of Christmas, and she was anxious to get home with the baby. He was the first grandchild, and everyone made a great fuss of him. A little while after the baby was born, Myra became unwell. And after several visits to the doctor she was found to have contracted tuberculosis. This came as a great shock to us all. She was sent to Cleaver Sanatorium in Heswall, and she was there for six weeks, apart from being ill she was missing the baby, and she began to fret. I was faced with the prospect of leaving her in hospital, and see her have a nervous breakdown, or bring her home, and chance her recovering from TB at home. I chose to bring her home, and she attended Mill Lane hospital every week for two years before she was finally cleared. Myra's mother was great. She took over bringing the baby up, and was an all round source of strength. It was a blessing that we had been forced to move into the big house.

About this time Myra's dad took ill with pneumonia, and the business was not doing well, and was in debt. I had saved £108 from my army days, in the hope of buying a car, but that had to go into the kitty. Fortunately his brother Herbert heard of the difficulty, and came up from Birmingham, and was able to help until things took a turn for the better, and the business got back on its feet. Both Gordon and John were now working for the firm, and it began to make progress. There was a foreman named George, who organised the jobs, and things began to go well. Dad had a dog called Chippy, a Yorkshire terrier, which died and Dad decided to replace it. I went down to the office to see them, and Dad was looking miserable, and the foreman was laughing, I asked what was the matter, and George said Jim had gone to get a dog from the dogs home, he paid £5 for it, and brought it home. He said it was more like a donkey than a dog, it walked in, snuffed around, looked at both of them, and dashed out, and it was never seen again.

Peter was doing fine, and on summer evenings we would take him into the park for some fresh air, instead of putting him to bed at 6:30 p.m. as most mothers did with their offspring. The only thing was, he would not go to sleep. I would come home, have my dinner, take him to bed at 7:0p.m and I would be walking the floor with him until midnight. We had to get sleeping tablets for him when he was six months old. It was also my job to get up during the night if he woke, and it got a bit wearing, because Myra always slept through emergencies. The next major event was that the Labour Government decided to nationalise road Transport. A valuer came to the office and put a price on the furniture and fittings, and then took me out to dinner at the Bear's Paw restaurant, which was nice of him. My company Cowan & Co was moved to a large depot in Blackstock Street, which was owned by the Ex-Army Transport Co. Also brought in were Springfield Haulage Co., Topham Bros, who also had a depot in Weaste, Salford, and S. Cusick & Co., who had a depot in Hollinwood, Oldham. The vehicles positioned in Liverpool, Weaste, and Oldham ran a daily service to Liverpool and Birkenhead. Most of us were able to take our own customers with us, and we each dealt with a number of lorries. Private transport was restricted to a range of 25 miles, and if they wanted to go further, they had to apply for a permit from our depot, and if we could not cater for the job, a permit would be issued. Cusick's handled a lot of cotton for the Raw

Cotton Commission, and they sent a rep. down to handle it, but after a couple of months he was withdrawn, and I took over the job. I had a sheaf of orders for a lot of mills around Oldham and Manchester, who required deliveries on certain days of the month, and it took a bit of organising. Tommy Cook was Ex-Army's man, and he was in the habit of keeping some orders hidden away, until his own drivers came in. This upset Leo McKewen, and he complained to the Manager about this practice, and was given the job to look after all the traffic for his pains.

Tommy Cook was very sympathetic during Myra's illness, and his wife used to make cakes and pies for me to take to the hospital, and when I decided to remove Myra from the Sanatorium, he arranged for me to have the loan of a small truck to take her home. Leo was Topham's man, and Frank Evans was Springfield's rep, and we four constituted the traffic staff, and we all got on well together. The first problems arose when it was decided to put up our haulage rates. I had a customer who gave us weekly orders to transport hundreds of tons of copper wire bars to Johnson and Neps, in Manchester. The customer refused to pay an increase, but instead of trying to negotiate a settlement, the Management would not budge, so we lost a very valuable client. The next issue was with the Raw Cotton Commission who gave us a lot of work. They also objected to the increase, the boss came into the traffic office, and told us they had refused the increase, but he said they can't do without us, so they will be back. I sat back on my chair, and said I know of three ways they can move their cotton, they can barge it to Manchester, and local hauliers will be able to deliver to Mills within their legal 25 mile radius, they can also send it by rail to Manchester for distribution, or they can go to Wigan, Leigh, and Warrington and find private hauliers who can deliver within their legal limits. In the event they chose the latter way, and they issued licences to local carriers, and we never carried any more cotton.

We had a particular problem. Many of the drivers would report with insufficient time to get back to their depots at Oldham or Weaste, and would claim 12/6d night out money, and quite a number used to sneak back to their depots, and keep the money. We had many articulated lorries in our fleet, and to defeat the night out problem, we devised a new system of working; we designated two units from each depot to work through the night. The Liverpool drivers would take two loaded trailers to Oldham, and bring two loaded trailers back, they would then take two trailers to Weaste, and bring two back. The drivers from the depots at Oldham and Weaste would perform similar runs, with the result that six units would move 24 trailers each night, and this cut the overnight payments considerably. I was in charge of the operation, and I had charge of ten units and twenty trailers to keep it going. In all the time the operation was in being, only one trailer was brought back to Liverpool by mistake. I suppose in retrospect that part of the problem of British Road Services was the fact that many transport owners were made Depot Managers, and one can't help thinking that it would be in their own interests to fail. To see how the job worked from the other end, I was sent to Oldham to run the job from that end for a week. I became friendly with their manager, Eric Coleman, and I took Myra to see him and his Italian wife Emma several times.

Things were working out nicely at home. Gordon had married and moved out. Myra recovered her health, and we started going out to the cinema, and shows, and of course we had built in baby sitters. We were able to commence dancing again, and a year or two later, a friend, Violet Porter suggested we should try teaching ballroom dancing at night school. She got us an interview, and we started teaching at a school in Fazakerley. The head teacher was paid according to numbers attending, and on low attendance nights, he would say, "count the legs, Mrs Wildman". We taught at Norris Green, Lambeth Road, and Roscommon Street schools, over a two-year period, and it helped our finances very much. Peter was coming up to five, when Mr. Hawkins went into hospital with his annual dose of pneumonia, unfortunately this time he did not recover, and died in Smithdown Road Hospital, This was a terrible blow for Mrs Hawkins, and was a sad time for all the family. However, the business had to go on, and it was decided that John would take charge. Soon afterwards the foreman left, to help his own son to set up in business, and a new foreman, Sam Harcombe, was

recruited. He was a very experienced man, and was a great help to John as he was trying to find his feet in charge. John said to Myra, “when Peter goes to school, you are coming into the office”. Peter started at Clint Road School in the following January, and Myra took over the office work, and between them they set about building up the business.

Myra was a great check on John, particularly where money was concerned. John was inclined to spend, when there was a bit in the bank, but Myra restrained him pointing out that there would be tax bills coming in later in the year, and advised him to leave money in the bank for contingencies. Between them they did a marvellous job and put the business on a very good foundation. The job suited Myra: she was able to get out of bed, and fall into the office. In time Mrs Hawkins got over Jim’s death, and went on holidays with her elder sister Gert, who lived in Birmingham. Before Jim died, we had bought a little car, and we decided to take Jim and Lil for a little holiday in Devon, as they had not been away for years. In his youth, Jim had run away from home, and went to live with gypsies in the hills above Taunton. When we were around there, he relived his experiences, and seemed to imagine he would see them again. We did not have a lot of money, but we stopped at B&B’s, and had a nice holiday.

We stopped at an old house in Taunton, which was a bit queer; it had statues in alcoves, and was very quiet. We heard the landlady speaking to the butcher, pleading for him to give her some steaks, as she had visitors, and would pay his bill when we left. She made us a nice dinner, and we went to bed. When we awakened next morning, we had a beautiful view, over a graveyard. We had a good time, and everything went well, until, on the last day, we had a blowout. We pooled our resources and had just about enough money to buy a tyre and enough petrol to get us home. So it was a case of full speed to Birmingham where we were able to stay the night with Lil’s sister. The following day we made it back to Liverpool, with a couple of gallon of petrol to spare. We were glad to get home, but it had been an enjoyable trip.

Myra was bored at home, just looking after Peter, so she took a job doing clothing alterations for a children’s shop in Wavertree Road, which gave her an interest, and helped our income.

Norman was next to leave home, he had met a girl called Joan, she was a very lively girl who had been married before, and had a girl of her own. However they got on very well together and they married, and went to live in a big house in Huyton, where Joan was a matron of a care home. She was a bit of a scatterbrain at times. She once went on a holiday to Spain, and left a load of washing on the line. Needless to say it was gone when they got back.

With Peter safely settled at school, Myra decided it was time to have another child, and Christopher was born the following year. Our friend Doris in Rhyl also had a second son just three weeks earlier, so our families were balanced. Sadly Doris had contracted rheumatoid arthritis after they were married and it progressed very quickly, to the extent that she could not use her hands at all, and Harry had to do everything: he had to look after Doris and bring up the boys entirely on his own. In the early days he used to stand Doris up when he went to work, and she could not sit down until he came home. Harry was ambitious, and he bought an acre of woodland on the edge of Rhyl. We helped him to clear the site and he built a beautiful bungalow for Doris, all on one level so Doris could move around with a Zimmer. He also designed and opened a chip shop in Rhuddlan for his father and mother to give them money to live on, and occasionally when we were there on holiday, we would get a frantic call, “can you come and help at lunchtime, we have got orders for fifty fish and chips for the boy scouts”, and Myra and I would scoot up to Rhuddlan to help out, sending Peter to look after Christopher down by the river with sandwiches.

17

After five years, the Government decided to de-nationalise road transport, and put it back in private hands. There was great competition for licences, and people were buying old decrepit vehicles, just to obtain the licences. My firm Cowan & Co. had gone out of business,

and the heirs had moved to South Africa. However, I was offered a job by Sam Cusick, with another man, Bill Jenkins. We opened an office in Goree Piazzas, at the bottom of Water Street. We did a lot of business with the Cotton Commission, and I would often walk up and down King Edward Street looking for sub-contractors. The job prospered, and we then moved into Chapel Chambers, in Fazackerley Street, at one time Bill was of several weeks ill, and I took Myra to work with me to help out, impressing on her that I was the boss at work.

The business built up quite nicely, and we were able to employ a lot of sub contractors, who worked regularly for us. We worked for a lot of large firms on Merseyside; we did a lot for Bowaters, Shell, Dunlops, and others. One stupid thing happened: I obtained a contract for two vehicles to work for Dunlop Footwear, and head office supplied them with Goodyear tyres, which was not very diplomatic.

Alan Cusick had been in negotiations, and finally succeeded in leasing our old Depot at Blackstock Street, which enabled us to enlarge our operations. Things went well until it was decided by Alan to go in for parcel carrying. This was a specialised business, and we were not really equipped for it. We obtained a number of contracts, one with a carpet firm, but it was found that carpets and other parcels were disappearing, and the number of claims for loss mounted considerably. This put a considerable strain on the finances and put the firm in trouble, and it was finally sold out to McVeigh's of Grimsby, who were anxious to move across country. They bought out a little local firm, Lightfoot Bros, who had a depot in Garston, with a large yard and a repair shop. We had a skilled fitter, Tom Boothby, with his son as an apprentice. Extra vehicles were sent over from Grimsby. I was put in charge, to the disgust of the previous owner, Arthur Lightfoot. He was kept on as a rep, and we began trading. I recruited a good foreman, George Grenfell, who was a great help, and very conscientious.

Things went well. I got into Bowaters who had daily production for Courtaulds at Grimsby, and we were able to start an overnight service to Grimsby, which gave us a solid base. Our premises adjoined the Army and Navy stores warehouse, and we had a visit from the police, who had found that their staff were passing goods through to our apprentice through a window, which overlooked our premises. Exit the apprentice...

After a couple of years, I informed my principals that there was an opportunity to take over the haulage for all traffic for Irish Sea Ferries, who sailed from Garston to Ireland every night. They came and negotiated a deal, and we moved our office down to the dockside, and took on more staff. We had to deliver all the unit loads, which were landed every morning, and collect the unit loads for the night sailing, and was a big boost for the company. However I was getting a bit unsettled, so I applied for a job with Joe Priestley at Warrington, which I obtained, and I went to work in Warrington. Joe Priestley had contacts around Warrington and had a thriving business. He decided to expand into warehousing, and we obtained a large warehouse in Newton le Wil'lows, which we filled with traffic from Thames Board Mills and Crosfields, and pallets of tins from Metal Box Co. At this time I had a call from a nun, who was looking for a job for her brother. In view of the extra work involving the warehouse, we had a vacancy, so her brother was taken on. As a reward I was asked to dinner at the Bishops residence in Green Lane. We had a good dinner, and finished up with port, and cigars, a pleasant afternoon. I was one of few Protestants to have dined at the Bishops House.

Time moved on, and after a couple of years, I fell out with Joe Priestley, and got my marching orders. There was a typist in the office, who when she heard I was leaving said to me a friend of mine is looking for a traffic manager, so she gave me an introduction to Joe Barke, who ran a little family firm based in Stoneycroft. He was a mason, we got on very well, and on the Monday after I left Priestleys I started with Joe Barke. He ran a three-vehicle trunk service to London, and had three small delivery vehicles. He specialised in carrying wine and delivered to North Wales, and around Lancashire. It was quite a thriving business and I soon got into the routine. They did a lot of work for Goodlass Wall & Co. paint manufacturers. Their transport manager was a Mr. Bibby, whom I had known in sports circles, so that was help. One of the drivers, Harry Johnson, had been in the navy, and had

been in two submarines, which had been sunk, but got out of both of them alive. Things went well, the only snag was that his son was always on to him to sell up and go to join family members in Australia, and finally he wore his father down, and he sold his business to Marwood and Robinson the shippers, who were later taken over by P&O Shipping Co. We were moved to a large yard in Hawthorne Road, Bootle. Some time later P&O bought up another large firm, Jarvis Robinson & Co. and they also moved to the Hawthorne Road depot.

I was left in charge of the London night operations, Jimmy took over the local operations, and Bob Beck and Leo took over Jarvis Robinson's operations. We continued running our trunk service to London, and the local firm carried on with their usual customers. The next upheaval was P&O Roadways bought the premises, and the companies, and moved in a very large Liverpool firm of hauliers, specialising in meat haulage, Jarvis Robinson & Co. I retained my desk running the London overnight service; Bob Beck of Jarvis Robinson took over as traffic office manager, with his mate Leo, and Jimmy did the local run. The merger brought us benefits; I was allowed to join the P&O pension scheme, which was a good move. P&O had also bought over Coast Lines, a very big Liverpool coastal shipping company. They had a canteen in Princes Dock where we went for lunch. They also had a lot of caravans scattered around the country for the use of staff, and I was able to take advantage of the system. I was able to book a fortnight in one in Torquay, and we went with Harry and Doris and their family and we had a good holiday; the only problem was that Alison contracted pneumonia the first week and a lot of time was taken up nursing her. However, she recovered for the second week, and we were able to see most of the sites and places around the district. One nice thing was that while Alison was ill, young Steven Holt rigged up a makeshift fan to keep her cool and it was a big help. I also had a week in one based in Fleetwood, and we took Myra's mother with us. We spent a lot of time in Blackpool as the illuminations were on, and it was quite a nice break.

About this time a vacancy occurred at work for a Stores Superintendent. Having got a bit fed up at a traffic desk for so many years, I decided to apply for it. I was appointed, and moved my chattels to an office in the repair shop, and took on another career in road transport. I was also appointed safety officer, as regulations had been brought in forcing companies to appoint one. It was a responsible job; I had to order fuel, making sure we did not run out, ensure supplies of engine and gear oils, and all the filters and spare parts required for the repair and maintenance of a big fleet. The nice change was there was no hassle or emergencies, and I could make my own decisions in my own time, so long as the parts were available when required. I was monarch of all I surveyed, without any interference. I was 65 in December, but I carried on working until the following August, when P&O decided to close the depot. So after working 51 years 8 months I was forced into retirement. During all that time I never had to apply for dole, and considering I left school in 1929 in the middle of a really bad recession, I feel I can be proud of going through troublesome times without having to recourse to state aid.

Now back to home life, Christopher grew up and went to school with Peter. Through the chamber of commerce I became a school governor at Clint Road School. I took on the post so I could supervise their education. I became chairman of the Governors. As a consequence Myra was invited to present the prizes on speech day, and to his disgust, Christopher was chosen to present her with a bouquet - a job he clearly did not relish. Back home, before Jim died, Irene had been courting George Riding. He had been in the Navy, but had not been farther than Birkenhead docks. However they got married, and having nowhere to live, they moved into the front room downstairs, and shared the kitchen with her mother, and having a bedroom upstairs. After about twelve months Jim came in and said, "I've got a house for our Irene." Myra immediately protested, saying we have been married the longest, we should have it, but Jim said, you stay here with us, and let's get rid of the other buggers, so Irene took the house. Soon it was David's turn to wed, and the same thing happened, no home, into the front room. He was a bit of a bully, and at one time his wife left him. He came home in a filthy temper demanding to know where his wife was, nobody could tell him, he

went upstairs put his fist through the bathroom door, and generally went berserk. He was in such a state, that I rang the police. They are still coming. We had a bad winter, and Lil, Myra, and David's wife were all down with flu, and I had the job of nursing them all. Lil on the first floor, Myra and Margaret up in the gods, I was making stews and puddings and endless cups of tea, and it was quite exhausting while it lasted.

18

While I was working I had joined the Transport Managers club. We met in the Bradford Hotel in Tithebarn Street, but then we moved out to the Park Hotel in Netherton. We used to have guest speakers and question and answer sessions. We also had a Ladies night, at the Prince of Wales hotel in Southport. We also had invitations to other branches social functions, and Myra and I attended nights at Manchester, London, Northampton and Blackburn. I was elected chairman, and one of my meetings nearly ended in a riot. British Rail had started an overnight service to London, carrying unit loads, and I invited them to talk about the service. They plastered the room with leaflets, and explained the cheapness and quality of the service, and how it would benefit hauliers, who could put unit loads on the train, and instead of running lorries overnight, they could just collect the loads in London the following morning. This led to a lively debate, about track costs, and how could they run such a cheap service, with all their extra costs, such as rail maintenance, signalling, repairs etc, and some nearly came to blows. A memorable evening. I had my Ladies night also at the Prince of Wales Hotel, and we had a very nice evening, and Myra looked beautiful. She liked these social events, because she always had to have a new gown, obviously she could not go in a frock she had worn before, so it was down to Rhoda Sports in Bold Street for a new one. We became known there, and the manager even gave me a cigar.

We really enjoyed those outings, as it gave Myra a break from the children. With Christopher well installed at school, Myra decided to have another child, and the following October Alison was born, to complete our family. Just over twelve months later, Doris and Harry also had a little girl, Catherine, so our families balanced once again. My mother decided to marry Bob Connolly, when Frank Connolly left to marry Doreen Smith, a member of our original table tennis club. In those days there were not many people who could say they had been at their mothers' wedding. Mother used to come round every Monday to see us, and she was particularly taken with Alison, who was a lovely golden-haired child. Bill Worthington, who had been a member of our First Aid post during the war, and with whom I did a lot of business, invited me to join his Masonic lodge, so I became a member of the Compass lodge, a daughter lodge of the old established Mariners lodge. A lot of rubbish has been written about masonry, it is not a secret society, but a society of god-fearing and good living men who arrange to meet once a month for social and charitable purposes. Few realise the extent of the charitable causes Freemasonry donates to. For instance, the Liverpool masons supplied a stained glass window for the Anglican cathedral.

Two of my business colleagues were also masons, Eric Coleman in Rochdale Lodge, and Bill Evans of Princes Foods in Crosby Lodge, we became firm friends, and we visited each other's lodges on a regular basis, and also went to the Ladies nights at each Lodge for many years. Later I encouraged John Hawkins to join, and he did well in it. I rose to worshipful master, and had my ladies night at the Blundellsands Hotel, to which all the family were invited, Mum, David and Margaret, Irene and George, and of course John and Jean, John being a member. We had a great night. It was customary to have a free draw for the Ladies night, and often many ladies got nothing, but Myra resolved to make sure every lady got a prize, and she bought a lot of presents to make sure it happened, so everyone was happy. I also joined the chapter, and when I was the master I initiated John Bellis, who was married to Christine, John's daughter. I rose to Provincial Rank, but after 27 years of masonry I decided to retire.

One of our visits to Rochdale finished on a sad note. We arrived home just after midnight, and went in to see Myra's mother, and gave her a bouquet of flowers, she asked us

if we had enjoyed ourselves, we said yes, and bade her goodnight. The following morning I got up, to find her slumped on the kitchen floor, I lifted her on to the settee, and sent Peter over to the fire station for help; they quickly came with respiration equipment, but she did not respond and was pronounced dead. You can imagine what a terrible shock this was for Myra, and the rest of the family; it was a very sad weekend. The next trauma was reading the will; Gordon and I were the executors. John was given the business, and Myra was given the house, the rest of the family got very little. David was a bit upset he had not been included in the business, but got over it. Myra offered Irene the choice of her mother's jewellery and she claimed the greater part of it.

Peter and Christopher were going to Liverpool Institute, and were both doing quite well, Alison went to Clint Road, and then Brae Street, and finished up in Childwall comprehensive school. Now that the family had broken up and moved away, Myra decided it was time we had our own house, and we found one in Crawford Avenue, off Smithdown Road, near Penny Lane. It wanted some repairs done, so the family blitzed it, Norman, John, and David did woodwork repairs and put a new lintel over the door, the house was decorated, and all finished in three nights. The lady behind us said she had never seen anything like it.

Peter did not join us, he had asked permission to marry, and at 22 he married Dorothy Monks, and Myra had fixed up a house in Dial Street for them, so they were settled there. Crawford Avenue was a three-bed roomed house, with a small bedroom over the hall. Christopher had a lot of books and was studying to get to University, so Myra fixed him up with a raised bunk bed, and put a desk and bookshelves underneath it. It made a cosy den for him to study.

It was customary for us to take the business cat home at holiday time, and the first Christmas we had an incident. We used to let the cat sleep on the mat in the kitchen. It was snowing hard, and when we got up the cat was missing, finally Christopher said he had put it out, as he did not approve of cats being left in the house, Myra blew her top, and told him she would not cook anything for him unless the cat was found. However after two days we found it, under a caravan in the opposite yard. Christopher's excuse was that he had seen the cat nibbling the turkey

Christopher gained a place at Bangor University, and off he went accompanied by John's son, Jim, They lived with a widow in a small cottage near the university. Unfortunately Jim became homesick and after six months or so, he gave up his place, and went home. Christopher soldiered on, and took a place in the hall of residence, self-catering: he could make a pound of mince last five days; he was very thrifty, but managed quite well. He obtained his BA degree, and came home, Uncle John gave him a job for the summer. He had a contract to repair and build concrete steps on Liverpool's famous Spion Kop. They were supposed to use a pump to pump the concrete over the top, but the lorry could not get in, so they had to carry the concrete in buckets up about 50 steps, and down the other side/ It was very heavy work and Chris was shattered when he came home, and went to bed at eight every night. He was very proud of his degree, and would sign delivery notes, C. E. Wildman BA.

He was intending to teach French and German, and while we were on holiday in France, Myra bought an English newspaper, which was advertising scholastic vacancies, and there was one for a school in Liverpool. Myra wrote and obtained an interview for Christopher, and as a result he was offered a post at Priory Road School, and commenced his teaching career. Myra was not very happy in Crawford Avenue, so we decided to look for another house, and one day Alison came in with a brochure showing a house in Moss Pits Lane. We went to view it, and decided that it would suit us, so we sold Crawford Avenue to a Chinese family whose saying was "more cheaper "...

We moved into Moss Pits lane, which had a nice garden, and overlooked allotments. It was a four-bedroomed house, but one bedroom was small so we used it to extend the bathroom. Myra had said how nice it was living in a smaller house after living in the three-story Durning Road, but after eighteen months she decided to have an extension built, to make a flat for Christopher to entertain his friends. Of course the foundations were already in.

so it did not take long. He put in a kettle and a stove, and made it comfortable for himself. Myra got the gas company to install a gas heater, to warm it up. When she went out into the garage after they had finished, she found they had laid the gas pipe about six inches along the wall, and then into the room. This was obviously a hazard, so she made them come back and install it at the top of the wall.

It came Alison's turn to go to University. She opted for Leeds, and went there to study Colour chemistry. During her studies, she was run over, and broke a leg, but her tutors were very good, and one of her friends brought the study papers to hospital so she could keep up to date with the course. The motorist tried to sue Alison for damage to his car, but we passed his dodgy claim to one of Christopher's friends, who was a barrister, and we were not bothered again. Peter by this time, had a little girl, Kate, the first grandchild, but Myra had no patience, and I was always sent round to baby sit. Peter was teaching at Gateacre comp. He was teaching RE and taught the Bishop of Liverpool's daughter. After three years, he left saying I am not allowed to make Christians but have to teach Islam, Buddhism and Hebrew law so he resigned, and went to work for Alfred Holt & Co, the shipping line. *(I'm sure most of these recollections are accurate, but I have to correct this bit! I worked for Alfred Holt when I left school at 17, before I went to teachers' training college; I left teaching after five years in order to set up Adullam Homes in Liverpool as below. Since I'm now working in a multicultural school in India with Muslim and Buddhist colleagues, I don't think that particular interpretation of history should stand! – Pete)* He joined the Wavertree Christian Fellowship, while Christopher joined the Old Swan branch. Both of them had learned to play guitars and helped with the music.

A man in Birmingham, a retired builder, owned two houses, and he opened them up to take in derelicts and ex prisoners etc. He called the organisation Adullam Homes, and as the organisation thrived, he came to Liverpool to see if a similar organisation could be set up here. He was put in touch with Peter, who approved of the idea, and decided to take the job on. He left his job, and with full support from Dot, took on the organisation of Adullam Homes as a full time job. They would take ex- prisoners, find them accommodation, pay the rent, make sure they got their entitlements and generally oversaw their rehabilitation. He opened an office in Toxteth, with a social centre attached, and the job took off. Myra and I gave then a loan to buy their first minibus. The job grew and Peter appointed some paid staff, and recruited a team of helpers from the church, who gave him great support. He was in the job twenty years, and it became a burden, so he decided to give it up. When he left the organisation it had a turnover of one million pounds, built from nothing. Dot had another daughter, and they also fostered two lads, Charlie Farrell and Steven O'Neil, and had by this time moved into a beautiful house in Green Lane, Mossley Hill. Dot of course had also been working as an RE teacher, so they were quite comfortable. Peter then re-started his educational career, teaching RE at Deyes Lane School in Maghull. With our two at university, it was quiet at home, and we were able to resume our social life and have visitors.

19

Of course Myra was still working for John, so I took her to work on my way to work, and picked her up on the way back. The family grew, John finished with 3 boys and a girl, Gordon with a boy and a girl, Norman with two girls, and David with five boys and Irene with two boys and a girl. Alison obtained her BS C degree, and left Leeds. We did not have her home long, after a few months; she went down south to find a job. She found a position with Coates Bros. Ltd, part of the Total Oil Co's empire. They manufacture printing inks. She worked in the laboratory for quite a while, then the firm acquired an electron microscope, brought in an expert to use it, and Alison was deputed to assist him. They had their own offices, together with a dark room for developing the pictures. After a while the expert left, and to save the company having to look for somebody else he recommended Alison for the post, and she was given it, so was installed in the office, suite, took and developed her own pictures and was monarch of all she surveyed. A typical problem she had to solve, was a

French company whose production was being marred by bits of grit in the final mix stopping the ink from flowing smoothly, She was sent a sample, took pictures, and analysed the sample, and found that along the line in the process, the ink was sent through ball bearings to refine it, and what was happening was that some of the ball bearings were wearing out, and depositing debris in the ink. She really liked the job, especially her microscope, which could take pictures a millionth of an inch. It was at work she met Andrew, who also worked at Coates, and they took to each other. She was living in Tunbridge Wells, and we went to see her, we went to church on the Sunday, and surprised Bishop Flagg and his wife Marj.

Bill Flagg had been our vicar at St. Cyprians in Liverpool and they were very pleased to see us. When they came home from Peru, where Bill had been president of the South American Missionary Society, they brought an adopted Peruvian child with them, as well as their own family. Tim grew up into a fine lad, and got into Oxford University. There are many facets to life which each merit their own chapters. When we settled in Durning Road, I joined the local church of St Cyprian, and when I went on a Sunday morning, I would ask the lads if they would like to come. Sometimes Peter would come, other times Christopher, sometimes both, so they had a grounding in Christianity from an early age. Myra would always help at sales, and fairs and things, and the vicar said to her "Mrs. Wildman, I always see you working hard at fairs, but I rarely see you in my church," Myra replied, "Its because of those invisible notices, no smoking. Myra was a heavy smoker and liked her cigarettes. She gave up for six weeks once, and we all clubbed together to buy her a packet, she was so bad tempered. She gave up for twelve months, when she was having Alison, and was able to buy a three piece suite with the money she saved .She also smoked Capstan full strength, she said they were the cheapest because when you handed them round, people refused them, as they were so strong.

Our church life developed nicely, I was elected to the Parish council, and after a couple of years, I was elected to the deanery synod and I later became chairman of Toxteth synod until it was done away with in diocesan boundary changes. I was also elected to the Bishops Council with bishop David Shepherd, and served on it for ten years. Myra was so highly thought of that Grace Shepherd asked her would she run an afternoon rummage sale at Bishops Lodge, which we did quite successfully. Our vicar Mr Nixon retired, and we had a young vicar, Arthur Whittaker, but he was driven out by the Sunday school faction. We then had nearly two years of interregnum without a vicar, then the Bishop promised to send a good one, and Bishop Flagg was sent to take over, but because he had diocesan duties, we also got an assistant vicar, Rickie Panter, so we had a full complement. Shortly after he arrived, the Bishop was standing outside the church looking up at the clock. A woman passing by said to him, "Are you the new vicar, he said yes, and she said, you will do well here, they make them canons," Myra became church treasurer when the old one retired, and we both became friendly with Bill, Marj, and their family.

After a while Bill wanted to alter the church, to form a social area at the rear, but met with opposition from the Sunday school faction, however Myra said to Bill, "If you tell them the alterations will result in more rooms for Sunday school classes, they will drop their opposition", and that is what happened. Bill's idea was to built a narthax or wall, straight up the centre of the church, but Myra told him that it would not be safe, and it would have to be supported, She suggested he put a large heavy, steel girder across to support the narthax, and it gave us an additional bonus, in that we were able to link across to the gallery, and create an upper floor. We were able to build a lounge, two quiet rooms, a BB room, kitchen, and toilets downstairs, and use the upper one for games and discos. Bishop David was invited to open the new part of the church, and Bill asked Myra could she lay on a three course meal for 80 people, she said "yes, if I am left alone to pick my own team". She laid on soup, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and trifle, followed by coffee, and the Bishop congratulated her on her achievement. However - disaster: a few months after we opened the new additions, the Diocesan architect found dry rot in one of the main supporting pillars of the roof, and repairs had to be done quickly, and the main beam replaced, Myra got John to do the work, and David was instrumental in putting the new beam in place.

We had to borrow £1600 from the diocese to pay for the repairs, and it left us in a precarious financial position, so Bill asked Myra did she think she could run a little sale, to make some money. We were both retired by now so she said she would have a go, and we started a good as new sale on a Friday, in the church hall in Kensington. From small beginnings it grew, and as it became known people from all over Liverpool began offering us goods for sale, and I was busy collecting. It was a revelation what people gave us. One lady gave us 40 pairs of shoes. Myra used to examine all goods, and wash them if necessary before putting them on sale. I helped with plants, flowers and vegetables from the allotment, and quite quickly we had a thriving business. We were ably assisted by Betty Collett, Margaret Carter, and Reg Barton. We were able to buy dress rails and equipment, and we took the staff to lunch at Easter and Christmas. We paid off the diocesan loan within two years, and when we finally gave up trading, we had made £10,000 in 10 years.

We did have a severe setback one year; a gang broke into the kitchen, set it on fire, and opened all the gas jets to cause an explosion. We were able to recover a lot of our stock, Myra took a lot home to wash, and other people rallied round, so we only closed for one week. There was a problem at the front of the hall when it came to repairs, so Myra suggested that instead of repairing the intricate front, we should move the wall 14 feet in, and create entrances elsewhere. This was done, and we incorporated a long room to keep our stock. And the hall was better all round when it was finished. Things were going nicely at home. When I gave up cricket, I took an allotment, at Bowring Park, and we used to get the bus down on a Sunday, and spend the day there. All Peter and Christopher wanted to do was climb trees, and light fires; they were not interested in gardening at all. I am amazed at their different attitude now they have both got houses with gardens. After a while I was voted in as secretary, I had to attend meetings at the council offices to discuss allotment affairs, and it was very interesting. About this time there was a project to build a new road to link up with the M 57 motorway, and we were told it would go through the allotments, We paid our rent up to March, and arrangements were made to move. We went down on a Sunday in January, and we found the allotments had been devastated. Everything had been ripped down,- sheds, greenhouses, all standing crops had been torn down, and the site was a wilderness. One chap had just put a new eighteen feet greenhouse on his plot. It had been torn down, and cut up for scrap. We made a complaint to the council, and we were invited to a meeting at Calderstones Park headquarters. We were not given any apology or explanation for the havoc, but we were told we could claim compensation for our losses. I received £200 for an old shed, and a greenhouse made of window frames, so that was all right. I then took a half share of an allotment at Thingwall, which was quite convenient. The lads had moved away this time so it was just big enough for us, and we had some happy hours there.

When we had been in Moss Pits Lane, a couple of years, I obtained a site on the Moss Pits Lane allotments, which was great, as the plot was near the bottom of the garden. The first thing we had to do was to remove our greenhouse from Thingwall, and bring it to Moss Pits Lane. Myra and I stripped off all the glass, and spent the week barrowing it across, and on the Saturday morning, Myra, Christopher, Charlie Curtis and I went to Thingwall, and picked up the greenhouse frame intact, and carried it along Abbotsford Road and Moss Pits Lane, and placed it on the base we had prepared for it. On the way over it started to rain so Christopher said to his mum, "come in out of the rain", being funny as usual. The plot was a good one, and had raspberry and blackcurrant canes, I also grew strawberries, and we had a good operation. We had apple trees in the garden, and Myra used to pulp them, and use them instead of pectin in jam making. The year before she died, she made 500 lbs of mixed jams for sale at Church fetes. She would also make 20 large apple pies for the cake stall at each fete. We also had our own stall at the fetes, and Myra used to make aprons, knit blankets, and make tea cosies for the events, and we regularly made over £100. Myra and I made a good team working together, but she was the main brains of the partnership. And St Cyprian's church reaped the benefit. One year we had a church holiday in Yeovil, and we volunteered to help the cook. We were up at 6:30 a.m. to prepare breakfast, and after lunch

we had to rest before we could we could face dinner preparations. However it was quite a good holiday. Bishop Bill took us to see his mother, who lived near by, he said as soon as we get in she'll say "Oh Bill you brought visitors, and I haven't got my teeth in", and sure enough, as soon as we got in, that is just what she did. She was very proud of her Bishop son. But she was a down to earth character living in a council house and a very nice person.

The next item on the agenda is Christopher. He was comfortably ensconced in his flat, he was happy in his teaching career, and had joined the Old Swan Christian Fellowship, an offshoot of the Wavertree Fellowship. He had learned to play the guitar, and was in the music group, he had a motorcycle, so he was quite happy. We thought that we would never get rid of him, but it happened. He went on a continental holiday, and in King Ludwig's castle in Austria, he met a girl. He had never shown a lot of interest in girls. He had girl friends in the fellowship, but never anything serious. However this time it was serious. Unfortunately Martine was teaching in Norwich, and he did not think he would see her again. However he rang her several times, and as it happened she was coming to the end of her contract, and after three weeks she left her school, and with a little encouragement, she decided to come to Liverpool. She stopped with us for some time, until she got a flat, and both Myra and I thought she was a lovely girl. Things progressed, and they got engaged, and in time they decided to marry, and fixed a date for the wedding. The week before the wedding, Christopher got himself into a state, he was restless, and wondering if he had the nerve to go through with it, he dithered, and was a perfect nuisance, until Myra said to him "look, son, either you get married on Saturday, or you get out of this house". He said, "you don't mean it mum", she said "I do", so that made his mind up.

He and Martine married at the Methodist church in Long Lane, and they obtained a house in Crofton Crescent, Broadgreen, and settled down very well. In the week before the wedding, Martine's mum came down to stay with us for the week, to help with preparations, and she was quite jolly. Her father, brother, and uncle Jack arrived on the Friday, and stayed with us over the weekend, and a good time was had by all. Chris and Mart had a little girl, who died at birth, which was very sad. However a year or so later, they had twin boys, Jonathan and David, and they were followed in due course by Linda and Andrew, so they had a complete family.

While we were at St. Cyprians, we had a visit from a church near Taunton, and their vicar and two ladies stayed with us at Moss Pits lane. We took a party on a return visit, and Myra, Charlie Burton, and me stayed with the warden and his wife. To Myra's consternation, when we went into the bedroom, there was a large notice on the wall, no smoking, and that put her off. It was a meticulous household, everything was in its place, sparkling and clean, and the dining table was covered in silver dishes at meal times. Everything was his, and hers, even to having their own greenhouses in the garden. Charlie was asked what he did for a living, and he calmly replied, "I am a dustman, you know, a refuse operative". The lady of the house was quite taken aback, as she was a bit of a snob. However we all had a nice week end, and I wrote an article on my impressions for their church magazine. A nice memory. I must say we were very welcome.

20

We had become great friends of Harold Workman. He had heart trouble, and was advised to move from West Bromwich to a level part of the country, so he and Jessie moved to a large bungalow in West Pinchbeck, near Spalding in Lincolnshire, and we used to visit them quite often. He and his brother Steve ran a printing business in Birmingham, and their widowed sister Doris worked in the office. Harold installed his mother and Doris in a house in Birmingham, and they were quite happy there. However a couple of years later, Steve, the younger brother died unexpectedly, and his wife Brenda moved into the firm to take Steve's place, and being in Spalding, Harold had to let her run the business. He used to go to Birmingham twice a week to oversee the business, and would attend his Masonic lodge at the same time. Tragically his sister Doris died, and as his mother could not cope on her own, he

took her to live with him in Spalding. Jessie encouraged us to go often, as she said only Myra could talk to her about the early days of the family. So we went over frequently.

Harold had a son, Bill, who was married and lived in Spalding with his wife and two daughters, and a daughter Jane, who worked in a London hospital, and did not come up very often. Harold was very old fashioned, and when she told him she was going to Germany to stay with a soldier, he had a bitter row with her, and refused to talk to her again, although it was a perfectly innocent visit. She ultimately married, and lives in London. We were due to visit Harold and Jessie over an Easter weekend. On the Friday, Jessie went into the mother's room, and called Harold, she said "I think your mother has gone". However she revived later on, and said "I saw Jesus, and he said to me, you have not said your goodbyes have you, Gert, so go and say your goodbyes". Myra and I went to see her on the Saturday and Monday to say goodbye, and she died on the Tuesday morning.

Jessie was a lovely person. She was descended from the writer, Robert Louis Stevenson, and came from a wealthy family. They met in a hospital in Chester, where she was a nurse, and Harold was admitted after Arnhem, where he had been a glider pilot carrying a load of Polish troops. He would never talk of his experiences, but he managed to avoid capture, and rejoin the British lines. While we were at St Cyprians I organised a concert for church funds. I roped in the Boys' Brigade, a couple of choir members, and some of the men. We had great fun rehearsing, and the night of the performance went very well, and we got great applause, and invites to other places, but we decided to leave it as a one off. I had invited my pal George Owen to play the piano, and Harry Lloyd came with him. We opened with a full chorus singing and dancing to "We'll all go riding on a rainbow to a new land far away", and it gave us a good start. Then one of the choir members sang "The little flower girl." We had three sketches. The first one revealed a woman ringing for the doctor, to say her maid would not get up, and could he call. He came, examined her, and said "there is nothing wrong with you". She said "I know, but she owes me three months wages, and I am not getting up until she pays me". The doctor says, "that is a good idea she owes me £50. Move over". The second sketch showed a newspaper editor shouting at a reporter for not bringing up to date news; he said, "this train crash was yesterday, and the house fire was last night, bring me up to date news". The reporter said, "how about this for an up to date headline - 'reporter shoots news editor'." "That's better," said the editor, "when?" "Now", said the reporter, and pulling out a gun he shoots the editor. The third sketch showed two men talking over a drink, one says "I bet you don't even know the colour of your wife's eyes." "Of course I do they are blue." The man went home, dashed in took his wife by the shoulders looked in to her eyes and shouted. Brown. Then a man came from behind the curtains, and said, "Who told you I was here". The boys brigade gave a lively rendering of Mc Namaras band. We had a couple of chorus numbers, then Harry Lloyd and I did the Wilson Keppel and Betty famous sand dance, and it was greeted with laughter. We finished with a closing chorus with everyone on stage, and everyone agreed it had been a great success.

I was appointed to the diocesan Synod, which met at Liverpool University. I took part in three debates, the first on lay Presidency at the Eucharist, in which I pointed out that in rural areas, where vicars had three churches to look after, it would be helpful if well respected senior members of a church were able to stand in for the vicar, but of course the powers that be insisted that only priests are authorised to take communion, and that would remain the rule/ The second debate was on the poll tax, which I thought was a good thing. I pointed out there were seven people in the house opposite, but because our rateable value was higher; two of us paid more in water bills than they did. The third debate was on the closure of churches in the city centre, and St Cyprian was a candidate for closure. I said :come on a bus journey with me, from St Margarets, Anfield, along Sheil Road, on the right St. Christopher's, to be closed; turn right up Kensington - Christ Church, closed. Turn left in to Durning Road ,- St Cyprians to be closed; along Tunnel Road - St Catherine's, closed for several years; look down Parliament Street, and see St Nathaniel's, closed. My speech made quite an impression, and in the event, St Cyprian's church was reprieved. Shortly after this, the Vicar, David Lewis

closed the nearly new sale, and as we had fierce arguments over the money, we decided to leave St Cyprians after forty years.

At this time Christopher and Martine and the family had started going to All Saints in Broad green, so we decided to go there with them. Shortly after we joined, a new Vicar arrived, Bill Stalker. St Cyprians had a connection with his former church, St Mary's in Aigburth, and I knew him slightly, so that was a help. Myra volunteered to take over as treasurer when the existing treasurer Mr. Hull died. They had been without a treasurer for a while, and everyone was relieved that a good treasurer had been found. I was elected to the Parish Council, and served as lay chairman for one year. They were a nice body of people, and we were made to feel at home very quickly.

Of course as soon as we were nicely settled, Christopher decided to go and teach in the Isle of Man, in Douglas, having decided that it would be a better place to bring up a family. They first lived in a large house near the Manx museum, but after several years, they moved to a lovely house in Devonshire Crescent, near the Quarterbridge in the posh part of Douglas. It has a large garden full of mature trees, and it looked lovely in the spring. While I was there, I dug out a vegetable plot for him, and he has kept it going. Being near the TT Circuit, it gets noisy at 5:30.a.m. when the riders are practising, but it is only for a short time so it can be endured. He enlarged his family so that as well as twin boys, Jonathon and David, it now includes a girl, Linda, and another boy, Andrew, so they have a complete family now.

One of the problems of writing about a long life, is that you lose your time scale, and I have been skipping about over many years, I suppose holidays quite often give rise to memories, and I am no exception. One of my earliest memories is going to a caravan in Moreton, with my mum and auntie Marie, and her two sons. We were in an old caravan, and when it rained, we had to put matchsticks in the roof to keep the water out. However it was nice to be at the seaside, even if it was close to home, and we had a good time playing on the beach. At that time it was thought that sniffing tar, was good for you, and walking along the road as a truck was coming along, my mother said sniff up it will do you good, She thought it was a tar lorry, but it had in fact been collecting night soil. We had another holiday in Menai Bridge. Our digs overlooked a butchers shop, and we could see all the prime cuts of meat on display, while we were fed on all sorts of cheap scraps. Of course it is a lovely place, so we enjoyed it.

I had a very good holiday in Talacre, when I was seven, before it became well known. My aunt Florrie took me with her three boys. It was quite a wild sort of a place, with a lovely beach, We used to play near the Point of Ayr colliery, and see the coastal boats taking on their cargos of coal, most of which went to Ireland. Talacre Abbey was up in the hills, and we got chased out for trespassing. All in all it was a very good week, and it was my first introduction to a place that very much changed my life years later. I suppose one of our most memorable holidays, was with Harry and Doris. We were with them in Rhyl in September, and Harry said "why don't you come to the continent with us next year?" So we said "very well, where shall we go?" I said I was in a place called Chiavari during the war, on the Italian Riviera; it's nice round there. So Harry booked a villa in a place called Cavi di Lavagna.

I obtained permission to use the firm's car on the continent. We had to take two cases of sausage and beans for Christopher because he would not eat anything else. What with food and clothes and things, the car was heavily laden. I looked at it and said, "How am I supposed to get this lot to Italy?" Anyway off we went, and the journey went like a dream. We took the boat from Dover to Boulogne and off we went, driving on the right for the first time. We stopped the first night in Rheims, then next day we went to Lausanne, where I had a puncture, right on the border; luckily there was a handy garage, so it was no problem. We stayed in a motel, but instead of moving on, the girls wanted to go shopping in the town. It was strange to see the traffic policemen with guns in their holsters. Anyway this left us late leaving Lausanne, we got to Alessandria on the Italian border, so I said "are we going to camp for the night?" but the others said "no, let's go on." So we pulled into Genoa at 11 o'clock. We found

a bar, and the owner said, "I will make you a cup of English tea", so we had some refreshments, and set off for Cavi.

I knew the road was a cliff road with a large drop to the beach, so I was glad it was dark, as Myra was uncomfortable with heights; she had not realised that to get up to the St Gothard pass in Switzerland we had to climb 5000 feet, and it had upset her. Anyway we arrived in Cavi at midnight, parked on a forecourt, and looked round. The only address we had was Villa Romeo, Cavi. And there was not a soul about; we spotted a light on the other side of the road. We went across, and found it was a bar. We asked the manager if he knew the villa Romeo, he said no, but asked who owned it; we said Mr Camparelli. He said Mr Camparelli is in the bar having a drink. What luck. He came out and escorted us to the villa, behind the town in olive groves; we would never have found it on our own. However we settled in, and the following Sunday was Easter Sunday, and Mr. Camparelli arrived with Easter presents for us. It was a beautiful villa, with marble floors, and a lovely kitchen, and a nice garden, and altogether very comfortable, with a view looking out over the sea.

There were a couple of other villas nearby, and our lads began to play with some Welsh boys, Myra came out and said, "I did not bring you 1500 miles to play with British boys, go down there, and play with the Germans". After a couple of days, we decided to go on a trip to Pisa, Florence and Venice. To get out of Cavi, we had to go over the Passo del Bracco, which was 6000 feet with a rock face on the left and a sheer long drop on the right. As we were approaching a left hand turn, a young Italian came up; he headed for the rock face, wrenched his wheel round, I tried to avoid him by turning to avoid him, and stopped three feet from the drop, but he still hit me and broke my headlight. When Myra saw how close we were to the drop she broke up, it really scared her. Harry had been in front, but he waited for us at the bottom, and after a while we went on to Pisa. I went to the police to report the accident, but was told I would have to go back to the pass to report it. Instead I went to the Zurich Insurance Co, and told them what had happened. Luckily the Italian lad was insured, as it was not compulsory there at that time.

After a few pleasant hours, we took the autostrada to Florence. We were intending to camp, but as we approached Florence, the weather turned bad. It started raining heavily with mist, and we did not want to camp. Just then an Italian on a scooter came alongside, and asked if we were looking for a hotel, we said "yes", so he escorted us to a Pensione on the top of an office block, in the centre of Florence, right where we wanted to be, near the Ponte Vecchio, the Medici palace and the Uffizi gallery. We had dined on the autostrada, so we agreed to have lunch the following day, instead of taking dinner. We asked for a pot of tea, and were brought an enormous pot, with one tea bag in, we were petrified. I had to go down to the car, and get another six tea bags to make it drinkable.

We had a good day in Florence, visiting the Medici palace seeing the statues of David and Neptune, and visiting the shops on the Ponte Vecchio. A couple of years after we visited, the bridge was swept away by the flooding river Arno, but it has now been rebuilt, exactly as it was. We had a good lunch; they were going to serve us spaghetti, but Myra protested, so the waiter went out shopping, came back, and proudly announced that he had obtained beefsteaks for us! After lunch we set out for Venice, and went into the large car park on the outskirts. We took the vaporetto, a waterbus, to St Mark's Square, and proceeded to explore. We went into St. Marks Cathedral, a beautiful building, well worth a visit, although the famous four horses were not on show. We inspected the Campanula, sat and had a very expensive coffee in the square, then we did a tour of the Doges palace, which held a portrait of every Doge except one, who had been a naughty boy and whose portrait was removed. We then had a ride in a gondola. It was an art. You approached the gondola station, and one man escorted you to the steps, and introduced you to the captain. You then tipped him, and he delegated another man to put you in the gondola. The gondolier then took over, and propelled the gondola into the Grand Canal, I was taking a movie, but I forgot to turn the film round, and it turned out to be a lovely shot of Doris floating down the canal in her wheelchair. Venice is unique, and we had a great day there. The following day, we set off back to Cavi, and we hit the rush-hour

traffic in Milan, it was quite an ordeal. However we got back safely, and enjoyed the rest of our holiday nice and quietly. When it came time to go home, Myra said I am not going back over those mountains if I never get home, so we looked at the map, and plotted a route back through Genoa, along the Riviera coast, and up through Avignon, and the centre of France back to Boulogne. And so back home. It was amusing coming through Monte Carlo and Nice, in a small car laden with pots and pans, passing the beautiful hotels. I said to Myra "look at those, and think tonight you will be sleeping in a tent!" We camped behind Nice airport, and every time a plane took off the ground rumbled, and we did not get a lot of sleep. However it was a lovely holiday, and gave us some precious memories.

21

The trip inspired us; we both bought caravanettes and we went on holidays together for thirty years, mainly on the continent. Several holidays stand out. One year, when Alison was quite small we went down to Cornwall. The weather was atrocious, we camped in a place called Modbury - it should have been called Mudbury. The following day it rained all day, it was quite depressing. However we came upon a holiday centre called Trelawne, we pulled into reception, and asked if they had any accommodation. The boss said this "no time to go camping with young children", he turned to his assistant, and said "go to the block of vans, which have just been cleaned, and open a suitable one up for them". So we were put in a luxury caravan. The weather improved, and we had a great time, there was a swimming pool, and dancing every night in the main hall, and a nice restaurant if you did not feel like cooking. On the Friday morning, there was a fancy dress competition for children. Myra dressed Alison as a Devon violet, but instead of standing in line like the others, she decided to walk along the ranks, and inspect all the other children, the onlookers were very amused at her antics, and it was no surprise when she was given a prize. It was so good that we went back again the following year.

One year we went down to the Vendee, to a place called Notre dame du Monts. It was a beautiful place, with sparkling beaches and camps set in pine woods. It was a place where the French went for their holidays - the first year we only met one English couple, who thought we were French, and said, "bonjour". But over the years it became quite popular with the British. It was so nice that we went back three or four times. We were able to go over the causeway to the island of Noirmoutier, later on they built a bridge from Fromentine. St. John de Montes was a nice little town with a splendid market, and the whole coast had lots of villages which were very attractive. And bathing in the Atlantic was great fun. We bought a rubber dinghy, and we had a lot of fun with it. We were in a market at a yachting place one day, and a couple of people from a yacht came in, the woman said to her escort, "darling what is the word for how much in French?" Myra turned round to her and said, the word you want is "combine", but how do you know you can understand the answer? There was a little girl on one of the stalls, and as she spoke to us in English, her mother was watching her daughter speaking in English to visitors. She was so proud. I had an embarrassing moment in Notre Dame. There were no toilets the first year, but the second year they had built a communal block, so I saw two women go in, and as they came out I went in, for a wee, I had just started when a school teacher came in with 16 little girls, and they stood around me until the teacher said, "ah monsieur est complet". I could not get out fast enough. I have a lot of fond memories of the Vendee.

Looking back over the years, it is impossible to remember time scales, and I am meandering over many years of holiday travel, One year, Harry did not come with us, and Myra, Alison and I went for a tour of the Loire valley. We went down through Rennes, Nantes and across to Saumur, then along to Tours and Amboise; it was very pleasant. At work we carried a lot of wine for a firm called Partington, and I told the rep, we were going down the Loire valley, and had he any connections there. Good enough, his firm wrote with three introductions, in different parts of the district. The first two were warehouses, and were closed when we finally found them. The third address was the Compté de Malastroit, Chateau No

Belle Air, Valet, south of Nantes. We were making our way back on the Saturday, and we stopped for lunch in Valet, we found that the Chateau was about three miles outside the village, so after lunch Myra said "let's go and see the Count". So we went up. We came to a pair of ornate gates, with a drive leading to a vast stable yard. We were all scruffy in shorts, I said "I am not going in there", but Myra said, "I am", so we pulled in to the stable yard, Myra got out, marched round to the kitchens, and said "Where is the Count?" He came out, greeted us in French, and told us to walk round his kitchen garden for a while, and he would join us. He showed us round the estate, speaking French, then he realised we could not keep up with him, so he reverted to English. He showed us his English park, and took us to the edge of his estate, where there were some ruins. He told us that the original chateau had been burned down during the revolution, and his ancestor had gone to Italy for an architect, who had designed the magnificent Palladian house which now stood on the site. From the old ruins, all you could see in every direction was a vast expanse of rows of grapes.

The wine he made was Muscadet. He showed us the old way of making the wine by treading the grapes, but now he has machinery which is much more efficient. He then picked up a bottle, and said, "we will try it". He took us into his study, and opened the bottle. "Will the girl have some?" Alison, twelve, said "yes please", and we sat there having a leisurely drink. For conversation Myra said, "that is a lovely piece of furniture", looking at a very old chest of drawers at the far end. "Ah yes", said the Count, that came from my mother's castle in Normandy; the man who bought it wanted to give her two million francs for it, but she said I had to have it". There was a beautiful clock in a glass case on the mantelpiece, and I said "that is a lovely clock". "Ah yes", said the count, "that was given to one of my ancestors by Napoleon on the eve of Waterloo". He said "I don't often show people around, but as you are interested come on". In the entrance hall was a table, twenty feet in diameter completely covered in mosaic, it was beautiful, there was also a cabinet, but the count dismissed it, he said "that is only just over a hundred years old". We then entered another room, and Myra made a friend for life: on the wall was a beautiful portrait; Myra looked at it and, said "what a beautiful woman!" The count said do you think so madam, that was my mother".

There were some ships, which we were told were made by his ancestors, while in captivity in England, during the wars. In a glass case was a soft toy, mounted on a donkey, it was quite unusual. The count said "ah that was given to one of my ancestors, by your Queen Elizabeth the First". It was a fascinating place. He asked us to stay the week-end, but we said we had to go a long way to Le Havre by Monday, so we would have to go on. It was a great experience; in fact we went to see him again the following year, and we took Harry and Doris with us, and we had the pleasure of meeting his wife, she had been evacuated to America during the war. As usual I dropped a clanger. I asked how often they watered the grapes, she was horrified, we never water grapes, it destroys the alcoholic content - they must grow only with rain. I have a photograph of the count and Myra, in front of the house. One to treasure.

One year we had a trip to Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, and Germany. Myra's brother Jim, was an air gunner, and his plane was shot down over Arnhem. We went to see his grave. There were 5 graves in a corner of the village cemetery, each one was immaculate, a little girl told some of the villagers we were there, and they came out to talk to us. It was a good sightseeing holiday, and Myra was satisfied when she saw Jim's grave.

Alison and Andrew decided to get married. She went to see the local vicar at Seal, to make arrangements, and he said I will be on holiday then, so Alison said, "Don't worry, I shall be bringing my own vicar, organist and choir." He was quite startled. Alison told him that bishop Flagg would be coming down to marry them, a university colleague would play the organ, and her barbers shop singers would form the choir. The vicar was so impressed by a Bishop coming, that he cancelled his holidays. It was a very impressive wedding, the choir sang well, the organist was great, and Bishop Bill took the ceremony, and gave a good homily. The reception was held in a large public school, and went very well. Harry Holt had lent them his apartment in the Algarve for their honeymoon, at a place called Villamoura. When the time came to see them off, everybody was admiring Andrew's car, a Lamborghini.

They lived first on a farm near Tunbridge Wells, but then they found their own place. It was the end two cottages of a small row in a little road called Back Lane, a private road on the Knole estate. Being on the end, Alison has a huge garden, 135 feet long and 70 feet wide. Andrew sought permission for a three-car garage, but was refused on the grounds that the garage would be bigger than the cottage, so he settled for a two-car building. The next-door neighbour asked what was he going to put in it, and was taken aback when Andrew said, oh only a Ferrari and a Lamborghini. He is also a motorbike enthusiast, and has three, and does rough racing. Alison got so fed up with him going out on his bike that she learned and passed her motorbike test, so she could go out with him. Knole House is where Henry stayed, on his way to Leeds Castle. Henry chased Ann for fifteen years before she eventually married him.

Alison is in a Barber Shop group, and she has passed her examinations to be an adjudicator, and is quite proud of that. Alison lives in a small place called Godden Green, on the northern edge of Sevenoaks and is a lovely country setting. Sevenoaks is quite a pleasant place, with supermarkets, a library a swimming pool, and a lot of leisure facilities. Alison now has a little son called Jamie, who is a little charmer and captivates every one he meets, and Alison's quartette fight each other to nurse him. Andrews' family is Polish and his mother was in a camp in Russia, when the Russians came into the war on our side, they just opened the gates and told the prisoners to go, without giving them any help at all. They suffered great hardships trying to reach Europe, in fact when I was in Iraq I saw lorry loads of them passing through northern Iraq. Many of them made their way down and settled in Beirut. She met his father in a Polish club in Manchester, but Andrew's mother died soon after he married. He has a brother Mark who is married with two children; his father lives on his own, but has acquired a Polish girlfriend, so he is quite happy. When my regiment came out of the desert, we organised a dance in Beirut; we invited girls from the American University to attend, and I became friends with a Polish girl named Anna Davidowitz, and when I had some free time, I would go into Beirut, and have a coffee with her, or go to the cinema. I met her family, and they were some of those who had been in camps in Russia.

I have spoken about Eileen and Eddie, with whom we lived when we were first married. They took a practice in Orrell Lane for a couple of years, and then they went to a country practice in North Wales, where they were for 25 years. Eileen had a very severe operation, on her stomach, and it was touch and go whether she survived, so they sold up, and her married daughter also sold her house, and they jointly bought a large house in Huyton, so that Vivian, who was a nurse, could look after her. Eileen made a good recovery, and after all that time, we resumed our bridge sessions, one week at their house, and at ours the next. This went on until I had a car accident, so I decided to give up driving, and the bridge sessions were at home after that. Things were going quite nicely, I was retired, the children were all doing quite well and we were happy with the allotment and church work, broken up by trips to see Alison in Sevenoaks, and our holidays with Harry. There was a problem at church, Ricky Panter got tired of being in Bill Flagg's shadow, and complained to the Bishop, and as a result Bill retired to Newark, and was given a post in that diocese. Ricky moved on soon afterwards, and we got a new vicar, David Lewis and his wife, Wendy. Myra and I joined in to paint the vicarage before he came, but he was not very grateful. It was at this time that we left St Cyprian's and went to All Saints with Chris and Martine for a short while, before they moved to the Isle of Man. We were well into the swing of things at All Saints so we decided to stay there, and we were quite happy.

22

We had of course kept in touch with Harry, but unfortunately Doris died, and his life changed. His eldest son, Andrew was married, and had two daughters, but he obtained a position with Social Services in St Helier, and moved his family to Jersey, Harry had to put Cathy in a home in Prestatyn, as he could not care for her on his own, but Steven stayed at home, he was a bit of a wastrel, he did not have a job, and lived off his father, however, Harry sold his property in Haford Wen, and moved into a bungalow in Rhuddlan, on an estate which

he designed. He took up golf, and made himself a new life, both his sisters, and a sister in law lived in Rhuddlan, so he had company. This is the time to recall two aquatic adventures we had with Harry in the early days.

He bought a little self assembly sailing dinghy, and we helped him to assemble it, The great day came, and we took it to Rhos on Sea for the launch, he put three of the kids in, took the oars, and started off, very quickly the water started to come in through the floor boards, and they had to abandon ship about ten yards out, before it went under. We took the boat back to Rhyl, and over the weeks, made it watertight. Subsequently we had some good times with it around Anglesey. Later he bought a converted lifeboat, which he based at Port Dinorwick, Anglesey. It had an engine, which started on petrol and was then changed over to diesel. We went out into the Menai Straights, and were enjoying the sail, when the weather turned foul so we decided to go back to Port Dinorwick. The wind had got up, and as we approached the entrance, Harry cut the diesel, but he was not quick enough to start with the petrol, and we were being swept pass the entrance, when Myra picked up a boathook sprang to the front, and just managed to get a hold on the edge of the quay, gingerly we hauled ourselves into the harbour, and we managed to haul it round the other yachts to its own berth. It was a narrow squeak, had Myra missed, we would have been driven on to rocks the other side of the entrance. Harry would try anything, he had been a navigator during the war, and had taken part in the notorious raid on Dresden. When we were on holiday in our caravanettes, Harry would lead, and we would always finish up in the middle of a housing or industrial estate, and Myra would tease him about being a lousy navigator and wonder how we won the war with navigators like him, but he took it in good part.

As a matter of fact, we went with him on a weekend to Scotland, to see one of his old crewmates who told us that Harry was in fact, the best navigator in the squadron. One night twelve planes went to bomb a power station in Germany, and his plane was the only one to hit it. Steve lived with Harry until the year 2000, when he moved out to go and live with one of his school day girl friends in Northwich. He finally got married in August 2002, and a very nice wedding it was; his wife had been married before, and has a girl from that liaison. Steve was 45 when he married, so it was about time he made the move. At eighty Harry decided to take flying lessons. He passed all his exams, and had been up a few times, but when he went for his medical, the doctor said he had an extra heartbeat, so he could not fly until it was remedied, he was passed from doctor to specialist and back, then they concluded that he did not have an extra heart beat after all. However they did find that he was diabetic, so some good came out of it. He also took up golf, and joined the Rhuddlan club, so he made the most of his freedom. After working so hard looking after Doris, and bringing up his family he richly deserved the leisure he enjoyed.

The years passed by quickly, and Myra and I were quite happy. However on a summer afternoon in 1999 we were sitting in the garden, and Myra, who hated being inactive, got up to do some gardening. She was near the greenhouse, when she tripped, and broke her wrist. We got Christine to take us down to the hospital. It was Sunday afternoon and we had a long wait, however eventually she had the wrist set, and the X-ray operator said that the doctor had done a very good job. However Myra continued to have discomfort, and was sent for physiotherapy to the clinic in the old Smithdown hospital, as soon as she was examined the head nurse said, "you have had a broken collarbone", and sure enough she had, and it had not been picked up by the doctor. The nurse said "there is not much you can do for a broken collarbone. It mainly heals itself". We went for therapy for a couple of times, but then stopped. But it took it out of Myra. The following March, we went down to Alison's to attend Jamie's third birthday party, and she was violently sick on the train. She was really in a bad way, and I was glad to see Andrew at Euston to pick us up. We had a nice week down there, and Myra seemed to recover.

We came home, and Myra started losing weight, and one Sunday night Pete and Dot came round, and she was so poorly, that they insisted on sending for a doctor. He came, examined her, and recommended that she go to hospital, so we sent for an ambulance, and she

was taken to the thoracic centre at Broadgreen Hospital, where she was admitted. She was sent from there the following week, to Prescot Street for a scan, When she came out I asked the doctor if she would live, and he said, quite off handedly, “we all have to die some time”, which was not very reassuring. Myra went back to Broadgreen, and was given a private room. Christopher and the children came over to see her, and then Alison, Andrew, and Jamie came up also. She was very pleased to see them, but told Christopher not to bring the children again, as she did not think it right to have them in a sick room. After a few weeks, the doctor came, and said they were going to discharge her, and would arrange for day, and night nursing at home. Peter said :you will not be able to cope, so we will take her to Green Lane, and you can come and stay too”, so that was decided. An ambulance took Myra to Green Lane, and she was given a bed in the back sitting room, with a view of the lovely garden. I was given a small single room overlooking the garden, which was quite comfortable. We had to obtain a supply of oxygen cylinders and Myra was hooked up to them. We had a night nurse for her, but her condition deteriorated, and she was finally put on a supply of morphine, which left her in a stupor, and she was not able to recognise anybody most of the time, and she was also unable to eat.

On June the 18th, a fine Sunday, we left Alison, and went to a fete in the local park. About 4:00 p.m. I said we had better go back now. We were met at the door by Alison in tears, saying that mum had died ten minutes ago. We went into the back room, and there lay my wonderful wife of fifty two years, having died peacefully on a fine June afternoon, mercifully freed from her pain. I prayed for her soul, and when we had all composed ourselves, Peter rang for a doctor, who confirmed her death. Peter then rang Jenkins the undertaker, who sent his ambulance, and took her to the chapel of rest. We were all in a sombre mood, at the loss of a marvellous wife, and mother, who had really been a genius, who could turn her hand to anything. There were no regrets, we had a wonderful life together, and although we had some bad patches, we always presented a united front and our love grew stronger with the passing years. The funeral was arranged for Thursday the 22nd June, and on the Wednesday night, Bill Stalker, the vicar, came round to discuss the details; we drew up a service sheet with hymns with the accent on celebration, rather than loss. The church was full, an illustration of the esteem in which Myra was held. I read the lesson, and Jonathon read a tribute to his nanny, and we had a very moving service. We went on to the Allerton Crematorium, and were greeted with the music from Myra’s favourite opera, La Boheme, which was quite tearful. A lot of people turned up at the Crematorium, including several members of my lodge.

We all went back to Peter’s to plan for the future. Myra had signed over the house at Moss Pits Lane to Christopher, seven years earlier, to avoid death duties. It was decided to sell the house, as I could not afford to stay there on my own, so we put it in the hands of Roberts Edwards and Worrall to dispose of, and we then set about clearing the house. It was a big job, for we had accumulated a lot of possessions over the years. Myra had some lovely ball gowns, and we sold them for £200, which was help. With the children taking some of the things as keepsakes, we finally got it clear. It was decided that I would move in with Peter and Dot. Kate was not at home, and Hannah was in Glasgow University, so there was plenty of room. I settled in all right, met Peter’s friends and was quite at home. I helped with the washing and ironing, as both Pete and Dot went out teaching every day. Daphne Randles and her husband, the organist at All Saints, lived a bit farther out, and they arranged to collect me, and take me to Church every Sunday morning, which was a great help. I was amazed at the love and affection offered me by the congregation at All Saints, and it helped me through a difficult patch. After some weeks the house was sold. I told Christopher that I wanted £10.000 from the sale, and the balance was split between, Peter, Alison, and Christopher, who did quite nicely from the proceeds. Peter and Dot had been nursing an ambition to go and teach in India. They had been on holiday in the Himalayas, and went to an international school called Woodstock, which has an orphanage attached to it, and took a fancy to it. They explored the possibility of obtaining a post there. They came home convinced that they should

go there and they started making preparations. Ultimately they were offered positions at the school, Dot to teach RE, and Peter to go into the Administration Department. They sold their beautiful house in Green Lane to Dot's sister. They fixed Hannah, and her boyfriend Chris, with a house in Glasgow, where Hannah is teaching at the University. Kate came home for a short while, until she obtained her own house off Penny Lane, so both the girls were catered for (*as were the two boys!* – Pete), and it was decided by the family, that I would go and live with Christopher and his family in the Isle of Man. However I had decided to spend the summer in Rhuddlan, with Harry Holt, as he was on his own, Alison took some of my things to Kent, Christopher took some to the Isle of Man with him, and in April I took myself off to Rhuddlan to stay with Harry.

We get on very well. He is quite a card. The previous summer, he bought a caravanette, and it stood in his garden until this year, 2002. He decided then that he did not like it, so he took it back and changed it for a more expensive model. That stood in his garden for a couple of months, then we decided to travel in it to see Alison in Sevenoaks. We took his daughter Cathie, and went down. We had a good run down, and saw some of the sights, Knole House, Leeds Castle, where Ann Boleyn lived, Dover Castle, and some other places of interest. We then set off back. Harry's flying club had moved from Welshpool to Derbyshire, and as they owed him some flying time, he decided to go and find it. We ultimately discovered it in the wilds, and Harry had his photograph taken alongside a Cessna on which he had trained. He did not get much satisfaction, but at least he now knew the new address. We finally arrived back to Rhuddlan, and after having just the one trip in the caravanette, Harry decided to change it again. He took it back to the dealer, and paid a further sum of money for a luxury model. I must admit that it is a beautiful van, and I hope to travel in it sometime.

23

Harry had booked a tour of Northern Italy for a holiday, and he persuaded me to go with him, so on a Friday towards the end of August, we boarded a National Express coach for London. Harry's sister Doreen came with us. His other sister Dot had also been going, but she had a mild heart attack, and had to cancel. We stopped overnight in London, and on the Saturday morning we made our way to Waterloo Station, where we met our guide, Marion, and boarded the Eurostar for Paris. We booked in to our hotel, and Marion said she would take us for a walk. We got the underground to the centre, and had a long walk around the Place de la Concord, the Champs Elysees, and the embankment, where we embarked for a boat trip on the Seine. It was a beautiful evening and we had a good view of the sights, Notre Dame Cathedral, the Eiffel tower, the original statue of liberty, it was a very pleasant sail. Marion then took us to a very nice restaurant for dinner, and we got the tube back to the hotel at 11.0 o'clock. Next morning we were up at 5:30 a.m. and on the bus to the railway station at 7:30 a.m. I was very glad I was travelling light. We then boarded a train for Turin, and had a pleasant journey through some beautiful scenery, arriving at Turin at 1:30 p.m. Then panic, there was no coach waiting for us. Marion was very concerned, and started phoning London, and various place in Italy trying to find a coach, without success. There we were outside the station with our luggage in the heat of the day, and not knowing what was going to happen. Marion was very upset and was in and out to the phone. However at 3:30 p.m. the coach arrived, it had been coming from Milan and had been held up by an accident on the Motorway. We all piled in, and were taken to our hotel in Cinzano.

It was quite a strenuous holiday, we were up at 6:30 a.m. every morning, and on the coach at 7:30 a.m. and there was always a lot of walking at each destination. It was a great sightseeing holiday; the country was beautiful, especially in the hills. I saw a lot of places I never thought I would ever see. The Vatican, St Peters church, the ceiling of the Sistine chapel, painted by Michael Angelo, simply wonderful, and the plaza where the Pope addresses the crowds. We went on to the Coliseum, and were hit by a fierce thunderstorm. The first clap of thunder was so loud we all jumped. As luck would have it, there were

peddlers selling umbrellas, and they did a roaring trade. We got back in the coach, and went back to Cinzano. It is almost impossible to recall all the details, but we went to Assisi to see the tomb of St Francis. We went to Verona to see Juliettes house. In the courtyard there is a bronze statue of her, and someone had put out a rumour, that it was lucky to touch her right breast, and people were queuing up to have their photographs taken clutching the breast, which is highly polished against the dullness of the other breast. We had a day in Florence, where we saw the Medici palace, the Uffizi gallery, and the various statues in the main square, Neptune, David, and other lesser works. We also went into the Cathedral, and admired the Baptistery, which was unfortunately shut.

We carried on in our coach to Mestre, just outside Venice and stayed there. The next day we got the bus to Plaza de Roma, and bought our day tickets for the vaporetto and got a ferry down to St Marks Square. We went into the cathedral, which had been slightly flooded and to get out, we had to walk planks. I lost Harry and Doreen in the scramble, so I waited in the square, and Doreen found me. We went into the Doges palace, for a look round, lost our way, and walked round miles of dungeons, before finding our way back to the main hall. After lunch we took the ferry to the island, which houses the Venetian Glass Factory. It was very interesting to watch, and of course Harry persuaded to buy some. The previous time we were there he bought a dinner set, and had it sent home. We then took the boat back to St Marks Square and as it was too early to go back to Mestre I suggested that we went for another boat ride. We got on the ferry to the Lido, a fifteen minutes journey, so we decided to stay on and go back to St. Mark's.

Two hours later, we were cruising miles from Venice, it was a lovely evening and we were thoroughly enjoying the cruise, but Doreen was getting worried, so Harry went to ask a crew member, what time we would be back at St Marks only to be told that they were not going back there. Luckily they were due to stop at another island, and we were able to get off there, and step on to another ferry, which took us back to the Plaza Roma, where we were able to get the bus back to our Hotel in Mestre. The following day we got on the coach, and had a marvellous run through the mountains to a little town beside lake Como. It was a lovely little place, and fitting for our last night in Italy. The following morning we were on the coach at 7:30 a.m. and had another lovely run back to Turin. We took the train back to Paris, were coached across Paris (a feat in itself) and took the Eurostar back to Waterloo. We were able to walk to our hotel, and arrived there after fourteen hours of travel, worn out. On the Sunday we walked to the bus station and boarded a National Express bus to Rhyl, and Jock met us and took us back to Rhuddlan. It was the end of a great holiday, but it was quite exhausting. Doreen was taken to Broadgreen Hospital - she thought she was only going for a day but they kept her in, and she had no money or anything. I rang Christine, who went to see her and she fixed her up with money and toiletry. They did a good job on her and she is much better now. It is a good job that she cancelled her holiday- it would have killed her. Harry was going with Cath on a Gateway holiday in Newquay, so I arranged for Christopher to come over, collect me and take me to stay with his family in the Isle of Man.

We had a good crossing, and I was quickly installed in my own room. The movement took place on September the 13th. I applied to be placed on the list at Snaefell health centre, so I could be assured of my regular supply of pills. I saw the nurse, who sent me to Noble's Hospital for a blood test. I applied for an eye test, but there is a long waiting list. The first Sunday I went with the family to the Mission at Peel, but then I joined All Saints church, which is only fifteen minutes' walk away. The main problem is that Christopher's house is at the bottom of Devonshire Crescent, and it is a steep hill. Every time you go out you are faced with a hundred yard long steep hill, before you go anywhere. There is a Total garage and supermarket called the Wessex, ten minutes away, where I buy my papers, and quite often a steak and kidney pie for my lunch. They are baked on the premises, and they are very tasty.

The church, as I have said, is quite near, and I have settled into a routine. I go twice on a Sunday, and to communion on Tuesday mornings, and during Lent there is an evening service of Compline, with a discussion and refreshments. There are social events- the Sunday

School had a Pirates party, and I dressed myself up and went. We had games, had to make a pirate ship out of cartons, which was quite funny, and finished up with tea, and a good time was had by all. Iris organised a Manx Tay on a Saturday afternoon, and I volunteered to entertain. I had just sat down when she came and asked me to start the proceedings, so I got up, told a few jokes and launched into Albert and the Lion, which went down quite well. In a second spot, I read the Return of Albert, and finished off with the Victorian poem, 'the girl on the stairs,' and that was also well received, and Bert Ferris, the Curate at St Thomas' church, said he would give my name to the social secretary with a view to entertaining there. We have a men's fellowship, which meets every month, and we have had some good speakers so life is quite pleasant on the Isle of Man. Now it is March, the weather has improved and I have been able to start digging the vegetable patch and clearing the rubbish from around the garden. Christopher has built a great tree house for the lads, and it is a magnificent piece of work, although the weather is often not good enough for the children to play in it.

24

Christopher has a lovely house in a good part of Douglas. He was lucky to get it. He has a large garden with a stretch of woodland down the left hand side, with some mature trees and bushes, and it makes a great playground for the children. He amazes me with what he has done to it. At home he was useless, but having his own house has inspired him. He has installed central heating, made his own room *en suite*, moved the bath, installed a shower and built a porch. The vegetable patch did very well. We had loganberries, strawberries, and red and black currants. We had a good crop of peas, onions, cabbage, lettuce, potatoes, and broccoli, so it was worth keeping it. Chris has had an extension built over the garage and it rounds off the house nicely. I am in the small back bedroom overlooking the garden, with a marvellous view to the woods, and hills. It really is beautiful- I am very blessed to be living here with Chris, Martine and the family. Martine is a real treasure the way she calmly copes with the family. She is always singing and has a sunny personality. I am glad she married Christopher; they are well suited to each other and have a lovely gifted family. The main event was in 2004, when I celebrated my 90th Birthday. When I arrived in the Isle of Man I did not know anybody, but at the suggestion of one of the wardens, I had a coffee evening in the vestry, and 38 people turned up, and I received 44 birthday cards and a congratulatory letter from the lieutenant Governor of the island, Air Vice Marshall Sir Ian McFadyen. He came to our church the following Sunday and I was able to thank him personally. The best thing was that on the Thursday morning, completely out of the blue, in walked Peter and Dot with Kate and Hannah. I was staggered- I had no idea they would come from India, but they did. Christopher had arranged a dinner at Tynwald for the Saturday night so we had all the family together. It was a memorable occasion, and we had a family photo taken in the house on the Sunday and it looks well in its frame. That was a memorable week.

Christmas and New Year came and went, and before we knew it, half term holiday had arrived. Chris wanted to take the family to Denbigh, where he rented a cottage. I rang Harry in Rhuddlan and he invited me to go over for about three weeks. I arranged for him to meet me at Liverpool Pier Head at noon. The boat was right on time, although it had been a bit rough: when we pulled alongside the stage, it was impossible to rig a gangway. Owing to a high tide and a westerly gale the ship was moving five feet up and down, and it was three hours before we could get off. They finally took all the cars off and we were able to walk off down the vehicle ramp. I have never known anything like that. Luckily Harry had patience. I had a good time with him; he is 82 and is never still. He is in three choirs: St Asaph cathedral choir, St Asaph Choral society and St Thomas in Rhyl. The choral society were rehearsing 'The Messiah,' and I was able to sit in on the rehearsals. They finally took part in a Sunday evening concert with other singers, in aid of Tsunami victims, and it was a pleasant evening. I went with Harry to evensong when that choir was rehearsing, and I was given a cup of coffee while I was waiting. When the service started, there were 15 in the choir, one organist, the vicar, and seven members of the congregation, a sad commentary. Harry is chairman of a

local government firm that makes timber products, but he does not get paid. He is also treasurer of the golf club seniors, and plays golf twice a week. We went to the Gateway club, which has now moved to Dyserth. This is a club for handicapped people, and Cathy goes every Tuesday. I decided to go home after three weeks, as I was running out of medication, so Harry took me back to Liverpool to catch the boat. On the way back, he said, "I will miss you, you old bugger", so I took that as a nice compliment. I was welcomed back and resumed my routine.

My memoirs are coming to a close now, but there are a few isolated incidents worth a mention. When I was little, some people had a habit of saying "Rabbits" on the first day of the month, which was supposed to bring good luck. When I was six, I thought I would try it, so I stood at the top of the stairs and shouted rats. There was a panic: my father, who was shaving, cut himself; my mother dashed upstairs in a panic to look for the rats, and I got a good telling off that left me in tears. So it was not very lucky for me.

Two incidents when I was in the army: we were doing a maintenance course, and the sergeant told one of the lads to fill the engine with oil. Not having a clue, the lad took out the dipstick, made some paper funnels, put them one at a time in the hole and tried to put the oil into the engine through the dipstick hole. Needless to say the sergeant was not impressed. The other incident occurred in Iraq. We had all our tanks in a hollow in the desert, and a guard post was set up. A huge brilliant light was set up which could be seen a long way - and the guard was posted immediately beneath the light, to be seen on every side, fully illuminated, for an intruder. I was on guard one night, and the C.O. came at 3:15 a.m. He asked, "Is everything all right?" I said "no, it is ridiculous having a sentry standing in full view of a powerful light - it is an invitation for any intruder to slide into the hollow where the tanks are knowing that he could see the sentry at all times". My remarks bore fruit, the Colonel said, "it would be better to have a prowler guard among the tanks, and do away with the light". I said that would be more efficient, and the next day the changes were made.

When I was staying with Peter; we had a holiday in the south of France. Kate booked us into hotels on the way down and back, and we stayed in a large tent, the weather was very good and we had a splendid time touring and swimming. My worst moment was when Peter was driving down the road at 85 miles an hour, with one hand on the wheel, and Dot draped over the back of the seat talking to him. Nevertheless it was a good holiday.

I have not said much about them, but George Owen and Harry Lloyd are my two oldest friends. We met at church and formed a firm friendship. George was my best man when I married, and I was his when he married Marjorie. Harry married Esther and we were all good friends. George has just had his 90th birthday and has gone deaf. We used to play cards with George's brothers quite a lot, but he is the last of his family. Harry was sleeping at our house the night his father died. We have kept in touch for over 70 years.

Looking back I have been well blessed. I had a wonderful wife and three marvellous brainy children: (I used to say they would go far with their mother's brains, and my looks). Peter is a B.Ed and MA, Chris is a BA and Alison is a BSc. They are all happily married with children. I have eight grandchildren and they too are all very clever. God has been very good to me, and has been near me to guide and direct me, through good times and difficult times Praised be the name of the Lord who is always there when you call on His sacred and Holy Name. Blessed be the name of the Lord, and praise to our Saviour Jesus Christ our Saviour and redeemer.

These are the last bits. I was taught a lesson never to tell lies. On one Sunday school outing, a girl called Gerry and I decided to miss the train, and spend more time in Helsby. Unfortunately the train we caught was later than we expected, and it was very late when we got home. So I had to lie; I told my mother that the train had finished in Birkenhead instead of Lime Street, and that was what had made me so late. My Mum accepted the story, and I thought I had got away with it. Unfortunately my Mum's cousin called the next night, and said "We saw Al on the train last night." My Mum said "Yes, wasn't it terrible the train going

to Birkenhead.” My cousin said “That’s funny; we finished up in Lime Street.” It just goes to show; your sins will find you out.

It is amazing how little things can affect life. When I was stationed in Chiavari on the Italian Riviera, I used to go walking on my own. There was lovely valley behind our barracks, with a little church on a hill, I was passing it one day when I heard the organ playing, and I sat down to listen, when it finished I started walking away, when I heard a voice shouting ‘soldier.’ I looked around and saw a Priest waving to me, he caught me up and said are you English. I said yes, he said, 'I have not spoken English for five years.' He took me to the presbytery, got out dates and a bottle of wine, and we had a long conversation. It turned out that he was an American, and had got stranded in Italy, so they gave him this little church for the duration of the war. He complained about his congregation going out shooting birds rather than going to church, and there were very few birds in the valley. However we became quite friendly and I called on him occasionally, and when he came into town to the canteen I would give him a couple of cakes. The point of this tale is that such a chance encounter had an effect on one of my buddies. He started courting an Italian girl in one of the bars, and he applied to the C.O. for permission to marry. This was granted, but he was told he would have to be vetted by a Priest. He was in despair, he said I don’t know any priests, so I said to him, don’t despair, I just happen to know one. So I took him up to see father Anthony, and he did his bit, and the marriage went ahead, so a chance meeting had a positive result.

When I was in the Middle East, in my army days, I had several week end leaves. On one occasion a friend and I went to Jerusalem for a few days. It was an unforgettable experience, to walk round the Holy Sites where Christ walked. It was a humbling experience. We visited the Dome of the Rock and saw the Wailing Wall and the tremendous rock in the centre of the dome. It was a fine sight. We walked up the Via Dolorosa where Christ made his last journey to the Cross. We saw where St Monica wiped His face. We went on to the Crusaders Church, said to be the place where Christ was crucified. We knelt and prayed in a small chapel. An amazing sight was a statue of the Virgin Mary in a glass case; it was covered in gold and jewellery. People, in overwhelming joy at being in the Holy Place, stripped off their rings, bracelets, necklaces, and other adornments, and placed them on the statue. It was an incredible sight. There were several Christian Sects sharing services in the Church, Latin, Greek Orthodox and Catholic, and in the door was a large couch, occupied by a Muslim, whose duty was to prevent fighting among the sects for service times. King Constantine reputedly found the true Cross in the basement of the Church. We were able to have Communion in one of the chapels. Unforgettable. The next day we had a walk. We went through the Garden of Gethsemane, and recalled the incidents there. We went on to the Mount of Olives. We were later shown a footprint in a rock, which was supposed to be Christ’s last footprint on earth when he was taken up to Heaven. We also visited Gordon’s Calvary. This is a garden with a tomb with a large stone at the entrance, and one end of the garden is a high cliff, which has the formation of a skull. Gordon claimed this was the real Calvary. Inside the tomb was a centre shelf and the recent dead were placed on it, and any bodies from there were placed on the side shelves, and ultimately their bones were thrown underneath the shelves to mingle with their relatives, hence the saying, sleeping with their forefathers. There are of course a lot of beautiful churches around so there is plenty to see; the Russian church, and the children’s church are really lovely. It was a moving experience to walk in the footsteps of the Master, and it is something to live in the memory. The leave finished on a sour note, during the night the Stern gang blew up a police station, so next day we left, and finished our leave in Haifa.

Another pleasant memory was a couple of trips to Alexandria. I was directed to a French school, Ecole Jabes, and I went several times. A French Lady, her sister and her daughter ran it, and they would entertain English soldiers at their flat. It was so nice to sit on easy chairs, drink tea, have refreshments in comfortable surroundings and engage in stimulating conversation with well-educated people- a refreshing change. We always finished up playing Monopoly in French, quite educational. After the war was over Miss Jabes had a

holiday in England to visit the people her family had entertained, she came to tea with us at Teynham Crescent, and we had a nice time, reminiscing; she was the going on to Bradford to meet the next on her list. People like her and her family throwing open their homes to soldiers were a great help in keeping us in touch with civilised living, and we were all indebted to them.

The trouble with memories is that one triggers another, and you have to be selective, I have a couple of stories that I will use to complete this series of recollections, and then I will pack it up. As I have said it is almost impossible to date your memories, but you just have to put them down as you think of them.

We had a rough time when my Father died, and my Mum was very upset, but strangely, a week after my Father passed away, a black cat walked in, and took up residence with us. We do not know where it came from, it just appeared. The point was it attached itself to my Mother. It followed her all round the house, and when she went out shopping, it followed at her heels to the grocer's, the baker's, the greengrocer's and the chemist, and it became a local talking point that it never left my Mother's side. It stayed with us for two years, and my Mother used to say my Dad had come back to take care of her. However, after two years my Mother decided to get married again. In those days there were very few who could say they had been at their Mother's wedding. The point is that as soon as she married again, the black cat vanished, and we never saw it again.

As I said, Harry is a golfer, and I have had the pleasure of walking some North Wales courses with him - Rhuddlan, Denbigh, Holywell - and one day he was playing in Caernarvon, so he dropped me in town, and I spent the day exploring the town. It was a pleasant day. We got into the habit of going to Sainsbury's for tea, on a Friday night, as there was an offer of two meals for the price of one. We were joined by his sister-in-law, Phil, and occasionally by his sisters, Dot and Doreen, so it became a social occasion. We also went to the Gateway club on a Tuesday night. This is a club for handicapped children, and we made ourselves useful there. I also got Harry to accompany me to St Thomas's church. He had been in the choir there for 35 years, but had not attended since moving back to Rhuddlan. He met several of his old mates there, and we then went every week.

Life is peculiar. We are born, having no control, and if we are fortunate we get good parents, who will teach us to be good citizens, but really we do not have much control, and we must cultivate our religious life to keep us in proper balance. I suppose I have had a fairly normal life, but it has been a great adventure.

Memory is a funny thing, and I suppose other stories will come to mind, but I think I have illustrated that life is a rich tapestry and we do not have much control. And the best thing to do is cling to your faith, and let it grow, and leave everything to our Creator.

