

My Life Story

by

Annette Blundred

Table of Contents

Early Life.....3

Teenage Years.....13

 Part I.....13

 Part II.....17

Adult Life and Career.....22

 Part I.....22

 Part II.....31

Later Life and Retirement.....36

Appendix.....41

 Family History.....41

Early Life

Early Life

I was born Annette Louise Marshall on the 14th of July 1952 in Hull, Yorkshire. My father said that I arrived at teatime but I can't remember whether he said 5:35 pm or 6:35 pm. My parents lived in a flat above a wet fish shop, named Polar Fisheries, and I was born at home. Apparently it was a difficult forceps delivery.

Hull had been badly bombed during the war: around 86,700 houses in the city, about 95% of the total, had been damaged or destroyed and of these more than 5,000 were completely destroyed. Only about 6,000 houses were left undamaged. As a result of the bombing, approximately 1,200 people were killed, 3,000 injured and, out of a population of 320,000, around 152,000 were made homeless. Consequently, there was a severe shortage of housing. Many new council houses were being built and in October 1953 we moved from 368 Anlaby Road to one of the new estates, Longhill, on the east side of the city. I think that this was a big step for my parents as it was quite different from the area in which they had grown up, away from family and friends, and a much longer journey to work by bike or bus for my father. However, they seemed to settle quite well into the new house. They gradually made new friends and they remained there for the rest of their lives.

My dad, Henry, had been in the Navy during the war and had travelled the world. As a gunner he had survived his ship sinking after it was bombed off Crete in May 1942. He had suffered minor injuries which had affected one of his eyes and his hearing. After the ship was sunk there was no news of him back in Hull for three weeks but thankfully all was well and he returned after the war to marry his childhood sweetheart Edith (Edie) on 21st December 1946, the shortest day, which led to a lot of jokes apparently. It was a foggy day and the photographs did not come out. They had some taken the following May, minus bouquet and corsage. They spent their short honeymoon in Leeds, as Auntie Mabel and Uncle Norman (Grandma's brother) who had "given the bride away" stayed on in Hull after the wedding.

My parents lived with my widowed maternal grandmother, Ada, for several years. My Dad said many years later that Ada was easy to live with. I was surprised by this comment as she was an extremely strong character!

Dad's parents lived less than a quarter of a mile from my Grandma's house. My Grandad Marshall was a chief engineer in the Merchant Navy and he was therefore away a lot. My dad told me that he often travelled to Toledo and Valencia in Spain and Malo in Denmark. Sometimes if he docked in Liverpool for a short period my Grandma would travel by train to meet him. When I was 3 or 4 my dad took me onto Grandad's ship when it docked in Hull. I remember seeing his cabin but I was terrified when Dad carried me down into the engine room to see where he worked. It seemed so steep and far down.

Occasionally the other grandchildren and I would wait by our grandparents' garden gate until we could see Grandad come into view. We were then allowed to run across the road to the green to greet him. He died when I was 6, but I remember him as a very kind man who used to give me Cadbury's chocolate and threepenny bits. Grandma was quite scary and all my cousins felt the same. Her house was quite dark and we were all expected to sit

Early Life

quietly. She was a bit of a recluse but my older cousins report that she had been a different character when with Grandad. They would go into central Hull to one of the oldest pubs. Apparently she laughed a lot when he was around. This was not the Grandma we all knew! Dad told me that his parents had their quarrels and disagreements, as we all do, and I think that knowing this helps to put things into perspective when things do not go as we would wish!

My other Grandma (Meggett) was quite the opposite. She was a lively, gregarious person with a large extended family and she liked to organise everyone. Two of her ten siblings lived in the same street and she was very involved in their families until her death. The two sisters who lived near, one next door but two and the other diagonally opposite, had lots of children between them but my grandma had only my mum. She therefore had more time and resources to help the others out and I have been told by her nieces and great niece that she did just that. She helped out with births, deaths and illness. My cousin Eileen said that at age 19 she helped my grandma to lay out her grandmother (Grandma's sister); they went to get her straight away. She was widowed in 1943 at 52 but she made a social life for herself by playing cards several times a week, for halfpennies or sometimes match sticks, in the local library at the top of the street where she lived.

She was also an avid reader, was always in the library, and did not have a television or a radio. She seemed to be quite well informed on current affairs although I'm not sure how she got her information - I don't remember seeing any newspapers except those in which the fish and chips were wrapped! Hull being a fishing port, fresh fish was plentiful and in the area where she lived, Hessle Road and Gipsyville, there was sometimes a strong smell of fish from the fish dock and the factories. It was often very unpleasant travelling on the local buses with the fish workers.

One of my earliest memories was being in a pram on Holderness Road, in East Hull. I can picture it, we were quite a long way from home and I had a balloon tied to my pram which was being pushed by my mum. There are no photos of this but I remember it clearly. It is doubtful that my mother would have told me about such a fleeting, random thing in a particular place so I am sure that it is a memory. Apparently children were in prams for much longer then. Some boards were removed from the base to accommodate growing legs.

Similarly, I remember my first hair cut, which I was told was in John Lewis in Leeds. I was also told that I was about 15 months old. Again no photos, but I remember being excited by seemingly high seats resembling animals, which children sat on. I chose a horse. I had difficulty deciding even then! However, it may have been a later hair cut and not the first.

We all played out in the street from a very early age. I was allowed to play outside from the age of four with other local children. I loved the company as I was an only child. Two boys nearby were also only children but the others all came from much bigger families. We did not have a lot of money but thankfully we were not short and resources did not have to be shared with several siblings.

I loved playing schools with the older children as I was looking forward to starting school and I wanted to know about it! I was hugely disappointed when the children decided to

Early Life

play something else after lunch. After this I imagined school teachers as huge women who were strict and threatened children with sticks! Not far wrong as I progressed up the school! Fortunately my first teacher was nothing like that. I remember her as being very young and quite glamorous.

We were not allowed to go to the local drain (like a river but less appealing) or rather I wasn't allowed to go. However, we did go and had to face the consequences, usually physical punishment, not horrendous, but I won't dwell on it! One time as I was crawling under the hedge to the drain, having crossed a main road, a policeman hauled me out backwards and gave us all a lecture. I was the youngest. I still have nightmares about the risks we took playing there, then and much later. There was a rope swing over a subsidiary stream which was an attraction but I was too young for that. We had to make our own entertainment most of the time. Parents were consistently busy with domestic necessities and there were very few, if any activities for very young children.

I do not remember having many books before I went to school. They were prohibitively expensive then, but I had a comic, Jack and Jill, and once I could read I had books. My early fiction favourites were "Milly Molly Mandy" by Joyce Lankester Brisely and later "A Peep Behind the Scenes" by Mrs O.F. Walton. I also loved Enid Blyton's "Famous Five" - sheer escapism for children. My favourite non-fiction book was a Reader's Digest Junior Treasury. It really was a treasure. I gave my copy to the older grandchildren and I have bought another copy for the younger ones. Callie picks it up when she visits me in Devon.

Before I went to school I was knocked over by a young boy on a bicycle and was badly bruised, but I was very fortunate that it wasn't worse. It was my fault as I hadn't looked. I didn't dare tell anyone as I knew that I would be in trouble so I didn't go home until I had calmed myself.

I eventually started school in the September after my fifth birthday in July. I couldn't wait, but the reality was that I didn't know anyone so I was a bit lost. However, I got some kudos as I was the only one who could tie shoe laces, thanks to my Dad. This backfired though as I ended up tying everyone's shoe laces several times a day, alongside the teacher.

I had also been taught to write my name. I had to relearn though, to write in lowercase letters rather than capitals. Being left handed I had some difficulties with the letter e as I went from right to left. I found that very frustrating and felt stupid. I loved learning to read on Janet and John, a look and say method. We did learn phonics too so I was well taught and fortunately did not really experience any further major difficulties.

The first teacher was Miss Pettingale. I went to school by myself after the first few days. I went home for lunch and one day my mum didn't come for me. I really didn't know what to do. I was terrified of being in trouble if I went by myself but in the end I did. It was ok as she had been held up and had hoped that I would go home. It involved crossing a main road with buses and I really was in a dilemma as I had been told to wait. I had been contemplating what punishment would befall me so I was extremely relieved.

Miss Pettingale was lovely but I was frightened of the next teacher, Mrs Kell, who always seemed to be slapping people for minor misdemeanours. I liked Mrs Baxter but I was

Early Life

always in trouble for talking and once for putting a plaster on a boy's mouth. I was very upset as Gordon, the boy, and I were having great fun until the teacher came along. I was 6 and I hated being told off.

The next teacher, Mrs Robinson, didn't like me. She once accused me of not saying thank you when I had. I protested which didn't go down well! I have awful memories of the smell of sour milk in that class. The small bottles froze in the winter and went off very quickly in the summer. I trapped my fingers very badly when I was in that class and lost a nail -ouch!

When we first moved to Longhill there were no shops. They were on the next estate where my mum later worked. The doctor was based there too but would visit at home if you were a Longhill resident and too ill to walk to the surgery.

We were served by a grocer's and other vans which visited on different days of the week. Children were sent out to get the items and I once lost the 6d change on the way back. When very young I touched something at the front of the Co-op van which my mum had no intention of buying. I was in so much trouble that I thought that I might end up in jail!

Eventually shops did open on Longhill and we also had a pub, The Dart, where we would queue to buy sweets on the way to school: Black Jacks, Palma Violets, sweet cigarettes and crisps with packets of salt in them. Milk was delivered every day and the coal man delivered the fuel. I believe that coal was still rationed until the early 50s. It was common and accepted practice to count the bags of coal to ensure that it was correct as it would be easy for the coal man to lose count. The coal man, the window cleaner and others all lived on the estate and had big families.

My favourite toys were dolls, prams and dolls' houses. I liked the play house at school but was I was often disgruntled because it seemed that I was rarely chosen to go in it. My mum used to give away my old toys when I was at school. This affected me, I was very sad and angry and felt out of control. I still sometimes have trouble with parting with things. I need time to decide.

My dad and his friend Alan made me a wonderful shop out of hardboard and painted it pink. It had a separate shelf unit and a semi-circular counter with attached doors to close the gap between that and the shelves. Mum bought or saved me some empty packets, jars, etc, and the local children and I had a wonderful time with the cash register and pretend money. However, it took up a lot of space in our small house so it was not long before that disappeared too. To be fair, the novelty had probably worn off!

My grey Silver Cross dolls' pram was my pride and joy. We went to town to choose it for my birthday and dad was told that it could not be delivered for another week. Everyone was very impressed when, desperate to have it, I suggested that Dad and I take it on the train to Sutton (in the Guard's van) and walk the couple of miles home. I was rewarded when they agreed. Mum went home on the bus to get the tea ready and I proudly wheeled the pram all the way home. I think that I was six or seven. One day when I got home, that had been generously given to another child in the street, but my generosity was not as well developed as my mother's!

Early Life

During my early childhood I went to Sunday School at 2pm every week. It was about a mile away at the Kingston Wesley Methodist Church and I was taken until I was seven. I met my friend Ann Godfrey at age four and we remained friends until about 18 but lost touch then until we retired. We were reunited through the advent of social media (Facebook), which I see as a blessing although it gets a bad press. Ann says that she was jealous of my vanity case. I do not remember having a vanity case but I do remember having a small red suitcase for my treasures. The church was a huge part of my childhood and teenage years, and I later met my husband Peter there.

On to the Juniors where we were streamed. There were four or five classes in each year. I was always in the top stream but I was never at the very top. We sat according to our grading and gender. The grading was probably correct as, after the 11 plus, those at the very top went to the top schools. I was pretty consistent throughout my education, never top but percolating above average and I tried hard most of the time.

I enjoyed Brownies from 7. I had to walk to the bus stop and get the bus after the first few times. In the summer I would walk. Eventually some other girls in the street came with me. I was in the Pixies and then the Elves, and I enjoyed the "Lend a Hand" week where we earned money by doing jobs for neighbours and friends. Most people were kind but there were those who would give us hard, dirty work which they didn't want to do themselves, such as cleaning ovens. This was before I was 7! I recently found an old chart which gave age-appropriate tasks for children. We would be shocked now as children are much more protected. From about 9 onwards, I had full responsibility for taking local babies and toddlers out and about. At 10, I took one of them to town on the bus!

A highlight of most weeks, from the age of about 7 or 8, was the Saturday morning matinée at the cinema on the next estate. This was just for children, most of whom were well behaved; if they were not then they were escorted out and banned. The first film I remember was "The Young Ones" with Cliff Richard. There were many more. When I was 10 a boy in the next class, Colin, asked my dad if he could take me to the cinema one evening, to the early showing. We had fish and chips afterwards but I don't remember what we saw! It could have been the hugely successful "Summer Holiday", again with Cliff Richard. I remember the film well and it was released around that time.

We made our own entertainment during the daytime when fathers were at work and mothers were usually busy doing household chores. We held our own concerts in people's gardens and played in the streets and playing fields. We frequented the local parks, often spending the later part of the day there; a luxury was to be allowed to take a picnic. The largest park in Hull, East Park, had a water chute and there were nearly always enormous queues of excited children wanting to get wet, largely unsupervised!

For the last two years of primary school I had a teacher who was a sadistic bully. I say this as someone who has now had well over 40 years of working in schools and observing other teachers. He would use the blackboard ruler to cane the boys on a regular basis, for learning errors, and ridicule the children, telling us we would never be able to do anything useful. He would tell us that he was in a bad mood because he had an argument with his wife. He once played an April Fool by lining nearly half the class up to be caned. I was so

Early Life

terrified that I didn't hear the punch line when everyone laughed with relief. I still do not appreciate this type of humour.

It was a miserable time. I misjudged my words once at age 10. He said that I undermined his authority and as a consequence he was going to deny the whole class any privileges; he was very hostile to us. I felt that it was my fault, but fortunately the other children did not hold it against me (as he had intended) and they held a meeting to decide what could be done about it. I think that maybe parents, not mine in this instance, became involved behind the scenes, as the local newsagent said that the teacher was more childish than all the children put together. I have to say that from the perspective of my seventies I agree. Maybe he had been traumatised by National Service or his own childhood, because he was too young to have fought in the war as many of our parents had.

However, this abuse was transparent. Hidden abuse was all too common and much of it has come to light decades later; chickens are still coming home to roost. Having described this, physical abuse in school was common. The Head was a kind man who must have had difficulty in managing this volatile teacher. He himself once publicly caned two boys who had pushed a pushchair into the local drain. It was horrifying as one of the boys was fighting him. The image has never left me but I was a clearly a sensitive child.

11-plus time arrived and I did very well in the mocks, known as the Preliminary. However, the night before the main exams were due to start I came out in a rash and felt very ill. My poor mum didn't know what to do. She hoped that it was nerves but unfortunately it wasn't. She took me to school and explained the situation to the Head who suggested that I sat apart from everyone else, did the exam and then went home, which I did for the next three days. We had English, Arithmetic and Intelligence tests. The idea was that they would see how I did. I now know that being in the top stream I was expected to pass and I did, but I often wonder if I could have done better as I didn't go to the top school. However, some friends were not happy there and, from later results and college attainments, they achieved about the same level as me, bright enough but not super bright! Maybe I had a lucky escape. I went to a school nearer home; I was able to go on my bike rather than on two buses. However, secondary school was not plain sailing for me either- more of that later.

During my primary years, we got our first television, fridge, vacuum cleaner and washing machine. The washing machine had a mangle and I once got my fingers in it. In earlier times, this would have been catastrophic as it would have swallowed the whole arm, but fortunately the new models had a safety release when anything became trapped.

I hated wash day. It was always on a Monday, as in nearly all families, and if it was wet then I would come home to washing drying in the living room, our only room apart from the smallish kitchen where Mum would cook the evening meal ready for my dad arriving home. He went to work on his bike or the bus depending on the weather or how he felt. After he changed jobs he went on two buses until we got a car in my last year, 1963, of primary school. It was a 1956 green Ford Anglia and we loved it. Dad had passed his test in 1962 so, when I think about it, he was only driving a few years before I was!

Early Life

We got a telephone when I was about 6. Hull has an independent telephone system and our neighbour, Len, worked for Hull Telephones. He was able to arrange for us to share a party line with them. It transformed our lives, no more going up the road to the call box with buttons A to connect or B to give back your 2 pennies if you couldn't get through. The only problem with the joint line was that you couldn't make or receive calls if the other party was using it. Having a phone meant that the grandmothers were able to ring, although Grandma Meggitt did not get a phone until many years later. She never had a television or a fridge. Another Ada, a relative who ran the shop at the top of the street, gave her small portions of butter, etc, and she used sterilised milk which lasted for a few days. The milkman delivered milk daily and he also used to deliver small bottles of orange juice which I enjoyed.

I have been told by relatives that my mother was very attractive when she was young and I believe she had quite a lot of admirers. She met my dad through her cousin Albert when she was 15. They married after the war, when she was almost 27. She did not have me until she was 32. She therefore had quite a lot of working years, enjoying many of those in what was known as "The Silk Shop" in the city centre, both before and after she worked on munitions during the war, a dangerous job. Uncle Albert told me that my mum used to come out of the silk shop to see him off whenever he went away during the war. The station was not far from where she worked. Uncle Albert was a Japanese prisoner of war and came back quite emaciated, but he survived longer than anyone else! He died a couple of days after his 100th birthday. He received his telegram from the Queen, but sadly he was too ill to enjoy that or the celebration his daughters had arranged for him. I had travelled up to Hull for that so I was able to say a last goodbye.

Albert had been a very close friend of my dad's when they were young: they both went to Selby Street Primary School. My mum was quite bright and passed her 11 plus even though she had had her left hand tied behind her back to make her right handed. As a result she was quite ambidextrous. I am left handed but fortunately did not have to endure such an ordeal. She left Thoresby school before she took her school certificate and went to work I believe in the Silk Shop.

My perception is that my mum found it very hard to adjust to domesticity and motherhood. She felt quite isolated and she needed both intellectual stimulation and a social life which I fully understand. My dad did thankfully appreciate this and managed to get my mum a job in the firm where he worked, at the dry cleaners in one of their shops. It wasn't far from where we lived and it would take her about 15 to 20 minutes to walk there. It would have been ideal had the social climate been different.

I either walked to the shop after school or would go halfway by bus because my school was in the opposite direction. Mum really enjoyed working in the shop, but unfortunately she was ostracised by other women, the neighbours, and people implying that I would suffer and that my dad couldn't keep her or was henpecked, which was very obviously not true. They were both the targets of acerbic tongues but it didn't worry my dad. He was ahead of his time, both in his views of women and in the way he treated me. An additional pressure on my mother was that she used to rush home at lunchtime to get me my lunch and then go back to work. In the end she stopped work and that was a further source of frustration for her. Of course I did not fully understand this at the time, but it affected her

Early Life

health and her moods. I experienced similar negative social pressure when I wanted to return to work after my first baby but things are very different now and many mothers work. In fact there seems to be a pressure on mothers to work now. However, it is still a very difficult, taxing, guilt-inducing and often thankless task.

My mum was very talented at knitting and she excelled at it. I still have two jumpers which she knitted for me before she died in 1976 and they have been going through the washing machine for 50 years, although I do not wear them too often now. She was always a keen reader and used the library regularly. She would do her housework in the morning and read or knit in the afternoon, often getting washed and changed before my dad came home. I do not remember when that stopped, maybe when she was working full time.

When I was in my early teens my mum got another part time job in the local wool shop. She was in her element at that time, sharing her expertise and chatting with the customers, most of whom lived on the estate. I think that she was still working there when she died aged 56. The shop also sold clothes so a lot of her earnings would be spent on those and things for me. Like my grandma she always loved clothes. People still comment on this when we discuss her. The love of clothes passed on to me but I have far more now, as fast fashion, cheaper clothes and charity shops have enabled me to expand my collection. This is not a good thing but it is an interest and I always have something to wear!

In my later years people do not dress up as much as they did when I was a child. We had "best" outfits. My mum loved hats and often wore one even though they were going out of fashion except for church, weddings and funerals. This was a bit of an embarrassment for me. An acquaintance of my mum also wore hats and her daughter, Valerie, and I used to joke and commiserate with one another. I also love hats but I rarely wear them.

Family holidays are treasured memories. In 1956 and 57, dad pushed the boat out and we went to Robin Hoods Bay; quite an adventure and source of memories that I treasure and often refer to. We had a taxi to Paragon station in Hull, unheard of for people like us. We then went to Scarborough on the train, changed trains and took the coast route to Whitby. They were steam trains then and, as a four-year-old, I was mesmerised by the view of the coast. It was a long journey but very exciting and when we arrived at Robin Hoods Bay the coal man was waiting with his horse and cart to take our luggage down to our cottage at the bottom of the hill. It was Gallery Cottage, which is an old house on the corner at the bottom of the hill as you go down into the village. I loved it! My bedroom looked over the street and because it was quiet I was allowed to go to the newsagents across the road to get shopping and to spend my pocket money. We spent days at the beach or exploring the area. One time we came across a bullock. My dad lifted me into a cordoned off area which must have been for electricity. He chased it off but I was very scared. We so loved the holiday that we returned the next year. The North York Moors remain a favourite area and I still visit when I can. Robin Hoods Bay is much more commercialised now and when I suggested taking dad back, by then he was in his 80s, a lady who owned a property there advised me not to return because she said that the memories would be spoilt for him. We didn't go as dad was ill.

Early Life

Other holidays were more traditional and in keeping with what most people did in Hull. They stayed at a nearby seaside resort where relatives could visit during the week. The nearest coastal resorts, Aldborough, Hornsea, Withernsea and, further afield, Bridlington were also ideal for special family days out. Scarborough, a favourite holiday destination of many, was further away and although a day trip was possible, it was not a usual choice. We sometimes visited friends and relatives who were staying in Hornsea or Withernsea, but we went to Bridlington for our week. Both grandmothers came on separate days to visit us by train.

We loved our holidays there: days on the beach, often wrapped up in the rain, boat trips, and dancing at the Bridlington Spa Hall. My parents loved dancing and I did too. We went most evenings there and some afternoons for a Tea Dance. I learned lots of dances then but unfortunately when I met my husband, because he hated dancing, that aspect of my life did not continue. I always dance when I can though and I still enjoy it.

My dad worked in an office doing accounts. He later gained accountancy qualifications over many years at Night School, as it was known. He became a Company Secretary and then a Director. For some inexplicable and unknown reason he had failed his 11 plus. My dad seemed to be well educated and informed. He had several interests, astronomy being the main one and cricket another. I found both boring and cricket matches seemed interminable!

At the weekends Dad would take me, from being a toddler, out into the countryside on his bike. There were lots of bikes in Hull then (as it is flat), many with toddler seats on the back but I had a seat in the crossbar. I enjoyed the trips out but I didn't like the smell of manure. I got my own bike when I went to secondary school in 1963.

Mum and Dad had a tandem for a while and we went to the seaside on it, sometimes with other families. I had a seat on that too. Once we all had cars, sometimes a group of neighbours would go together to the coast in the summer. Hardly anyone owned a car until about the time I was 10, when we got ours. Gloria's dad had one when they moved in nearby and a few more began to appear around that time.

For my 11th birthday party, my dad drove me and a few of my friends to Bridlington so that we could go to a dance, one of my favourite holiday activities. It was a tight squeeze in the car, no seatbelts were legally required then, but it was a really memorable and successful evening.

A highlight of my childhood was that Brenda and Ernie next door had a bubble car. I used to look after their baby, Alison, and they would take me with them when they went out for the day or to visit friends and relatives. I knew all their friends and relatives as if they were my own family. The bubble car was great fun, but very temperamental and was always breaking down, much to Uncle Ernie's frustration. He worked as a joiner and if he was ever out of work he would travel long distances to find some; unusual then. My dad once went to tow him home from Scarborough, 90 minutes away. The neighbours were certainly not well off but they helped each other and were amazing when my dad was very ill and at the end of his life. I have remained close to Brenda, Ernie and Alison, although they moved to a bigger house when I was 14.

Early Life

When I was young I do not think that children were encouraged to express their fears and worries as they are today. A bad period in our lives was when my Auntie Joan, dad's sister, died very suddenly in her early forties. She had been widowed many years earlier so my cousins were suddenly left without their parents. Frank and Maureen were around 22 and 20, but Pat was only 14. Frank called dad and he went straight over to the other side of the city on his bike. I was 8 and I was terrified that this would happen to my dad too, but I could not verbalise it. I had nightmares, but of course this was nothing compared to what my cousins went through. They all came to stay at different times and shared my room. I spent some time at their house too, but internally I was worried about what had happened there. It took some time for arrangements to be made for Frank to have parental responsibility for Pat. Thank goodness he was over the age of majority, 21 then.

I knew that there was something really huge going on and I had to be on my best behaviour. I loved having Pat around but we couldn't discuss the situation. There is a big difference in maturity between 14 and 8. Then people went to work at 14 or 15. Pat has said very recently that no one really told her what was going on and she didn't fully understand. My cousins also spent time with my paternal (their maternal) Grandma but she was a very "stiff upper lip" person and did not want any crying!

Maureen was always very kind to me. She forgave any lapses in impeccable behaviour and kept her promise not to tell my mother. I would have known about it if she had done so! It was the culture then and my mother was determined not to spoil her only child. Only children were often referred to as "spoilt" because of their status, warranted or not! I have to admit that I was never wanting for food, clothes or toys. I longed for a pet and eventually I had a yellow budgie, courtesy of my godfather. I named her Beauty.

Teenage Years

Part I

Just before I left primary school a new family moved into Waveney Road. I became friends with Gloria who was the same age as me and we have remained friends. When we were 11 we would go on bike rides to Hornsea, about 10 miles away, and talk about what the future might bring. We went to different schools and so we had plenty to share and talk about.

Gloria's dad was a sales rep for a stone mason, I believe. He travelled all over the north and occasionally he would take us with him for the day. We loved it. It meant an early start and, as there were no motorways then, it took hours to drive through the West Yorkshire towns to get to somewhere like Manchester. We would eat in cafés, which was a real treat, and we enjoyed seeing all the different places. We all sat in the front on a bench seat. You don't see them now. Great memories, thank you Cyril.

I was very excited to go to Estcourt High School and I wore the blazer with pride. The uniforms were expensive and prohibitive for some parents, so it was not uncommon for children to turn down places at grammar schools. This had certainly been the case for previous generations, but there may have been grants by this time. I am unsure. Uniforms were certainly not available in supermarkets as they are today.

On starting school, I was very keen to seek out my second cousin Susan, who was 15. She had other ideas, wanted to be seen as cool and did not want to be associated with a "fag" in the first year. It was a long time before I forgave her for that rejection.

To add to my problems a group of girls decided to bully me, perhaps because I was small. They awarded me a certificate to say I was the smallest in the class. I was not prepared for what came next, although I had previous experience of bullying from the other side.

When I was walking to school at age 5, I was told to scratch someone who was on the ground. I could not see who it was. An older girl, a mean and nasty piece of work, said "Scratch her, scratch her or we'll scratch you". There were about four of them aged 9 or 10. I remember it distinctly. I was terrified so I got down and ran my nails against the poor little girl's legs but it wouldn't have hurt her. I have done some mean things in my life, regretfully, but I have a clear conscience on this. I think that I did the best thing at the time as I literally wasn't big enough to stand up to the group of much bigger girls. The victim, Carol, was about my age and was left crying. The bullies ran off and Carol and I walked on to school. She held my hand and I remember it was very soft. I didn't tell anyone though.

In my first term at secondary school I lost something, I can't remember what it was, but I was in trouble with the teacher. The girls saw an opportunity and started to take things out of my desk, so this became a pattern in different classes, much to their delight and amusement and to my distress. I did tell the form teacher, but she told me that I should be honest about losing things and "call a spade a spade". She said that I needed to accept responsibility for my actions, be more organised and grow up. My solution was to carry all

Teenage Years

my things with me in my satchel and keep it with me at all times. I even took it to the toilet! The toilets were not nice, outside, where many of the older girls smoked, and there was sexual graffiti too which I came to understand. As an adult I cannot understand how this was implicitly encouraged; it appeared to be accepted as it was not removed. Being found without your beret was a much worse offence – keeping up public appearances?

This was a very difficult time for me. Someone took my compulsory beret off my head, from behind me in the playground, and I was in trouble in front of everyone. I think that the duty teacher did then see that my reason was plausible, as some girls said they had seen it happen. I was very grateful to them. Fortunately the bullying stopped then, but other girls suffered far worse. It did scar me though as I do not like to be found without anything to this day. I have yet to learn to pack lightly!

The form teacher, who had humiliated me by saying I was dishonest, taught us French. She did not like me and for some reason she held the fact that I was an only child against me. She would shout “Début Enfant Unique” when I had to answer a question or translate. She had five children and asked my mother why I was an only child. My mother replied “I don’t think that is any of your business Mrs D—”, which certainly didn’t help me!

In hindsight, having worked in literally hundreds of schools, I can see that it was not a good school. I think that there was a lack of ambition for the girls. Quite a number left as they were pregnant, and one I met in town the day before my wedding said that she was very envious of me and other classmates who had gone to college or university. She said “Look at me, three kids and no money”. We were 21. I felt sad for her and grateful for my circumstances. We had no money as we were students but I was looking forward to getting married.

I did ok academically and well for that school, in the top stream but I was not top. Once I did very badly in a Geometry exam. As I went into it I remember thinking to myself “You only have yourself to blame.” I hated Geometry and had not revised. I reaped the consequences with a humiliating 13%, but I learned my lesson. I worked hard for my O levels and I was awarded top marks in the school for English Language and History. I do not remember sciences being an option with the exception of Biology.

Out of approximately 120 girls, only 17 of us went into the Upper 6th to do A levels. We did not receive any careers guidance as I recall and I believe that most of us went on to be teachers. It suited me since my two A levels were a means to an end: English Literature which all 17 of us did, and RE which most of us did. One girl did History (my favourite subject but I thought the teacher was poor) and failed. I am not sure if anyone did three A levels, but History and RE were timetabled against each other so it was not an option for me.

Sport, Art, Needlework and Domestic Science were not my strong points! I was always sidelined for anything sporty, and told I was very weak at Art, which I still am, although I am sometimes creative! Needlework was ok but I didn’t enjoy it. My excuse is that I am right eye dominant and left handed! One time I got a high mark for my lemon meringue but then told the teacher that I had forgotten to put the sugar in! She reduced my mark from 9 to 7½! Honesty does not always pay!

Teenage Years

I once moved a mirror in the Needlework room as it didn't look stable. After a few minutes it slipped and broke. I owned up to it and my Dad got a bill from the City Education Office. He protested and asked why he was being penalised for my honesty. He stated that it was an accident and there was a lot of vandalism at my school for which the parents weren't charged. This was true. He stuck to his guns as it were and after a couple more letters the charge was waived.

Another time my mum wanted me to have my hair done and to leave school 15 minutes early because of something we were going to. The teacher refused our request, so I said that she was teaching me not to be honest. I said that I wouldn't be honest next time and that I would say I had a dental appointment. I now think that I was quite bold, but she surprisingly conceded and said "OK then!"

Unsurprisingly, when prefects were chosen for the Sixth Form I was not amongst them. The RE teacher, a man, told me that the consensus was that I had too much to say for myself. He said that he had spoken up for me. I have never been a "Yes Person", as one of my Head Teachers much later told staff, but I have mellowed!

During my school years I would walk to school on a Thursday and then go by the Circular bus to the other side of the city to see my maternal grandmother. I would have my tea there and after an hour and a half would return by the same route. I enjoyed this as I liked to participate in the fun the pupils had on the bus with the boys from other schools. Also on the way home, a young chap from the Youth Club, who was already working, would get on the bus and we would chat. He had a girl friend but I liked him as a friend.

At the age of 13, I started attending the Youth Club at the church with my friend Gloria. There were lots of activities for young people then and many of us from Kingston Wesley agree that we had a wonderful social life in our teenage years. There was a group who met after church on a Sunday evening. I still see some of these friends occasionally and, although there were a few broken hearts along the way, I think that it prepared us well for adulthood. We agree that we were very fortunate. We had wonderful days out as some of the group had vans and another was able to borrow her parents' car. We even went camping in Whitby with several tents. Great fun!

At 13 I had my appendix out. It was a better experience than an earlier one as I was in an adult ward, although the elderly lady opposite died. I had been in hospital at 5 for a sinus operation. I was traumatised because when I turned round to speak to my mum she had gone and I cried. A nurse threatened to slap me if I didn't stop. That made it worse but I tried to stifle my sobs. Other children were crying too and I could hear it get worse as they came round to inject us in our bottoms. I was terrified but I survived. I have often wondered why we were injected at the same time. Odd! It transpired that my mum had been told to leave without saying goodbye to me. One didn't like to question authority in those days, but I would never leave my children without saying goodbye and reassuring them, even if they did cry – which they did sometimes!

When I returned home from my operation, the minister from the church came to visit me, having heard that I was not well. My parents did not go to church, but they had done in

Teenage Years

their youth and they gave to the church monthly. They liked my new friends and let me host the Sunday group when it was my turn (they went out). The minister told my mum that he and his wife would have liked a daughter and would she like to swap for one of his twin sons! We were surprised to learn about his three children but I didn't know them until they joined the group some time later.

When I was 15 I was invited to a friend's 21st party. For some reason I was seated with the Blundred twins and Gloria observed that Peter kept looking at me. I laughed and said that she had imagined it, because he seemed quite intellectual and he wouldn't be interested in girls. I was wrong.

I have always been interested in spirituality and esoteric things. I visited various different religions in Hull and at one time our neighbours were spiritualists and I enjoyed conversations with them. I enjoyed things like handwriting analysis and palm reading. I had my fortune told a few times at Hull Fair. Peter, known to his family as Pete, pretended to be interested in such things. When I was talking about it one Sunday, he asked me to look at his palm and, dramatic as it may seem, I knew then that I was likely to marry him. It was probably to do with two children, which most people have! The following month he came round on his bike to ask me out. We went to see a Carry On film.

This was in 1968. Gloria, I and several others were attending classes to become church members, the equivalent of Confirmation. The Blundred twins were also attending. Pete and I were going out regularly by then, mostly walking to the park or going on bike rides. Gloria and I were doing O levels. Pete was helping me with my Geometry and Trigonometry. I had to do a re-sit so that tells the story! In the May we were made church members, the first time we knelt at the altar together.

I remember us having a conversation very early on when I said that to me women's futures did not seem very appealing. Years of domesticity, chores and child rearing. I was not sure that I was cut out for it. Pete's mum had other outlets as she had a major role in the church as the minister's wife. She led meetings and seemed to thrive on it, although it was certainly not without its pressures. To my surprise Pete agreed with me. This probably set the tone for us. We have both been very independent and did not always adopt the traditional regimented roles, although this elicited negative comments throughout our marriage. It worked for us though, and we changed our procedures and roles many times to adapt to our changing circumstances and finances.

We have been through a lot together since then and although we were irritated with each other sometimes he never ever let me down (except not dancing) and I can honestly say that I never doubted his love for me.

Teenage Years

Part II

In my early childhood I was not really aware of world events, but in 1962 when I was still at primary school I remember that the world held its breath at the time of the Cuban crisis. I was aware that something serious was going on but I did not fully understand it. I was 11 and in my first term at secondary school when Kennedy was assassinated. I am sure that all my generation remember that event and where they were. I was at home and heard it on the radio. A lot went on when I was 13. For Winston Churchill's state funeral we had a day off school, a poignant moment in our national history.

I had been going to Sunday School for most of my life and I became a teacher. I can't remember exactly when. I had some lovely children in my classes and I continued until I was about 15.

I started Youth Club at 13 and had my first boyfriends. I had several mini-relationships before I was 15. I wish that I had been kinder to them, but I guess with hindsight that I was not really interested, although I enjoyed the dates. We usually went to the cinema or dance classes. As mentioned before, the cinema featured highly in those days and I had been going with friends since I was about 8. Sometimes I would go with my maternal Grandma and very occasionally with my parents. It was the norm then in my circles to start dating early and progress to early marriage. I think that there was a status in it but that is my perception.

Some of my boyfriends were older and earning money, although I met one at the school dance. He lived at the other side of the city and I went to his house a few times. His mum was a bit snooty. He was a nice enough person, but I was very involved with my friends at the church and he was a distraction, so I finished it. People told me later that he was very upset and I regret ignoring his letters.

I think my friends would agree that we "did the rounds" at the church, dating different people, but it was mostly very innocent and I think that we all gained a lot from our youthful liaisons, although they may have left some faint scars.

I also started my first job at 13. Again, as my mum had done, I worked for the firm where my dad worked. They needed a Saturday girl. In those days jobs were advertised separately for male and female. I don't think that my job was advertised, as Dad became aware of the vacancy.

I got up early on a Saturday and caught the circular bus to start at 8.30. I was quite nervous but the two ladies I worked with were very kind. I had to take in dirty laundry and dry cleaning and when the items were returned clean a few days later they had to be folded and well presented for collection. My first earnings were 8 shillings (40p) for the morning.

Around this time my dad set up a bank account, into which he put a monthly sum, for me to manage my expenses, fares, entertainment, gifts and some purchases of clothes and

Teenage Years

personal items. I added to this from my earnings and I think that it helped me to manage money responsibly.

I gained a lot from that job. I remained quiet and listened to the customers chatting to the staff about very adult matters! They said that they forgot I was there but I knew that I did not want a relationship like some of these women had. Fortunately I had good male role models in my life and would measure other boys and men against these.

The job progressed to working in school holidays when I would be in sole charge of a shop. I was responsible for all the things described above, plus cashing up and taking the proceeds to the bank. If the money was short I had to make it up. I continued with this until I went to college, travelling to various parts of the city by bus, or occasionally Dad would take me in the car, by then a Hillman in which I learned to drive.

In the poorer areas the fishermen would bring in their suits to be cleaned, sometimes with vomit on, after they had been drinking. Unpleasant, but it was good for me as I had to interact with many different people. I was covering for holidays and one week I was in Gipsyville so I could go to Grandma's for lunch. I enjoyed that. I was 18 and it was just before I went to college.

When I was 16, I had a brief spell working on various counters in Woolworths in the city centre. We had to pass a maths test to be appointed. I was always good at arithmetic and algebra but not geometry and trigonometry. I didn't really enjoy Woolworths and there was a lot of pilfering. There were many separate counters, each with its own cash register. I worked on a different counter every week: sweets, hardware, haberdashery and toys. There was also a baby counter from where one of the full time employees, who found herself pregnant at 16, would pass goods to friends who came into the shop. I was aware, so I worried that I would be accused or implicated if this was discovered. Fortunately, all was well as I was put on a different counter the next week. For the tea breaks we had bread and dripping in the canteen. No wonder I put on weight! After a while I decided that I no longer wanted to work there, so I made a quick decision, unusual for me, and I gave in my notice.

In 1968 something extremely poignant happened to the Hull fishing community, which also affected the whole of Hull. The trawler, Ross Cleveland, was fishing during a severe Arctic storm. The ship eventually capsized and sank. All 19 crew members were lost, making it one of the worst fishing disasters in British history. The loss of Ross Cleveland was the first disaster in a devastating period for Hull's fishing fleet: other trawlers were in trouble and I remember praying in assembly and also at church for those who were presumed missing, as contact had been lost. The Kingston Peridot sank on 26 January 1968 and the St Romanus sank shortly afterwards. Together, these three disasters claimed 58 lives in just a few weeks. The hymn "Eternal Father" seemed to be sung constantly in those weeks. Most people seemed to know someone or of someone in the fishing community who was affected. A group of fishermen's wives began to campaign for improved safety standards. They were known as the "Headscarf Revolutionaries" and were led by "Big Lil", Lillian Bilocca.

Teenage Years

The campaign was very controversial and led to copious misogynistic comments as the wives' role in it was certainly overstepping the socially accepted norms for women at that time. They were subject to abuse, denigration of their class and, if I remember correctly, were physically attacked. Sometimes other women were their harshest critics. Despite all these setbacks the women were extremely dedicated and determined. Their efforts eventually led to major reforms in fishing safety, reflected in better weather forecasting, radio communications and safety equipment.

My teens were a hectic time juggling studying, romance and trying to earn some money. Peter sometimes would come to meet me at school once he had finished his A levels. He had hoped to go to Southampton University but fate decided otherwise and he went to Hull instead. He lived at home for the first year until his parents moved. I was pleased that he was around and we widened our social life from the church and walks round East Park to events at the Students' Union. He too had jobs: on the tugs, being a beater (which he hated) and gardening at the cemetery where lots of my family were buried.

A levels were a big thing and many people in Hull liked to study at the Central Library. It maintained self-discipline and the coffee and lunch breaks were social. In Hull there was a change of educational policy in 1968/69 when schools became comprehensive. As a result, we had a new Head and Deputy. The traditional study leave which had been given to sixth formers prior to A levels was stopped. We were incensed as we had been looking forward to it and we did not like the classroom given to us for study. We did not feel that we would work there as effectively as we would at home or elsewhere.

Although this was before schools were graded by league tables, individual results were published in the local paper under the school name. This was a big deal for all concerned and, for parents choosing schools, a big decision. A meeting was held with the Head who was adamant that study leave would not be given. It was a very heated meeting. Some of the girls were very aggressive and others were in tears. I felt that there was no hope of changing her mind, so I thought that we would have to make the best of it. However, for some reason I decided to contribute at the end. I said that one aspect we hadn't considered were our parents who had kept us at school when most of our contemporaries had left and were earning money. I said that the way we studied could make the difference between a high grade and a low one or even a pass and a fail. I knew that I would do better in the library or at home and, in a few weeks, at college or university, we would have to study independently without the teachers. Most of us were 18 (I wasn't) and should be treated as adults.

To my shock the Head thanked me for my diplomacy, said I had made good points and that we could have the study leave. I was extremely popular and the Head decided that I could be a prefect after all. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to accept after being rejected, but it would have been awkward not to!

My A levels over, Peter and I had some wonderful, memorable days at the coast and Pete, Paul and I went camping in Wales, a lovely holiday but very cold even though it was summer.

Teenage Years

I also passed my driving test. Dad had been very encouraging and, from the age of 14, I occasionally had been taken driving on a disused airfield. I did not have access to my Dad's car but Pete's dad offered me his when he wasn't using it - amazing! It was a Morris Minor but even then, although he couldn't drive, Pete was giving me instructions! He then bought a tandem which we used for a while. I hated that as I wasn't in control, but it was a means to an end and it enabled us to get about cheaply when he was living in a student house.

I had chosen to go to college in Lancaster to train as a teacher. I couldn't wait to go, I was so excited, but, when I went in September 1970, I missed home dreadfully, particularly Pete. We wrote to each other nearly every day and phoned a couple of times a week. The phone system in Morecambe, where I lived in lodgings with 7 other girls, was antiquated compared with Hull. You had to lift the receiver and speak to the operator, giving the number you wanted to call. Calls to the lodgings had to be at a pre-arranged time.

I made some good friends at college. I am still in touch with Anne and Gill from the lodgings in Bare (lots of jokes about that) and Sally with whom I later shared a flat. I enjoyed the course, the social life and the early teaching practice. Pete visited, as did my parents and friends from church, but I missed home and would go whenever I could. It was four hours with a change of train at Leeds. When I saw the river Humber I would feel that I had arrived. Philip Larkin's poems depict this perfectly and "The Whitsun Weddings" describes Paragon Station on a Saturday tea time just as I remember it. I remember going there to wave my cousin Frank and his wife Elaine off on their honeymoon in 1963. The station was always covered in confetti on a Saturday. It evokes powerful memories for me.

Long before I went to college, Peter and I had decided that we wanted to get married but we knew that we were too young, needed careers, money and to see more of the world. However, he still wanted to buy me a solitaire engagement ring which took nearly all of his savings. In later life he kept wanting to buy a more expensive one but I didn't want one. He eventually persuaded me to have a zircon!

We didn't tell anyone about the ring, but after only a couple of months we decided to go public when I went home for the weekend. Our parents were happy for us, but Pete's mum said she was worried about his "prospects." I said that I wasn't worried. Later I used to joke that I should have listened! My college friends were delighted and we went out to celebrate. One of the blokes stole my Babysham glass from that evening and gave me it as a souvenir. I have only recently thrown it away.

In February 1971 Decimalisation took place. New coins were introduced and old ones such as the shilling, sixpence and three penny bit were withdrawn. Prices were displayed in both old and new money for a transition period and a major public education campaign helped people adjust. I can clearly remember using the new coins for the first time on the bus to college. The transition was a major challenge for some people.

Also in 1971 we had the miner's strike and the three day week. We would often have to sit in the dark in the lodgings when the power was off. We had candles to enable us to do our work and we put plenty of warm clothes on. We worked hard and had a good social life, but I missed my boyfriend and wanted to get married. Living together was uncommon in

Teenage Years

those days so we discussed me transferring college for the last year. In hindsight it would have been ridiculous for a few months and, as things turned out, Peter went to work in Winchester after he graduated, rather than Grimsby, so it would not have been a good move.

Pete got top marks in his year and was delighted to secure a trainee librarian post. He sent me a telegram to say "Holidays in Winchester." Our friend Stan from the church, with whom I had been out briefly and performed in concerts and am still in touch, took us in his car and we camped just outside the city to look for somewhere for Pete to live. This was difficult and we were running out of time, but eventually he was able to go and live with two men of his age, one of whom had a house bought for him by his parents.

We loved Winchester and had a good and memorable year travelling back and forth on the overnight bus once a month. I was doing my finals and we were planning our wedding.

Adult Life and Career

Part I

Peter and I were married on the 1st of September 1973. The wedding date was postponed twice so Pete could earn money over the summer and so we didn't have to pay rent on any accommodation. It was difficult for him to leave before the end of August as his postgraduate course started in September.

I took the summer off, as he had done the previous summer. I had hated working in Needler's sweet factory two summers before, making greasy orange and lemon slices. I had then worked in a hot steamy laundry the following year, which was not much better.

I had also worked as a post person in the snow. The delivery area was two bus rides. It was interesting and I did enjoy sorting the mail in the delivery office one Christmas, where I learnt about most locations in the UK and which counties they were in if I had not known before.

My parents and I planned the wedding, I think much to Pete's relief. He did not have much to do, only organise his clothes, etc. However, he somehow managed to leave his tie in the honeymoon car which my dad had taken to the reception venue. Therefore, Dad had to go and retrieve it, taking out almost two hours of the morning of the wedding. My mother was very angry and was having second thoughts by then! His first words to me when I arrived at the altar were "Do you like my tie?" which made me laugh!

Peter had bought a car, an old Wolsey 1500, at the end of June. My dad found it for us and I drove it all summer. I also went to Liverpool to try and find accommodation which did not prove easy. We did not see each other for the last month before the wedding. It sounds ridiculous now, but travel was expensive and the logistics were difficult. Pete arrived with his two friends the evening before the big day.

Fortunately, after the morning fiasco, the ceremony, conducted by the minister of our church and Peter's father, went smoothly as did the reception. My dad had hired a coach to take the many non-drivers to the reception which was held at a scout venue in Raywell, run by friends of my parents. There was an article about us in the local paper, as ours was the first wedding reception to be held there.

We set off on our honeymoon to Hardraw, near Hawes in the Yorkshire Dales, where there is a well-known waterfall. We had seen a honeymoon couple there in a "just married" car a couple of years before, when we were on a camping holiday and we decided then to have our honeymoon in the same place. However, it was not the romantic experience that we had envisaged! The food was not good when we finally arrived. It was more like a station buffet and our room overlooked the graveyard. The weather was pretty awful over the next couple of days and the locals seemed not too friendly. We looked round Hawes and had a tour of the area.

Adult Life and Career

We set off about 48 hours later for Morecambe to see two retired ladies with whom I had become extremely friendly. I met them at the church in Bare. Initially I had rejected their invitation to tea, but then thought "Why not?"; it was a good decision and led to a lasting friendship. I went for tea most weeks before church. Peter really liked them too and we continued to visit for about the next 20 years until they had both died. Muriel was a deputy headteacher and her sister Phyllis stayed at home as the housekeeper as she described herself. They were the generation of women who were "surplus" after the devastating loss of many men during the First World War. They described their relationship as "a type of marriage" as they had each adopted a traditional role.

When we arrived in Liverpool we had a nasty shock. The one room bed-sit, which I had eventually found, had been let to someone else and we seemingly had nowhere to go. After fruitless calls to the landlord from the local phone box, we decided that we would have to find lodgings for the night as I was starting my new teaching job the next day. It was a very rushed honeymoon! On our last attempt, we did manage to contact the landlord, who came round and found us a similar bedsit further up the street. It was very dirty as it not been cleaned since the last tenants. However, we did have bedding and basics in preparation for the other accommodation, so we settled down for the night and, when I went to my new job and first ever day of teaching the following morning, Peter went out and bought lots of cleaning materials and set to work.

Initially we planned to look for better accommodation but decided to "slum" it to save up for a house. We knew that we would be moving to Hampshire the following July, but of course I could not reveal this at school.

My job did not go particularly well. It was in a poor area of Liverpool and seemed even more deprived to me than anything that I had seen in Hull. I had a tough time with a very challenging class, but they all did very well academically and I remember slow but no non-readers at the age of 5. The management agreed that I had a very difficult class. I don't know why they organised it like that but Sue, my contemporary probationer, had a much easier and quieter class. We are still in touch. She gave up teaching shortly after that, so in hindsight I suspect that they made judgements on our personalities, rather than distributing the classes or the pupils evenly.

The Head said that I was my own best critic so she would leave me to it! This was true. My family did not really indulge in praise so I tend to put myself down before anyone else does! Unfortunately I still do this. When I met Pete I was astonished how his family built each other up. I used to joke that it was like a mutual admiration society, but that was unfair. It was probably more the norm and certainly not excessive, just encouraging. I was not used to it.

Pete praised me too and it went down well when he said I was good at things, especially when he said that I was better at things than he was! Years later Paul told me that their dad had taught them to do things badly if they didn't want a job. This applied to several things in our household including the night feeds and preparing for Christmas! These were Pete's choices as he was competent at most things domestically.

Adult Life and Career

The first year of our marriage was a very tough year. Pete had a wheel stolen from his bicycle so that was kept behind the wardrobe. The bathroom window was broken and never mended. We had to keep the toilet roll in the flat because if we took it up to the shared toilet, it disappeared. Every Sunday we thoroughly cleaned the bath before we enjoyed that luxury, but the rest of the week we had to make do with washing in our cramped single room. Although we were both pretty slim, sleeping in a single bed all year cannot have done much for the quality of our sleep. I was never fully free of nits throughout this year and I would frequently see lice crawling in the children's hair when they were reading to me.

We shared the accommodation with about eight other people, one of whom came home drunk on Friday night and made a hell of a commotion punching doors and shouting. Peter stupidly went out to tell him to quieten down. I shut the door and opened the bay window ready to climb out and run to the phone box to dial 999. Fortunately, there was no need for this as, even though he was twice the size of my then thin husband, he did quieten down. It transpired that he was ex-Navy, divorced and lonely. After that, on a Friday night he would bring us all fish and chips and come home from the pub early, as he had something to look forward to. We didn't really make a relationship with him, but he just needed to talk and have someone to listen.

I got to know some people at school, but I didn't really settle. I joined a keep fit class and I became vaguely friendly with a nice girl, similar to me and recently married. I went to her mum's house which was in a very nice area of Liverpool. It was a selling "party" which were very popular at that time. At the end of the year, we left in a hurry as we couldn't wait to leave. I still regret to this day not being able to contact her to let her know what was happening.

During the year, we eventually acquired a portable television, which was quite a luxury but made a huge difference. I had been invited to watch Princess Anne's wedding at somebody's house, but I didn't really fit in. I thought they felt obliged to ask me as some of them were people I drove to school.

I don't really have very many happy memories of that year. When waiting for a bus, a conductor told me to get on his bus because it wasn't safe for me to be waiting in that area.

Our trusty car saw us through quite a few years. If it was raining when we woke up, we had to go out to see if the car would start, use the starting handle, and if it didn't start I had enough time to go and catch the two buses to work. First though, I had to use the phone box to let my "lift passengers" know.

My parents brought Pete's mum over for the day to visit us and they were all horrified at where we were living. We went back to Hull whenever we could. We bought a tent in March and went camping in Wales – a big mistake. It was freezing! However, we then had the equipment to go camping on many weekends and that was a welcome respite.

Adult Life and Career

In May, before notices had to be given in, I revealed that I was going to be moving. They took it quite well and to my surprise I got glowing references for having managed such a challenging class.

I applied for jobs in Hampshire and to my delight I got the first one that I applied for, in Petersfield. I was appointed instead of two other much older, more experienced local women. The job was a real godsend as it came with a house in the playground. I was not aware of this until after I was appointed and couldn't believe my luck. We had more luck when Peter was given a post in Havant, which was nearer than Winchester. He was still learning to drive and amazingly passed his test very soon after we moved, although he had not taken any driving lessons, having only been in the car with me.

We moved at the beginning of August 1974, but before that we had a week on the Yorkshire moors in a place where we had stayed with Paul a couple of years before. It was a happy week. My friend Gloria, with her baby Louise, and Jim our best man, who by then lived next door to Gloria and Lewis, came to visit. Jim brought Gloria as Lewis and Christine, Jim's wife, were at work. We took a trip from Goathland, near where we were staying in Darnholm, to Whitby on the newly opened North York Moors Railway. As a child, my parents had a cottage for annual holidays and Gloria used to come to stay for part of the time. Her parents brought her and stayed for the day. At that time the original railway was running and we used to watch the steam trains in Goathland station from my bedroom window. Our friends were all very fond of the North York Moors and so our day out was a memorable one for all of us.

Moving down south to Petersfield was a very new experience for us, although Pete had spent a year in Winchester. He had a job as a children's librarian in Havant and commuted on the train. He hated it as he preferred the books to the children! My job at the infant school went well. I really enjoyed working there. My impression was that the children came from most social backgrounds, although the woman in the next classroom, who was a complete snob, disagreed. There are many private schools in the area, including Bedales where she was eventually appointed into the prep department.

On my second or third week, a child brought me some birthday cake which I took into the staff room at break time. The deputy advised me to look up the address and, if it was a council house, not to eat the cake. I said that I wouldn't have got very far on that advice as I had grown up in a council house. The comment was met with an awkward silence and I found out later that many of my colleagues had been privately educated.

I made some very good friendships in Petersfield, many colleagues amongst them, and I am still in touch with some, although many have died. These were very happy years, but the other women were busy with their families and tended to dump things on me as I was young and they were encouraging me to be ambitious! It was quite manipulative and I was aware of it. However, I did enjoy my job and I seemed to be highly thought of, if considered too enthusiastic. I was pretty successful in my role, but wasn't popular when I requested training for us all on child protection. We had to stay after school. There was then, as always, a horrendous case going on, but people always think that it doesn't happen in their school. It was quite apparent to me that there were children who were suffering. I don't think that I am being unfair when I say that most staff seemed oblivious to it. There had

Adult Life and Career

been ongoing child protection issues in Liverpool but it was difficult to ascertain what was being done for the children concerned.

We lived in the school house for a year and were saving for a house of our own. It was very difficult for us to get a mortgage on our salaries, as house prices are so high in that area. One lunchtime, I went to the council offices and enquired about options. I found out that we could have a council mortgage, as we both worked for the council, and the ratio was more generous than that applied by other lenders. We were ecstatic and within a couple of months we were extremely fortunate to find a lovely old cottage in Frenchman's Road, Petersfield. We absolutely loved it because we had thought that we would have to move out of the town to afford something.

Although Pete loved and enjoyed the cottage, he was very unhappy that it backed onto a factory, but it was not really a problem, and we could park in their car park when the factory was closed. I think that he perhaps worried unnecessarily about things, but I recognised how much stress it caused him.

In March 1976 my parents came to stay with us in Petersfield. Unfortunately Mum was below par and suffering with a headache. I can remember regretting feeling sorry for my dad having to spend the holiday indoors, because the headache proved to be much more serious than we thought. While she was having a bath, she collapsed, so we had to call an ambulance. She did regain consciousness enough to speak to us at the hospital. All seemed to be OK, so we went home, only to receive a call in the middle of the night to say she was in a coma. Sadly after five days she died. It was a terrible shock for us all as she was only 56.

That year was a memorable year for other reasons too. We had an extremely hot summer with water restrictions. I enjoyed the weather and it may have helped a little during a very sad period. Peter's dad, Fred, had a heart attack in the midst of this in July. He thankfully made a full recovery.

My mother's death was the beginning of an extremely stressful period for my father. Not only was he dealing with this sudden shock and all the grief, but, as I only came to know a few months afterwards, he realised that there was something amiss with the accounts for which he was responsible at work. Unfortunately, he had to call in the police as he suspected that some of his colleagues were taking money. It was a long and stressful period, although by today's standards the court case went through fairly quickly, in about 18 months. He had to give evidence against two of his colleagues who received jail sentences of 10 years, longer than expected.

I was 24 or 25 at the time and I realised that this was very stressful for him, although I did not fully understand the implications until I was much older. Obviously, Dad could not speak to me about it and, given his wartime experiences, just got on with it. As I said elsewhere, people did not speak about things as much as they do now and there were many taboo subjects.

As a consequence of these events, I believe, my dad started with late onset asthma, which made him very ill, and he ended up in intensive care a couple of years later, just before Gill

Adult Life and Career

was born. Fortunately, he recovered from several episodes of that and from a major operation when he was 76. He lived until he was 85, 29 years after my mum, when he died within five months of being diagnosed with lung cancer.

When Gill was on the way in 1979, we moved to a new estate at the other side of Petersfield. I really did not want to move; it took a toll on me, but the house gave us more space and I did settle there after a while. We sold our lovely cottage to Frances and Howard. They loved it too. We met all her family just after the offer was accepted. The sale went through smoothly and we have remained friends ever since. We are godparents to each others' children.

I had plans to return to work after Gill was born. I received a hostile response both from colleagues and parents at the school. Working mothers were certainly not the norm in our social circles; another person who did it was constantly gossiped about. It was a dilemma but, as things happened, Peter got a job in Kent. By then he was working in Petersfield library, having been on the mobiles before that, but his job prospects were not great. We had only been in our house for 18 months.

A difficult period followed, during which he was commuting from Hampshire to Kent on the train, a journey of about three hours each way as he had to cross London. He did try living in lodgings but hated it. Financially it was extremely pressured as there was no moving allowance or any expenses reimbursed. We were paying for the mortgage on our existing house at a high interest rate (15% unbelievably!), travel expenses and subsequently rent when we did move. It now seems like a crazy decision when only one of us was working. I really do not know how we managed it.

Eventually we moved in November 1980, although we were both very reluctant to go as we had been happy in Petersfield. We rented a house within the East Malling Research Station where Pete worked. A few months later, in July 1981, Debbie arrived. Then, thanks to a small legacy from my paternal grandma, we were able to move to Birling in 1983, after a long house hunt.

Pete worked flexi-time so I was sometimes able to do supply while he looked after the children. I also did tuition in the evenings, moving on to teaching children who had been expelled from school, had medical problems or had English as a second language. One of them took my car keys which I had stupidly put down but, when I didn't go after him, he came back fortunately. Some of those pupils did end up in jail so I clearly did not turn things round for them.

I went back to full-time teaching when Debbie started school. It was the local Catholic School, covering maternity leave (still elicited a lot of negative comments) and an eye-opener for me as I had not really had any close dealings with Catholicism. I found it a bit of a shock after my Methodist upbringing and I was not allowed to teach there permanently as I was not a Catholic.

I then moved to Hadlow where the headmaster and staff also frowned on working mothers. I was asked at the interview which I would put first, my family or my job. That wouldn't be allowed these days, but I replied that I would do my utmost to make sure that neither

Adult Life and Career

suffered, although I would never ever neglect my children because of fear of what the Head might say. Surprisingly, I was appointed.

I stayed at Hadlow for three years as their reception teacher. A new Head, who had been at my interview, started the term after me. At 45 she had recently lost her husband and was not in a good place; it was a very difficult time for her. She valued my work and encouraged me to go for promotions, but I was not really ready for that. The job and the family were very demanding and the only free time that I had away from young children was when I was driving the car to and from work!

In my third year I asked for a secondment to do research on children with behavioural needs. As I was the reception teacher, I don't think many heads would have agreed to it but to my surprise and delight it was granted. It was a very successful term for me. Our lifestyle and family life benefited as Pete and I got some free time together occasionally, when the girls were at school.

Unfortunately, Pete had to go into hospital with a suspected cancer during this. Fortunately, the lump was benign. Again, the course leader gave me time to visit without question, which would have been much more difficult in school. At that time there were no teaching assistants or free periods and it would have required a supply teacher. Eventually, the teacher who took over my class for the term's secondment replaced me when I was promoted to the Support services. I really found my niche in this role after a problematic start. It worked out really well for us all. The teacher and the parents were happy and she remained there until she retired.

I had a wonderful leaving celebration which was more like a retirement! I was told by one rather stern colleague that I had made the best leaving speech she had heard in over 40 years of teaching. I have already said that I was not used to a lot of praise growing up and this was praise indeed! It was perhaps because I had referred to a bible reading I had read to the congregation when I was at Sunday school, aged about 7 and so of primary school age myself: "Mary stored all these things in her heart". I said that I had not understood it as a child but I realised as an adult all the things I had learnt and was learning every day from the children. Children do not fully realise that teachers and adults generally learn a lot from them too. I also learnt a lot from my colleagues and these experiences and memories would go with me to my new job and help me to do it well. Flattery maybe, but the truth and it went down well.

Pete changed his job at the same time as I did in 1990. He went to work for the Wellcome Trust in London. We were both having work problems. He had to get up very early at 5.30 to catch the coach. The working patterns created more problems with childcare although Gill was at secondary school by then. My problems settled down eventually and I really enjoyed my job. Teachers often have a hard time acclimatising to advisers in their classrooms. They are ready to eat you alive if you don't measure up but usually (although not always) they came to look forward to my visits and we worked well together. I got to know all the secrets!

Unfortunately Peter really disliked his job, his boss and the commute. It was a very difficult three years and we were extremely relieved when he managed to get a post with the

Adult Life and Career

Wellcome Foundation. He brought home what I thought was champagne, but I think it was actually sparkling wine. We did not drink much in those days!

Gill and Debbie had their ups and downs at school but they were a credit to us, both doing well academically and in other areas, though maybe not sport. We are not a sporty family!

During this period, in 1992, the girls and I had our first holiday abroad in Menorca after my godmother, Auntie Phyllis, gave me some money from a legacy she had received in her 80s. She had never had money before and having some threw her completely. She had bought us a beautiful Silver Cross pram which was my pride and joy. I have never seen one that I loved as much. I have to admit that I kept it and it has been used for the grandchildren. Auntie Phyllis was very embarrassed when I asked the shop staff to get the pram down from a top shelf, so we could look at it more carefully. She went on about it for years, but it cost an absolute fortune and I thought that we should be able to see it closely before she spent that amount of money.

Pete refused to go on holiday to Menorca. He had a thing about going abroad, but I decided to take the girls anyway. We tried to persuade him to come but he was adamant. Interestingly, most of the relatives and some friends tried to persuade me not to go, but they didn't try to persuade him to come with us! I went because I was desperate to travel and give the girls the experience. I would have felt very resentful if I had given up the opportunity.

Gill was upset to leave her dad behind at the airport, but Debbie kept saying it was his choice. The holiday was fantastic. They both really enjoyed it and it was a very memorable one for us. The girls were so enthusiastic that they persuaded Pete to try it, so we went back two years later. He loved it and one day went off on his own and bought me an eternity ring. He had changed his job by then and was a lot happier.

We visited Gill's exchange partner in rural Burgundy in between these holidays. It was a reciprocal visit and the start of two or three holidays with them which we thoroughly enjoyed. It was a totally new experience for us. Initially the holiday was blighted when I had an accident in the car. We were very fortunate to escape injury and had a taxi and then a hire car for the rest of the holiday in France and our camping trip to Switzerland. My O level and subsequent evening class French just sufficed with the Gendarmes! Getting all the equipment onto the ferry without a car on the return journey was a challenge to say the least!

In 1991, the girls and I also took part in a local exchange where we stayed with a family. Again, Pete did not want to join us so we were referred to as "Famille sans homme". However, he enjoyed hearing the girls tell of the very positive experience and he was very welcoming when the family came to stay with us. He enjoyed their company and so decided to join us the next time. We had several exchange visits. Lovely experiences and they stood the girls in good stead for their future language studies. Neither studied any French until they went to secondary school so they did very well to shine in their exams and to go on to study languages at university.

Adult Life and Career

These were the start of many ventures abroad. After I had visited Majorca, I persuaded Pete to accompany me on another trip. This started a love of holidays on the island. We went for our Silver wedding and we have had very happy holidays there since. We completed our Balearic Islands list with an enjoyable trip to Ibiza. We also visited all of the Canary Islands. I enjoy the warmth as an antidote to the British winter, but Pete was not keen on hot weather, so the temperature there was perfect for him. Pete and I have enjoyed many holidays, some with the girls and lots on our own. Not enough for me though!

Part II

After my secondment in 1989, I had a break from studying to adjust to my new role on the support services in West Kent and Mid Kent, serving a huge variety of schools with different atmospheres, staff and social dynamics. Some were very challenging and not very welcoming, but on the whole I managed to establish relationships in them and thankfully they mostly valued my input and advice. It usually took a little while, as teachers are notorious for not wanting to accept advice, particularly from those younger than them! It was important to discuss what they had tried first rather than just offering advice and strategies, some which may possibly work and others which may not.

I started my MA in 1992 and, as I made my first journey to Canterbury, I distinctly remember hearing on the radio that the Church of England was going to allow, if not welcome, women priests. These journeys were not easy, as I was trying to organise the girls by remote control and I worried about them getting home. It was a long way from Tunbridge Wells to Canterbury each Wednesday evening. Again, I am not sure how I managed it. I bought a mobile phone to enable contact, but this was a source of great ridicule from Peter and his relatives. However, it gave me a sense of security even though it was as heavy as a brick and didn't often work.

Peter was never very keen on me doing an MA, for the reasons already specified, so he was not very encouraging. He thought that it was a waste of time, pointless and too demanding for me. However, when I graduated eventually in 1995, we went to Canterbury Cathedral for the ceremony and he apologised to me for not having been more supportive. My dad came too, but Debbie refused to come. She never wanted to go back to Canterbury after we once returned home from a shopping trip to find our lovely cat, Sally, missing and later dead under a neighbour's caravan. Sophie, her sister, grieved for a while but settled to life on her own.

Before I even graduated, I had enrolled on a counselling course in the evening, with a view to a possible change of career. It replaced my Wednesdays in Canterbury and was much more local in Tonbridge. It was easier to manage, although there were weekly assignments. I was looking for a change of direction and I enjoyed the course.

It was on one of these evenings that we heard about the horrific shooting at a school in Dunblane. This event changed security arrangements in schools completely. Until then anyone was able to walk into schools and classrooms freely.

I remember an incident at Hadlow when an estranged parent, known to be violent, walked into my classroom and tried to take his daughter. As he approached, I quickly sent a sensible child to bring the headteacher or deputy, but before they came I managed to talk him out of it, witnessed by all the children. It was a very stressful experience. I adopted a friendly manner and I think that helped. The little girl clearly did not want to go as she made no attempt to get up. Unsurprisingly, she had a lot of problems, was extremely disruptive, very taxing and challenging for all in the class.

Adult Life and Career

On the strength of my MA, I managed to change my job, although I was not shortlisted at first for the Preschool Adviser post for which I applied. I was extremely disappointed, but the upside was that I could keep my school holidays. As I had coveted this post for years, I rang up and spoke to the senior person involved, asking why I had not been shortlisted when I felt that I met all the criteria. She admitted that the shortlisting process was crude but didn't really give me a reason.

Some weeks later another, lower grade post was advertised involving membership of a different team. I applied for it as did a number of other applicants. I was later told that I did extremely well at the interview. I had done a lot of preparation for the more senior role and I think that helped.

At a subsequent event the senior manager approached me and asked me if I would be interested in the acting post as the Preschool Advisor for West and Mid Kent. I made an instinctive response and said "No thank you". I was quite happy with what I'd been offered and I would still get my school holidays. She mentioned the pay increase but I repeated that I was happy. My holidays have always been very important to me! She then offered me the post with the school holidays, so I accepted. Unbeknown to me the successful applicant overheard and was furious! She had been part of the second interviewing panel. We were colleagues on the same level. Fortunately we got on well, and made a good team as we had different strengths. We were friends for a while, until we both went for the same post and she was appointed. Again, I was very relieved as, due to yet another reorganisation, I may have been without a job.

She never really forgave me for my better terms, even when I was appointed to a substantive post. Unfortunately she saw me as a rival. This was quite a stressful period, because I'm not very competitive and I didn't really want her job.

I enjoyed the work, but colleagues thought that I was set up to fail, managing two large areas of Kent and working between two offices. Colleagues in other services also told me that it was an unmanageable job, but I did manage it fortunately, and gained some kudos as I was thought to be a huge improvement on my predecessor. My biggest regret from this period is that I was not able to accept an invitation to sit on the adoption committee, because I was feeling very pressured at work with enormous caseloads, disgruntled staff to manage (one had been demoted) and the logistics of working in two offices miles apart. There was no flexible working in those days apart from sometimes being able to take paperwork home.

I made sure that I took holidays, often on my own as Pete did not have school holidays. During this time, he gained new experiences in travelling to the States and loved that aspect of his work. He flew business class and had a chauffeur to the airport, but given our backgrounds he would have preferred to drive himself to the airport, travel economy and use the cash for a family holiday!

I was appointed by my former friend to a substantive post in East Kent. I did well at the interview and I think she couldn't turn me down. However, she refused to pay me as much as I had been getting in an acting post. HR advised me of this in a bcc email, but I missed

Adult Life and Career

it as I was between posts. I spent my holiday trying to devise an exit strategy by doing a course in Bromley on Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

I stuck the post out for four years, but it was a stressful period as my manager was always trying to trip me up. She acknowledged my skills, but resented my popularity and the compliments I received from others. She bullied people, so was not very popular and the staff were scared of her. I dealt with it as best I could but in hindsight, I don't think I handled it very well.

I became unwell; a huge cyst was diagnosed on my pancreas. For the next two years, my manager was always trying to prove I was not fit for work, although occupational health disagreed, and I continued working full-time for another 11 years. One day a friend asked me how much more of this I was going to take. That was a turning point. HR had said they couldn't change her management style, even though there were so many problems in our small department with several others as well as me.

I embarked on a search for a new post. I was well known across Kent by then and I secured a new post working back in schools with some former colleagues. It was across the Sevenoaks and Swanley areas and nearer to home, albeit at a lower salary. Some months later, yet another reorganisation took place with three interviews in two days and I was back in Early Years. On the support services we frequently had to reapply for our jobs. These processes took months with "consultations", were very stressful and extremely expensive. They seemed to be a weeding-out exercise as most staff were reappointed, eventually if not initially. However, in this reorganisation, my fourth in 13 years, my former manager was out of a job.

During this period, the girls did their exams and both started university. Gill went to Durham and Debbie, St Andrews, the latter opening up a whole new world in Scotland for us.

Peter was under threat of redundancy in 1995 and had to go to work in Hertfordshire. He didn't want to move the family there, saying that several people had done this and then been made redundant. The girls were doing A-levels and GCSEs at the time. He therefore commuted which often took over two hours each way in the rush-hour.

My dad was not well at the beginning of 1996. At first the symptoms were vague, but he gradually declined. I was told that he was sleeping on a mattress on the floor downstairs. He was sipping water through a straw and was in a great deal of pain, unable to go upstairs to the toilet.

I decided to go up to Hull and just made the last train on a Friday night after work. I was shocked at what I found. Mavis, a very close family friend, was with him. The GP had visited and had prescribed strong painkillers, but apparently did not seem to have any idea what was wrong. I called an ambulance, but, when it arrived, the crew said that they could not take him into hospital, because he had someone with him and he had seen the GP that day. I protested, saying that Mavis was just visiting and that I could not stay as I was only there for the weekend.

Adult Life and Career

They eventually took him to Hull Royal infirmary where he waited for hours on a trolley. He described the pain with difficulty, pointing to his stomach and his back. No further investigations were done, but I was told to take him home as an “elderly person with back pain is better in their own home”. I was livid and told them that, although I frequently experienced back pain, I had never ever heard my dad complain of it. I said that if he went home, my dad would be alone as I had to go back to Kent. This seemed to help, although it was a lie: I would never have left him in that state.

He was admitted to what was then referred to as a “geriatric ward”. The sister on the ward was shocked that no further investigations had been made and arranged for tests, including an X-ray. Fortunately, these were done quickly and showed that my dad had a rapidly perforating bowel. He was given emergency surgery as time was short.

Fortunately, he survived the operation, but it was not without its traumas as I thought that he had been brain-damaged. I regretted having consented to the operation because he would not have wanted to live like that. He recognised me, but he thought that he was a child and he repeatedly removed his oxygen mask which was taxing for everyone. When I told him that I lived in Kent, he wanted to know why on earth I had gone there! I could not really answer that question! Thank goodness things improved, as the drugs he had been given eventually proved to be responsible for the delirium and confusion.

In 1997, I successfully applied to be part of a “Canadian Exchange” between Kent and Ontario. It was more of a shadowing experience, which many colleagues had enjoyed in previous years. I was paired with Cath, who held a similar position to mine, and her husband Bob, also a teacher. Cath and Bob were very welcoming and I had a fabulous time, both socially and in learning about the Canadian education system upon which I had to write a dissertation. Cath and Bob visited us, at our very much smaller house, the following year. Suffice to say that it was very successful and we followed it up with several more visits.

My godmother died in 1997. I had to arrange the funeral as she did not have any children. I had also been arranging care homes for her after a neighbour had organised her urgent admittance to a very inappropriate one. I remember having to discuss the whole thing from a school secretary’s office with half the staff listening; my mobile phone must not have been working. Auntie Phyllis changed homes three times in four years. I was left some money, so we used that in 1998 to put a deposit on a flat for Peter in Hertfordshire.

I did apply for the post of head of Early Years in Hertfordshire, but by then we were getting used to our own space, working hard in the week and doing lovely things most weekends. I was shortlisted to the last two, but they made the right decision in taking their internal candidate in the end, since we did not have nursery schools in Kent at that time and I would have lacked credibility with the head teachers. As I became ill shortly afterwards, things actually worked out quite well, although it took a while before I realised this.

While Auntie Phyllis was alive, her solicitor was responsible for her money and I took responsibility for her care. It was a big ask from a distance and, when it transpired that the solicitor had stolen her money, it turned into a nightmare. I had had my suspicions and had discussed them with a local solicitor, but he reassured me that it would be highly unlikely

Adult Life and Career

that there was a problem. Peter and I embarked on a campaign to get the money back for her beneficiaries. The law firm was mortified that this had happened, so they did compensate us. The solicitor pleaded that he was unfit for trial so it didn't go to court, but he was struck off.

A very memorable holiday was a cruise to the Caribbean in 2001. We "pushed the boat out" and treated ourselves between our 50th birthdays. The cruise was on a tall ship, the Royal Clipper, so it was indeed special. Pete, who did not particularly care for heights, uncharacteristically decided to climb the mast. I was quite nervous, so I tried to dissuade him in case he got cold feet halfway up! I don't know whether it was "Dutch courage" after a glass of wine but he really enjoyed it. This cruise was just after 9/11 so a lot of Americans had cancelled and the ship was only half full. We visited many islands and had a wonderful time.

We spent quite a lot of time visiting our parents in Yorkshire. Peter's mum died in 2000, after a couple of years in a care home following a stroke. My dad died in 2005 from lung cancer. I visited him in Hull almost every weekend. It was the end of an era when all our parents were gone.

Pete had a health scare (prostate cancer) and it was then he decided that he wanted to buy a place in Dartmouth for me to live, in case anything happened to him. He thought that it was an ideal location. He was absolutely right, but it did take me a little while to come round to the idea. We already had the flat in Hertfordshire, and we had bought a flat in St Andrews which we also hugely enjoyed and where we had thought about retiring.

Weekends were very busy. The girls had both graduated and were living with our friends Gillian and David in London, although at separate times. Gill met Tom in 2000 and they married in 2006, in Birling. By then Debbie was engaged to Ewen and they married the following year, in Scotland. Their stories to tell. Peter and I always considered ourselves very fortunate to have such lovely sons-in-law.

In 2006, we found a flat in central Dartmouth after quite a long search. It was a lovely flat and we gradually had building work done and furnished it to our liking. We were very pleased with it and enjoyed living in it, although there was no outside space and parking was difficult. Also in that year we had a special holiday on the Rocky Mountaineer train with our Canadian friends, Cath and Bob.

Later Life and Retirement

2006 was quite an eventful year. Debbie and Ewen became engaged in January; they surprised us with the news when we were washing the car! Gill and Tom married in August in the Norman parish church in Birling. It was a lovely wedding! Gill and her dad were able to walk to the church. The reception was held in Bradbourne House on the East Malling Research station where Peter had worked. We had lived in a house on the research station when we first moved to Kent, and Debbie spent her first 18 months there.

The same year we found a flat in Dartmouth and spent an enjoyable couple of years doing it up, before we bought, in 2008, a house in which we had stayed as a holiday let. I remembered the house being built in 1987 and thinking how lovely it would be to live in Dartmouth in such a house. We never ever imagined that we would be in a position to buy a house in Dartmouth, especially in a part that we really loved. However, with some luck, a recession, some prudent financial planning and fervent encouragement from our family estate agents (daughter and son-in-law), we managed to raise a mortgage and bought the house. We love being in Dartmouth and our family have had many happy holidays there. Every day that I am there, I am grateful for it and it was certainly Pete's most happy place too.

In 2007, Deborah and Ewen had a very different wedding from Gill and Tom's. They married in Dunkeld Cathedral, Scotland, a place with which Debbie had fallen in love when at St Andrews; Ewen loved it too. Ewen's friend Andy, who was Best Man, arranged pre-wedding accommodation for Ewen and himself at his father's house, which by a complete coincidence was a few miles up the road! We had a very happy day.

I must say that we were pleased to get the two weddings over with, enjoyable though they were! By this time we were both having a fairly steady period at work and were enjoying our holidays. The girls, having left university and now establishing themselves in their new careers, took some of the pressure off. This was a happy time in our lives with the arrival of Kitty in 2008 and Henry in 2010.

In 2010, I decided not to reapply for my post when there was yet another reorganisation. I was threatened that I could just be offered anything in Kent, but I braved it out over six months and was eventually given statutory redundancy at the end of October. I was not wholly well even then, with my pancreatic cyst, and I wanted to wind down a bit, although I did continue working part-time for the university as an assessor on the post-grad course.

It was when I was looking after Kitty, while Gill and Tom were waiting for Henry's arrival, that Pete rang me to say there was to be another big reorganisation at Glaxo Smithkline and they were seeking voluntary redundancies. He didn't hesitate and fortunately it was granted. He officially finished work on his 60th birthday, three months after me.

We were both delighted, but it took some time for the pair of us to adjust after a lifetime of working. I still continued as part-time associate lecturer for Christ Church Canterbury and I started doing Ofsted inspections in 2013, just around the time when Toby, Gill and Tom's

Later Life and Retirement

bonus baby, arrived. I was present at his birth in the hospital in Orpington, but I only just made it!

I finally finished work in 2016. I don't regret taking the Ofsted role, but it was very stressful for all concerned if one was to do a fair and thorough inspection. Ofsted is always a stressful process and people are resentful. Peter did not want me to tell anyone that I was doing it and he told me the rather crude terminology which his brother used to describe such inspectors! His daughter is a teacher but I don't think she had a bad inspection.

Whatever one thinks of the inspections, I feel that they are necessary, particularly in the early years, where, in disadvantaged areas, parents do not have access to a wide choice of childminders or nurseries, as they often have to be within walking distance. Issues such as drug taking, child abuse, etc, have been more widely covered in recent years, and so I think that perhaps people now realise the need for these checks and balances, more than they did when I was inspecting.

Holidays were still a big source of enjoyment for us, but I won't list all our holidays here. We decided to invest in the Holiday Property Bond (HPB), in 2003, so that we could enjoy good holidays when we retired. We both agreed that it was one of the best things we ever did and the family have enjoyed several holidays too, both independently and with us as a large group.

On a whim one year, Peter went on a bakery course in the Isles of Scilly and was hooked by them. He did one more trial bake after he got home, but that was it! For our 40th wedding anniversary, we made Pete's long awaited second trip there. He wanted to do this regularly, so started to look into timeshares, but I was less keen to go every year. However, when we saw a good deal several years later, I was the one that said "let's go for it as life is short". I then persuaded him to go for a longer term, as he loved the Isles of Scilly so much. We joked that he that he would be 92 by the time it came to an end, but we thought that the family would make use of it.

We went to Croatia twice, which we loved. Again, I booked and then Pete decided to come with me, having not been keen initially. He enjoyed it so much that he booked a cruise round the Dalmatian islands for our 45th wedding anniversary!

I went alone on a special holiday to visit my friend Trish and her husband Neil, who had taken a post as the principal of an international school in Singapore. It was a wonderful and different holiday. Trish had organised a three day trip to Bali which was absolutely fabulous, even though I was ill for the whole of the second day! I will always be grateful to them for their hospitality.

In 2017 a long awaited baby, Calliope, arrived for Debbie and Ewen. Debbie had a difficult pregnancy and I spent quite a lot of time with her in the hospital before the birth and afterwards when she was quite ill. Pete and I spent several days travelling between home and the hospital. It was an anxious time but fortunately all was well.

Sadly, our plans for the timeshare on Scilly were not to be as we only went twice, once on our own and again with Debbie and two-year-old Callie, before Pete was diagnosed with a

Later Life and Retirement

brain tumour. The couple of years following Callie's birth had been normal and enjoyable but then things started to go awry. Peter developed some niggly health problems and I noticed that his behaviour was not normal. I did find this quite stressful and didn't know how to deal with it. I thought he was starting with dementia.

In August 2019 we were in Devon, but he intended going back to Kent for the weekend as he had appointments and other things to do. He was planning to cut the high hedges. The deal was that he would do that while I would stay in Devon and do a deep clean. Unfortunately we had an argument: he was very critical of the way I hung up the washing and said that I never took instructions from him. In hindsight he may have had a point, but after 11pm I was tired and did not want to change the way I had always done things!

Once in Kent, Pete set to work. During the day, all was normal but, during our evening telephone call, he sounded very confused. I was worried but I put it down to tiredness from the hedge cutting. However, I rang early the next morning and it was clear that something was very wrong. He was asking me very odd questions, such as, where was the dining room? He said to me that he thought things were not right and that he must have had too much to drink the night before. He was partial to a glass of wine or two, but I knew that since he was so tired the night before he was very unlikely to have stayed up drinking wine. Although I was in Devon I decided to call an ambulance, and Debbie and Ewen went to Birling to be with him. At first he was diagnosed with a slight stroke and we thought that we had got off lightly. His language was beginning to come back and both daughters were testing him by asking questions about current affairs, when I arrived after a long drive from Devon. However, a couple of days later, he was diagnosed with a brain tumour and our lives changed suddenly and forever, as is often the case. Thereafter ensued biopsies at Kings, but the tumour was declared inoperable. Treatment for brain cancer has not developed much over the last 40 years.

It is a gross understatement to say that this was a difficult period. At first things were fairly normal and steroids helped, but then, as his health deteriorated, we went into lockdown. That certainly didn't help, as we were unable to access any support and I had to cope with bizarre behaviour on my own. He didn't really understand the lockdown, it didn't make sense and he thought that I was keeping him indoors because he was ill. However, when he had good days, we did have some very happy times and were very close.

I have blocked out a lot of this period so I won't dwell on it here. Pete was admitted to the local hospice, but visiting was not allowed because of Covid, so I was very relieved to be able to get him home after 10 days and keep him at home, where both the girls and I could see him and be with him at the end.

On the very day that Pete died, Debbie found out that she was expecting Lyra, the second little IVF miracle. She was able to tell her Dad and we were told that hearing is the last thing to go. It seemed to be an incredible coincidence, but I was very apprehensive about another turbulent pregnancy to follow this difficult and sad period. My fears were not unfounded as there were difficulties, but thankfully feisty little Lyra arrived in May 2021.

Less than two days after Pete died in October 2020 our cat was killed on the road. I had said to Pete "No more husbands and no more cats - too much trouble" to which he replied

Later Life and Retirement

“You will always have cats!” I managed for four months, but as we were so restricted, no visitors and extremely limited socialising outdoors, I felt the emptiness of the house probably more than I would have done had things been normal. I decided that I could and would give a cat a good home and I ended up with two from Romania. I first saw Effie and Mika online on what would have been Pete’s 70th birthday. They are very special, very affectionate and they have enhanced my life hugely.

I did have three years between the end of lockdown and becoming ill, but there were still restrictions and I was adjusting to a life on my own after caring for Peter. I sorted a lot in the house in Dartmouth, as I had promised Pete that I would, but I felt that I did not do enough to clear my possessions. I did some, but I have to admit that I acquired more, seeking solace in bargains! I guess it was a relatively harmless pastime, made easier with shopping online, on Amazon particularly! I found it enjoyable and “down-time”.

After Pete died, I found it hard to concentrate on reading or watching the television. Even after five years, I still find it somewhat difficult, but I take pleasure in listening to audio books, particularly when driving to Devon which I enjoy.

I took the family twice to the Isles of Scilly so they could experience them too. I knew that was Pete’s wish, as he kept saying that he wanted the grandchildren to enjoy the islands. They are very expensive to visit, but very special and whenever we have been, there have been several celebrities visiting at the same time. A favourite place, with happy memories!

I went on solo holidays sometimes, which were always interesting experiences. I decided to go on a river cruise down the Rhine to celebrate my 70th birthday and what would have been our 50th wedding anniversary. Good excuses for a celebration! I enjoyed the different experience and I danced a lot in the evenings!

HPB was brilliant for solo holidays, because it offered a familiar pattern and always other people with whom to chat or eat if I wanted company. When he was dying, Pete said to me that he knew I would continue to enjoy my holidays with HPB. Unfortunately, these had to stop once I became ill.

Just before that happened, I became very fond of one of the HPB sites in Turkey. Pete and I had gone there in August, when I was restricted to school holidays, and were not that enamoured with it. However, I have returned a few times quite recently with the HPB solos group and also with the family. We have had very enjoyable experiences in October, with its cooler weather and a less crowded village. I would love to go back again if I could have one more holiday, but sadly I have had to cancel all my holidays over the last two years. Being on an extremely restricted diet and now taking only liquids, means that it is difficult to socialise. Holidays would be extremely difficult now, but I have many happy memories on which to draw thankfully. I am pleased that I did make time for holidays and pleasurable things before I began to face serious health challenges.

I have always enjoyed driving, more than most people I think. Since I was 17, I have regularly done long distances across country and north-to-south on my own. It has never been a problem. Clearly some journeys are much more taxing and tiring than others, but once completed, they are soon forgotten. To avoid being complacent and to try to be safe,

Later Life and Retirement

I have done a fair number of online voluntary courses for interest and to improve my skills. Most people don't! I also did most of the advanced course, but Peter's diagnosis prevented me from continuing and taking the test, as I couldn't leave him easily.

For some years people have been questioning me about the distances I drive, which I have found both perplexing and frustrating. It seems to me that they would not want to do it themselves, so they're pushing their agenda onto me. Something to do with being female me thinks? Men seem to be rarely questioned and statistics show that they carry on driving much longer than women. I have recently been declared mentally alert to continue driving, so I do not really understand what it is to do with anybody else. My daughters will tell me if they have concerns.

At the time of writing, as I am ill, I realise that I will have to give up long distance driving soon. I will be very sad as it means giving up my independence and a very pleasurable part of my life. However, that is for me, my daughters and the medics. I would never dream of questioning people's ability to drive or make their own decisions, so I do not really understand why people I barely know raise it so easily with me, particularly as most have never seen me driving a car! Please be careful about giving unsolicited advice.

I experienced the same attitudes when the children were young and I wanted to return to work and when I wanted to take the children on holiday on my own. People would rudely comment about the adverse effects it would have on them and tell me that it was not a good idea. This is interfering and undermining, but delivered under the guise of "caring". I must be very approachable and forgiving for people to offer their opinions so freely, but not now that I am on steroids!

Stopping driving will be my next big challenge. It will be more difficult logistically to continue the life that I love. I hate being so dependent on others and having to ask for things, both big and small. I will have to spend more time on my own too.

I started these memoirs over a year ago, but now I feel that I need to finish them in rather a hurry, so this is my submission! I am thankful to my long term friends and family for the love and support they have given me over the years. I have appreciated some challenges too! I hadn't really anticipated that both Pete and I would come to the end of our lives so relatively early. However, I am very grateful that these illnesses did not start when we were younger and when we both had jobs, a mortgage and family responsibilities. That would have been much worse. I was very taken by the poem "Normal Day" which I came across in 2000 when I was unwell. Kitty wrote it out for me in her best calligraphy after Pete's funeral and its sentiments are very true. I have also read a variation on this poem called "Golden Days"; it is not a gratitude list but rather about remembering particular highlights from your life. Writing my story has evoked some wonderful memories, days out when young and when the children were small, holidays, happy days with good news and unexpected delights.

So, do make the most of things, remember your "golden days" and enjoy your "normal days!"

The End

Family History

Appendix

Family History

Both my maternal and paternal lines came from Norfolk, where I had a fascinating tour embracing Salthouse, Swaffham, Castle Acre and many more places, the names of which I cannot immediately recall.

Maternal Line

My mother was born Edith Meggitt on 19th February 1920 to Ernest and Ada Alice (née Jarvis) who were married on 28th November 1915, during WW1. Grandad, I believe, was in the trenches but I am not sure of the dates. I have a book on the Northumberland Fusilliers which was his regiment. I only have snippets of information with regard to their life before this. Grandma had been previously engaged to someone called Walter but she had called it off. Her sisters married much younger but I think she was reluctant. She certainly wanted me to have a career rather than give it up to have a family. She wanted me to be a Head Teacher. Teaching was an unfulfilled dream of hers, having been a Pupil Teacher for a while, recalling how her younger sister Ellen tested the boundaries but was quickly sorted! I wonder how many people dream of being a teacher now? She did piece work in factories and was reportedly good at it, and was talented in all things practical and domestic.

Grandma was born to Edward Jarvis and Catherine Norman, who met in North Shields where Catherine was in service and after he had moved there from Salthouse, Norfolk, to work on the railways. I am unsure why Catherine moved there from Derby - it may have been after her mother, Sarah Coxon, was widowed. Sarah's husband, Joseph Norman, had been a tailor. Sarah died from "senility". I have been to look at the institution in Northumberland where she died - sad. I have traced both sides of my Grandma's family history; the documents and information are boxed up awaiting interest from descendants! Grandma was the seventh of ten children and she was born on her parents' 17th wedding anniversary. The linen wedding certificate from 5th July 1873 is in my box, along with a glass photograph of Catherine and her mother, taken when Catherine was about 4, maybe around 1859. I think that photos would have been a fairly new thing and I like to imagine that Sarah, like me, was up for trying new things much to the disdain of my relatives, who caught up with videos, dishwashers and mobile phones much later!

Similarly, I have traced the Meggits and Allons; the latter belonged to a well known Hull family, who had a demolition business. Ernest was one of ten. His mother was reported to be very difficult by all concerned. My mum's cousin, Auntie Jessie, who looked very much like my mum, lived with her grandmother, Sophia, and said the same. I have been in touch with various people on Ancestry who have traced the Allon family. Sophia died in old age, if I remember correctly, after an accident in the road.

John Meggitt came from a family of farm labourers who lived in Tickhill near Doncaster before they went to Hull. I have visited a couple of times on my way up north, to get the feel of it; quite a pretty village.

Family History

Paternal Line

Dad, Henry, born on 24th July 1919, was named after his father Henry also known as Harry and born on 2nd October 1892, and Gertrude Longmuir Starling born on 13th May 1894.

Grandma said her middle name was Louisa after her mother, but it transpired that Louisa's surname was Longmuir from her first marriage. I have not yet been able to ascertain whether Louisa ever did marry Alfred Starling but there is certainly a very interesting and sad family history leading up to them being together in Hull, having had connections in Norfolk when they were young. Dad told some stories and I wish that I had taken more notice. Dad was very fond of his grandmother as the family lived with her (and Alfred presumably) when he was young. My middle name Louise is after her.

I have had a really interesting time trying to solve a family mystery which I promised my Dad that I would do when I retired. In fact I did it before then, four years after he died. I became hooked on Family History but have now abandoned it for others to take forward. It was taking up too much of my time and became another chore.

My Grandad Henry, as mentioned elsewhere, when he was around the age of eleven had to go into an orphanage with his brother due to the death or disappearance of his father, a merchant seaman. Their sister, Mary, remained with their mother who took in washing to make some money. I am not sure but I think that he returned at the end of his education at age 14. I have looked for details in the Hull History Centre and was able to see a menu for the orphanage. Grandad did well at the orphanage and there is some evidence (not verified) that after he left he worked at the Carnegie Library on Anlaby Road, Hull. I do know that he studied at night school and eventually became an engineer in the Merchant Navy, working his way up.

My great Grandad Archibald Marshall, whose family lived in Dunbarton was a mystery. I guess that these things were not discussed and Grandad was away a lot so did not have the opportunity to talk about these things, even if he was so inclined.

Dad thought that maybe Archie was a dubious character as he was older than the recorded age on his marriage certificate. In addition he died in Alcester, Worcestershire in a "sanatorium" aged 43. Why was a seaman there? In the days before the internet, Dad trailed round Worcestershire trying to find out what had happened but he met a brick wall. There are many errors on certificates and census returns so the theory about Archie's age may or may not be true. He was older than his wife.

In 2009, having not made much progress, the internet being still very much in its infancy, I decided to splash out and pay £25 to a researcher at the library. It was one of the best things I ever did, as she came back with a newspaper cutting which explained all. My dad had maligned his grandfather falsely. He was of "good character" but had been discharged from the Merchant Navy because of ill health. He had lung disease and was malnourished; this was before the Welfare State. He was trying to walk from Gloucester Docks to Hull! He worked in the workhouse on the way to earn food and a bed. He had a sad and lonely

Family History

death by the side of a road, having told a policeman that he felt too ill to return to work in the workhouse. His wife had neither the means to travel, nor any funds to bury him. He is in a pauper's grave in Alcester, I do not know exactly where, but I visited in 2010 with Peter to pay my respects and give love. If I feel well enough I will try to do these family history tours again.

There is a lot of information on the Blundred family history in my boxes, less on Peter's mum's family, the Webbs. I know a bit about the latter and will ask Peter's cousins if anyone has anything. It would be a shame for these things to get lost. All these people made a contribution in various ways, cared for our ancestors, and are key players in our existence.