

Chinwag

**MY CHILDHOOD AS I
REMEMBER IT**



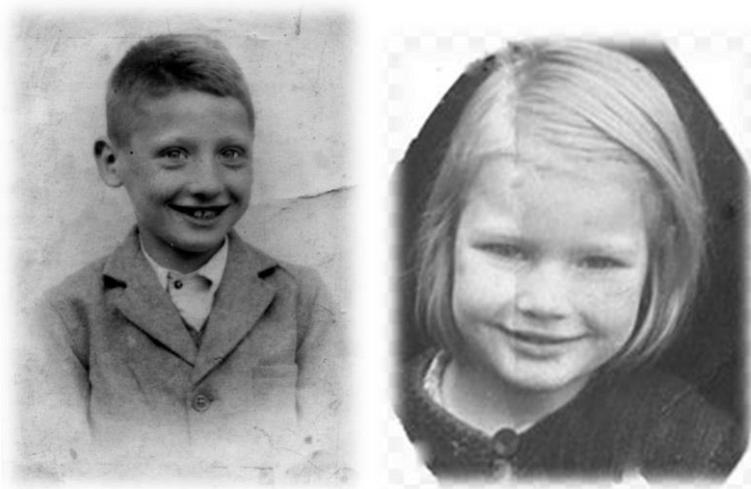
By Shirley Kiteley

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Photographs from family archives except photo of Barford Road on Page 35
sourced from <http://www.ouldladywood.co.uk>)

Dedication

Dedicated to my brother John and sister Brenda who both helped to make our childhood fun and interesting but sadly both have passed away leaving a large hole in my life, but I remember them with love and affection.



My brother John & sister Brenda

Preface

My sister Pamela, being nearly thirteen years younger than me, was the one who asked me to write a book about my childhood. When she heard my brother John and I telling our stories, she knew nothing about them because she hadn't been born when we were living in Spring Hill, Ladywood.



Sister Pam

So this is really for you Pam, but I have dedicated this book to John and Brenda who are sadly no longer with us. Although when I started putting the book together, John was still alive and we had great fun reminiscing the events.

Obviously, this book is also for my son Darren and grandchildren Adam, Beth, Molly and Ellie who, when they are older will appreciate some of the stories their Nan wrote about.

With apologies for any typing mistakes or overlapping of stories. The reader must appreciate that I have tried to remember things that happened ages ago, so I expect you to bear with me. I am sure family members will sometimes disagree with my memory of things that happened when we were all children.



Shirley Kiteley nee Neale,
alias 'GOGGY' April 2013

I was born on February 3rd 1940 at 6, back of 28 Spring Hill Ladywood, Birmingham.

I don't remember my birth, I don't recollect any "coo's or aaah's or "She's a beautiful baby girl"!

I don't remember a silver spoon being put into my mouth.

I don't remember photographs being taken or reporters from the Birmingham Mail being there!

I don't remember the Head Mistress of Benedon Girl's School reminding Mom and Dad to put my name down for this prestigious school. (Princess Anne was later assured a place, so I missed out).

I don't remember whether it was a sunny day or piddlin' down with rain (it was probably the latter).

I wasn't aware that Mom and Dad were going to honour me with the name of SHIRLEY after Shirley Temple the child film star (this always gives your age away later on in life).

I wasn't aware that I had a big brother John and that a further three siblings would follow my birth, and that Mom and Dad were pleased 'it' was a girl to make up a set with my brother!

I am an Aquarian, which means:

Strong minded - i.e. "Pig headed"

Artistic - "Arty Farty"

Sensitive - "Thin skinned"

Stubborn As in "Mule"

Loyal - Unless anyone upsets me

So there you are - this is me and my story



John, Mom & Me 1943

My first memory in life was when I was about 2 years old and Mom had dressed me in a matching coat, bonnet and leggings. Dad was in the army and it was the only time mom had a bit of money to spend on John and I so I assume that army pay was quite good at the time. John was only 17 months older than me so Mom must have had her hands full looking after two toddlers.

We lived at No 6 back of No. 28 Spring Hill, Ladywood, Birmingham in one of eight terraced houses behind some shops. You had to walk up an entry to reach the houses. The school that John and I went to was Steward Street Infant/Junior school, and the building still exists, although it is now used as offices. It was only a short walk to school, and I was five years old when I started. I can remember Mom dressing me in a brown gymslip and I eventually had a satchel for my hankie and pencils. Once inside the school gates, we could only look out of a mesh fence in the playground — we were well and truly 'locked in'. My first teacher was a Miss Kettle, a very 'motherly' lady to us babies, and playtime was special because there was a sandpit outside, so all in all I think I was quite happy in infant school.

Junior School was in another building across the playground and the Headmaster was a Mr Scott who I was very fond of. In fact, in 1996 I answered a letter that appeared in the Birmingham Evening Mail asking for anyone who had been at Steward Street School when Mr Scott was the Headmaster to write to a Professor at Exeter University with regard to their memories at this time. A reply came telling me that Mr Scott had passed away recently at the age of 82 and the professor was writing a book about him on behalf of Mrs Scott, and he thanked me for my information which had helped him to form a picture of Mr Scott's time at Steward Street.

Going back to Spring Hill, each house had a downstairs living/dining room with a small pantry/ kitchen on one side, and two doors one leading to the two bedrooms upstairs and the other door to the 'coal hole' where the bags of coal were delivered about every fortnight. No bathroom, you will note! Everything had to be done in the living room, with dad hauling in a tin bath for himself or Mom, but us children being bathed in the copper boiler inside the wash house across the yard after our mothers had done the weekly washing. We used to come out all bright and pink after being soaked in sudsy water, and sometimes the fire was still aglow underneath the copper boiler, so at least we had nice warm bottoms.

The characters that lived in these terraced houses were unbelievable! At No. 1 was a widow Mrs Stride. Her house was next door to the outside lavatories so she saw a lot of coming and going from there. Next door to her, at No. 2 was Uncle Ernie, a widower, who shouted and bellowed at the Bickleys at No. 3. He used to take bets on horse racing, so had quite a good business

going on the side. The Bickleys at No. 3 were a sad and poor family. Mr Bickley had a scabby skin complaint which made you cringe to look at him. Mrs Bickley was small and very thin. Then there was Joyce the eldest daughter. She had left school and was very streetwise. She always seemed to be out on the town with her legs coloured to look like stockings by using sand and water and a black pencil to draw a 'seam' on the back of her legs—obviously she couldn't afford the real things.

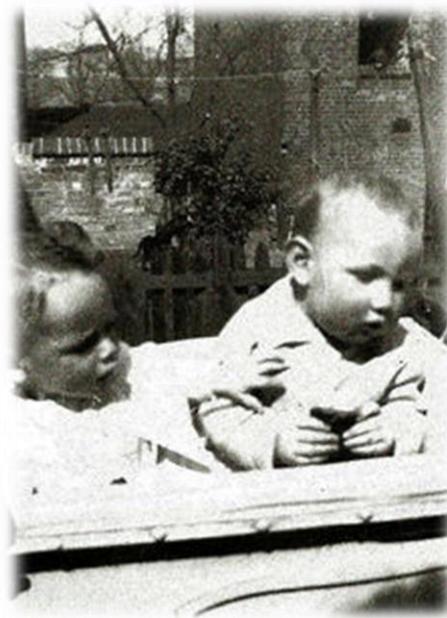
Jean Bickley was a year or two older than me and was my 'best friend'. She had bright ginger hair and freckles and we were always together, although I cannot remember her being at the same school as me. She wasn't very well looked after by her mom and dad and later on she was taken into care. I can remember on most Friday and Saturday evenings, she was left alone in the house while her parents were in the local pub and Joyce was out with her friends. The electricity had been cut off and they only had candles for lighting. She was so scared being on her own that I usually stayed in her house with her, but as the evening became darker, we were both quite nervous of the candles flickering, casting spooky shadows! When 10 o'clock came, I had to go home across the yard, which was always in darkness as there wasn't a street lamp here, only one further towards the entry, and she had to be left alone. I still don't understand why she couldn't have come back home with me, but I suppose it was well after my bedtime. I remember when she came home for a visit after being in a care home for about 6 weeks. She looked so clean with a pretty gingham dress on. Even her accent had changed and she was starting to speak quite 'posh'. We were quite shy with one another, so things were different now. After a few days, she had to go back to the care home, and when we moved to Barford Road, I never saw her again.

One other memory of Jean was that the lady who owned the Bridal shop on Spring Hill used to give Jean bits and bobs of material - satin, silks and muslin, that had been used to make the dresses. When I started to go into the shop, she used to give me bundles as well, and did this after Jean left. We used to make dolls clothes and always had pretty ribbons for our hair.

When I got married, Mrs Marriott, the shop owner and dressmaker made Pam's bridesmaid dress for her. I felt a bit guilty about not having my brides dress from her, but I had already seen a dress I wanted in another bridal shop. She never passed any comment. I shall always remember her as being a very kind lady. At No.4 was Aunt Edna, Uncle Charlie, Vincent and then Philip. I always thought they were 'posher' than us because there was always a bowl of Mars bars and other sweets on the table. This was after rationing of course!

Uncle Charlie grew gladioli flowers in their small garden, and also kept a few chickens. Mom said I was always in their house. Aunt Edna was very fond of me, I suppose it was because she had two boys (and then later on had another boy - Tony). I think I was there because of the Mars bars! Aunt Edna was a difficult person, she was always 'falling out' with someone, sometimes our Mom. I can remember Mom being very upset about Edna causing trouble with their mother (our Granny Stansbie), and in the end, none of the family were on speaking terms with Mom. When we eventually moved to Barford Road, it was only Pam being born there that brought Mom and Aunt Edna back together again. In later years of course, they used to holiday together after Dad had passed away, so it was always Mom, Edna and Charlie going abroad.

Another memory is one of playing outside with John and Vincent when a little nurse arrived in uniform, carrying her little black Gladstone bag, and going into our house. Later on, Aunt Edna told us that she had brought a new baby girl, a sister for us. I don't know what our reaction was - however, Brenda had been born! Alan followed a couple of years later, along with Edna giving birth to Philip the following month. She had a large pram, and Alan used to be put at one end and Philip the other so that they could be looked after together. I have a photograph of them showing Alan trying to take something out of Philip's hand, a toy or something - typical!



Alan & Cousin Philip, Spring Hill 1948

When Brenda was about 6 months old, some man visiting one of the houses accidentally tipped her pram up and she fell out. Fortunately, she was more frightened than hurt (probably landed on her head that's why), but this

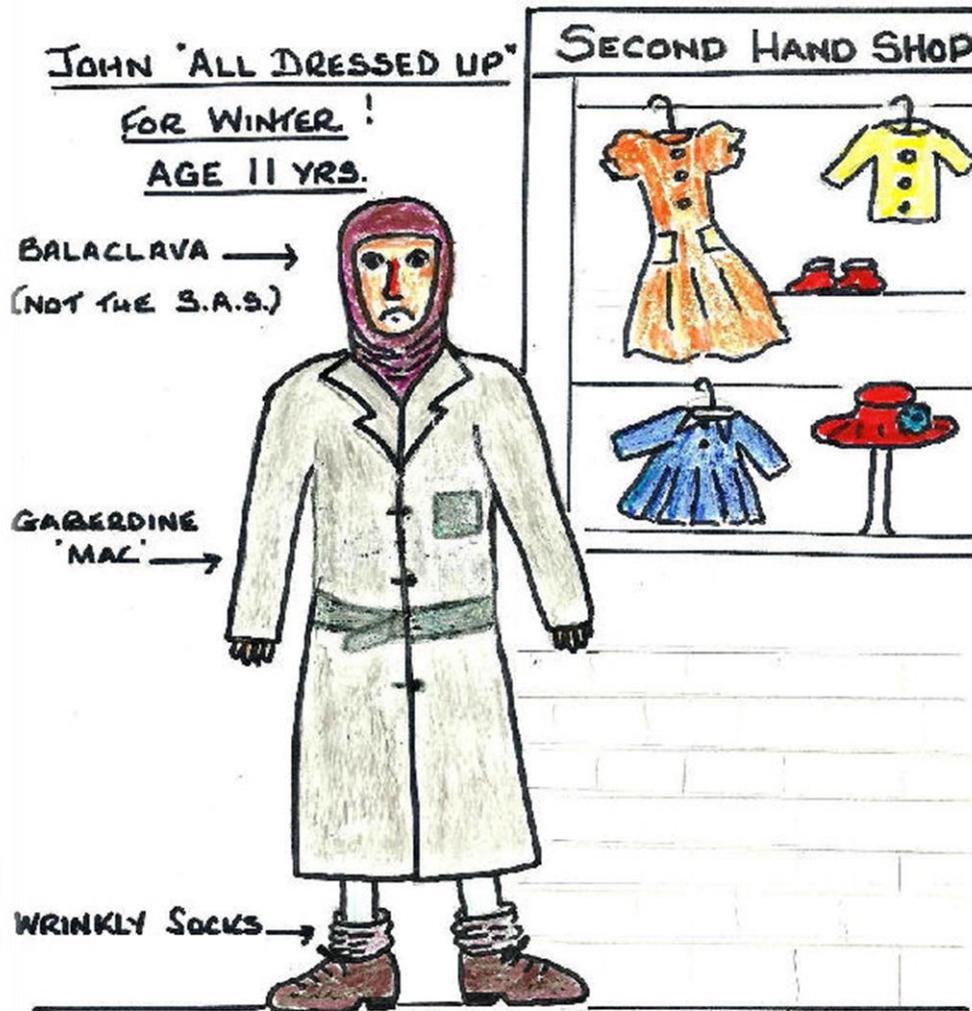
might account for her always being stropky and argumentative later on in life .

At No. 5 lived Mr & Mrs Mills and their children, George, Dorothy, Reggie, and Harold, who were all round about the same age as us and we played together. Mrs Mills had apparently been born in India of British parents, and although the Mills's weren't well off she came across as being very dignified. Everything was done slowly and carefully by her, I never ever saw her in a rush or shouting at the children Mr Mills and later on George, smoked cigarettes, which were in very short supply after the war, so along with Mom and Dad, they were always borrowing cigarettes off one another. Inside the cupboard by the fire grate 'someone' had chipped out the mortar between the bricks so that cigarettes could be pushed through from either side, to save them going around to each other's house when cigarettes were needed! Talk about lazy! Our house was No. 6, right in the corner and alongside Mrs Spittle at No. 7 - no, I am not making these names up. All the kids were afraid of her, she was a strange old lady always muttering to herself and glaring at us - we kept well away from her. I don't remember Mr Spittle - she may have killed him off!

A little further down Springhill was a billiard hall and I was very friendly with the youngest daughter Pattie Freakes. We didn't go to the same school as on weekdays she went back to their house in Aston with her mother and younger brother Victor. She had an older brother 'Peter' I think his name was and an older sister, whose name I cannot recall. It was rumoured that Victor was actually the son of Pattie's sister but it was all kept 'hush hush' at the time, but he did resemble his 'sister' very much but didn't look at all like Pattie or her mother. On a Saturday evening we sometimes were allowed to go into the billiard hall and serve cordial behind the bar, serving ourselves as well of course! And also on a Sunday morning there would sometimes be sausage sandwiches covered in brown sauce for sale - ooh Heaven. I remember them being a kind family, although Mr Freakes could get miserable some times and so we had to keep out of his way.

They lived in Aston not too far from the Villa Ground and HP. Sauce factory. You could always smell the vinegar from the cooking of the sauce in the air where they lived. Sometimes on a Sunday I used to catch the No. 8 Inner Circle bus in Icknield Street and travel all on my own to visit them. I must only have been 9 or 10 yrs. old then and I can't remember Mom having to worry about me. I always got home safe and sound. Mrs Freakes used to pass on clothes for us and I often came back with a big bag full of them. I don't think they were much better off than us, but then there weren't any charity shops about so people passed things on to one another, but there were a few second hand shops which did a good trade. John said he

remembered Mom buying him a gabardine mac from the shop on the corner of Steward Street where we went to school, it being 3 sizes too large for him but Mom saying that 'he would grow into it. We were always 'growing in to clothes' I suppose the idea was they would last us longer. Most of the other kids were the same so we didn't stand out.

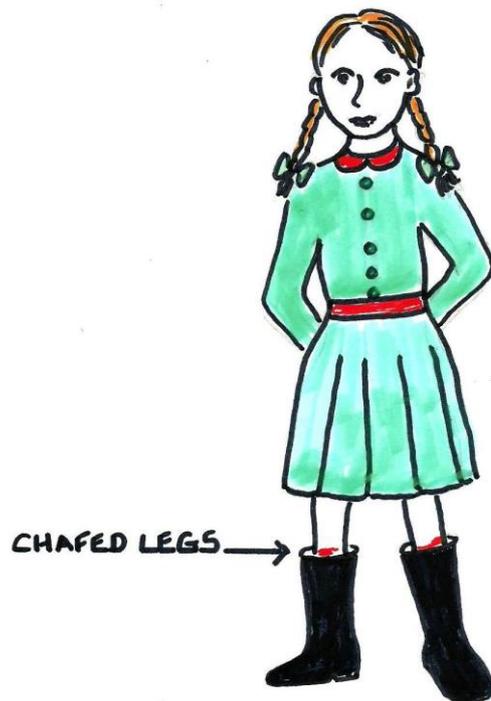


'He Will Grow into it' !

Says Mom

One time, things were very bad and Dad had a lot of time off from work. Mom couldn't afford to buy me and John new school shoes and as The Daily Mail issued vouchers to poor families for children's shoes, Mom carted me and John off into Birmingham to a large warehouse where dozens of other

children were being fitted up with boots and shoes. John couldn't have cared less about what he had but my heart sank when I was given a pair of brown 'boots'. It was winter and I suppose they were the most sensible things to have but I hated them. Even so, I had to wear them and couldn't wait for them to wear out, but when this happened Dad bought some off-cuts of leather from Brown The Boot Menders at the bottom of the entry and repaired them for me! Sometime later on, when things were a bit better Mom bought me a pair of black patent ankle—strap shoes which I loved. I think she never forgot the stigma of us having to have free footwear. At Easter time every year she bought me new white plimsolls which had to be whitened with a block of whitening 'powder and water'. After a few times, they became very hard so that I could almost tap-dance in them John had black ones of course. What a thrill it was to have new white socks and new white plimsolls once a year. It's funny how these things stick in your mind for ever. We did have wellingtons later on and they always chafed your legs after wearing them for a day. After taking these off you would end up with a red ring around each calf of your leg that was very sore. Mom would get the Vaseline and rub it all over the skin to make us feel better.



Dad kept pigeons in a shed in the garden. I did not like them very much. They were noisy and dad always seemed to be cleaning the shed out. I remember once when we came back home in the evening from somewhere that a plague of cockroaches had come through the billiard hall wall into the pigeon shed, and they were even crawling along the pathway. The billiard hall had been empty for a while and so I think the cockroaches decided to come into the shed for extra warmth; the poor pigeons! This was the only time I felt sorry for them. I think that Dad decided to get rid of the pigeons after this. Uncle Charlie at one time kept a few chickens but there was not much room for anything really. Our garden was just a hard patch of soil to play on. Dad was not a gardener at all and did not bother to do anything with it. We used to have a coal delivery about once a fortnight, and I remember the coalman heaving his heavy bags into the coalhole under the stairs. There was usually a bit of banter with Mom telling him off if she thought the coal contained too much 'slack' or coal dust, as this would make the fire smoke rather than give a good flame. It was such a tiny house; we did not have a kitchen as such, it was just a small pantry with a stone sink and a gas stove. There were a couple of shelves on the wall for pots and pans and some food, but nowhere really cold to keep food fresh, so most food was bought daily. In the middle of the living room was a wooden table and John says he remembers Mom putting a sheet of newspaper on the table so that she could throw it away after we had spilled our food onto it, and a fresh newspaper 'tablecloth' would then be put on for the next day. The fire was a black iron- type one that Mom used to clean with black lead polish occasionally. I also remember a brown leather settee and two chairs, but how these fitted into this tiny room I do not know! Upstairs were two bedrooms, one for Mom and Dad, and the other for John and myself, and then Brenda later on. She slept on the recess over the stairs which was quite dangerous as she could have fallen off quite easily but I don't think she ever did. Later on when Alan was born, he slept in Mom's bedroom for a while until we moved to Barford Road.

One of our neighbours Mrs Vickers was a real troublemaker and I think a bit jealous of Mom because she always kept herself looking attractive. When Dad was in the army Mom befriended a woman named Ann who lodged with the Mills family for a while. Ann had a daughter and we played together sometimes. Apparently Ann was going out with an American GI, much to Mrs Vickers' disgust and she made no bones about it. When Dad came home on leave, somehow it got to him that Mom was also associating with American GI's, and he was quickly put straight on that one. However, we always suspected it was Mrs Vickers spreading rumours. Sometime later, Mom was preparing to do her washing in the 'Brewhouse' and as it was a nice day she had the wooden tub outside filled with soapy water. Mrs Vickers appeared and started to make some nasty remarks to Mom, who by this time 'had had enough' of Mrs Vickers and before we knew it, Mom had pushed Mrs Vickers and she fell into the wash tub. Mrs Vickers was screaming and shouting and people came out of their houses to see what was happening.



Mrs Vickers comeuppance or Mom's revenge

Everyone thought it was hilarious except Mrs Vickers and a week later Mom received a court summons for assault. She got herself smartly dressed and went to court, but she was very worried at the time. However, the Magistrate warned Mom to behave herself in future, but also told Mrs Vickers that she had provoked Mom and the case was dismissed. I don't think Mom ever forgave Mrs Vickers for being such a nuisance, but at least Mrs Vickers kept her head down for a long time after. The only annoying thing was that we kids were at school so we missed all the action!

Spring Hill was a marvellous shopping area. Every kind of shop was here so there was no need to go into the City centre unless you needed to go to one of the big stores like Lewis's, Greys or Woolworths. To do this you would catch the No. B82 or B87 buses which went along Spring Hill into 'Town' as we always called Birmingham (or Brum), only a 10 minute ride away. There were buses coming to and from the City centre all day long. Then there was the Inner Circle No. 8 in Ickniel Street which ran to Aston Cross, and if you boarded this in Monument Road going the other way it took you To Five Ways Birmingham. When I used to visit Aunt Doris and Uncle Sam in Weoley Castle I used to travel on the bus into Birmingham and then catch the No. 22 in Livery Street to Kemberton Road. I was only 9 or 10 years old and when you think that I used to travel on my own, it's amazing because Mom never worried about me, as long as I was back home before dark. A lot of children lived in Spring Hill, mostly in terraced houses like ours or over shops in 'flats' but our playing areas were mostly on derelict sites or the recreation ground (the rec) to use the swings and a see saw and roundabout. We used to spend hours here and it was only when a bell was rung and the gates about to be locked up that we ventured home, tired, hungry and scruffy! We were usually with the Mills children, the Bickleys or our Uncle Les and Aunt Shirley who were only a few years older than us. We were always 'in a gang'! Occasionally we would go to Summerfield Park if the weather was good, and again, we would spend hours here, sometimes having to walk all the way back to Spring Hill if we hadn't got money to pay the fare on a bus, which was about an old penny. It never crossed my mind that we would one day move house to Barford Road just two streets away from Summerfield Park, so that we would eventually spend even more time here.

On the corner of Spring Hill and Steward Street was a grocery shop called Neal's where Mom shopped for our weekly grocery. No self-service then; everything had to be weighed and wrapped up separately. Therefore you could find yourself waiting for quite some time before it was your turn to be served. I remember the blocks of butter on a marble slab to keep cool. Sugar being put into blue bags and loose tea. No tea-bags then. Cheese was also on a slab of marble with a cutting wire attached to it, and then the lethal bacon slicer. I loved to look at the biscuits through the clear lidded boxes in front of the counter. The various smells were wholesome and warm. In Ickniel Street where Granny and Granddad Stansbie lived there were also a lot of varied shops. Stoddard's the butchers shop, a Greengrocers shop, a Sweetshop next door to a pub, a Jewellers and Pawn shop. How many times did John or I go round to the pawn shop to take something for Mom to borrow money on, then going back the following week to retrieve it. I

remember you had to go into a little cubby-hole of a room with a wooden floor and a sliding window across the counter where you had to ring the bell for attention. It always had a 'strange' smell in there.

Other shops in Icknield Street were a Barber's shop, a Ladies Dress shop, and a shop where we took our radio batteries to be re-charged. These were rectangular glass containers with a handle on top that you had to carry very carefully home. Further down Icknield Street towards Warstone Lane was a fish and chip shop where they had a black range for frying the fish and chips in beef dripping. This was stoked up with coal to keep the fire underneath burning to heat up the fat. They were very delicious — I think the beef dripping gave the chips a lovely flavour. These were wrapped in greaseproof paper first and then newspaper. Most of the time the cooking was freshly done because they were so popular the fish and chips never stayed for long in the warming area and you often had to wait until the next batch was ready.

Apparently, The youngest daughter of the owner had done a modelling course and then gone off to Hollywood as a starlet. She was a lovely looking blonde and her portfolio of photos were all around the walls of the chip shop, so you could stand and admire them while waiting your turn. I don't know whether she ever became a film star, but I don't ever remember her visiting 'home', as we peasants would all have known about it, but I believe her family used to go over to visit her in the USA, I only hope they remembered to get rid of the 'fishy' smell before they turned up!

There were pubs everywhere you looked (Dad must have been delighted) and as children we often played outside while our parents had gone in for a pint or two. Sometimes if we were lucky we might have a packet of crisps bought us. We would play for ages, never daring to go inside the pub as we would have been quickly ordered outside again by the Landlord as well as your Mom or Dad. Children were never allowed inside at all, unlike today. Our parents never seemed to worry about someone 'running off' with us. Even babies in prams were left outside the pub, with Mum or Dad coming out occasionally to see if they were all right. When it started to get dark and cold we would be wishing that 'Dad' would 'hurry up' so that we could go home. I don't think we ever had a key to let ourselves back into the house - I don't know why. The shopping areas were also our 'play areas', hiding in the shop doorways playing hide and seek, etc. We were never bored as there were always lots of other children to play with. When I look back now, it makes you realise the freedom we children had, which was wonderful.

On the corner of Springhill and Ickniel Street was the library which is still standing today (2013). I was fascinated with this place and as soon as I could have a library ticket I was always 'in the library'. The building I believe is Victorian and the foyer was completely tiled, walls and floor and if you shouted you could feel the echo coming from the everywhere. If it was raining we would play in this foyer until a librarian came out and told us to 'clear off'. I once found an umbrella left there which had a few broken spokes and I thought I was in heaven having my own umbrella and was always wishing for it to rain so that I could use it. One day when John and I were home for our dinner from Steward Street School, we heard that there had been a collision between a No. 8 bus and a fire engine, so we raced across the road to see what was going on. One person had died and the ambulance was there taking the injured to hospital. Today, the library still bears the marks of the bus hitting the wall, and sometime later I got friendly with a girl named Shirley Brown at City Road School and she told me that it was her brother driving the fire engine. Fortunately, by this time he was fit and well and still in the fire service.

Another time, I attempted to cross Monument Road to go to the sweet shop on the corner of St. Marks Street when I collided with a cyclist and we both fell into the gutter. It was my fault and I felt so embarrassed but I picked myself up and ran off. Although I had grazes and bruises, I never told Mom what I had done. I don't know what injuries the cyclist had but he had gone by the time I came back from the sweet shop!

At the bottom of our entry was a toy shop on one side and next to this was Browns the shoe menders and leather shop. Mrs Brown ran the shop and her husband or son, I can't remember, used to do the shoe repairs on the machine in the shop. I can still smell the leather stacked up in the shop. They also started to sell leather handbags, and one Christmas when I was about 10 or 11 years old Mom put down a deposit on a 'crocodile' leather shoulder bag for me. I was so excited, I could hardly wait for Christmas morning to arrive! When I went back to Steward Street School after the holiday, low and behold my best friend Sheila Mortimer had one as well, just a slightly different colour. Dad used to buy offcuts of leather from Browns to mend our boots and shoes himself on an iron foot called a 'last' which he held between his knees. I can still see him with the shoe tacks in his mouth while hammering away at the leather onto the sole. Sometimes the leather was so hard and thick that we could hardly bend our feet and it felt as though we had clogs on! Mrs Brown was a very small lady and she used to get me to run errands for her and my reward was usually some sweets, either sugared almonds or fondant ices — lovely.

Another responsibility was to take a little girl to school and back every day. She lived at the back of the tobacconist shop next door to the billiard hall. Her mother had just had a baby and her dad worked as a bus driver. I was given two shillings (10 pence) every Friday and sometimes I would buy myself some Gallard & Bowers butterscotch sweets with some of the money. Next to Browns was the Midland Bank, then the billiard hall which was situated at the back from the road and you had to walk up a gravel driveway to the entrance. The coke to heat up the central heating in the billiard hall used to be delivered at the side of the building ready to be shovelled down the grating into the cellar, and we kids used to have a great time running up and down the coke piles until someone came out and told us off. Next came the small tobacconists shop, Daltons the betting shop, a dentists. A ladies dress shop, a butchers shop and George Baines, the bread and cake shop. Also Drury's book shop and a shoe shop. On the other side of the road were similar shops including a chemist, a newsagents, opticians, cooked meat shop. So we were well catered for locally.

In Monument Road were the swimming baths and public baths where you could have a lovely hot bath for a few pence, and because we hadn't got a bathroom we often used these facilities. If you hadn't got a towel, you could borrow one for a few pennies. They were always hard and grey looking, but they dried you well! The swimming pool was very popular, especially during the school holidays and if you didn't get there early enough, sometimes you would have to queue outside until the session was over and then you could go in for your hour or so. I was never very brave in the water and always kept to the shallow end, although I was brave enough once or twice to jump off the first diving board into the deep end, but I would always 'swim' as fast as I could to get into the shallow end. The fear of not being able to feel the bottom of the pool with my feet while my head is above water is still with me today! They didn't have lockers then, you used a hanger type contraption which had a metal basket suspended to put in your clothes and shoes etc. Nothing was ever stolen from these as far as I can remember. I never went to the swimming pool on my own, I was always with John or some of my friends and we always had a good time, arriving home all pink and with wrinkly fingers. Of course, we could only go here when Mom could afford to give us the money to do so which wasn't very often as she had to watch every penny she spent. It must have been very hard for her at times, as it was for most people living in Spring Hill. I didn't know of many people being in a better position than us except perhaps Aunt Edna. Most of us children wore hand-me-down or second hand clothes - it was the norm.

I was about 8 years old and John 10 when we joined our 'gang' to go out carol singing outside the local pubs. This was on Christmas Eve, so the pubs were full. We went to the pub on the corner of Spring Hill and the road which led to our doctor's surgery, near to the school, and when we started singing someone in the pub wedged the door open so that people could hear us (not that we were making a very good job of it) but I suppose as everyone was feeling 'merry' and we were only kids, a collection was made and handed over to us. Well, it was unbelievable; when we shared out the takings, we each ended up with approx. 7/6d (37p). Our pocket money was only normally about 6d (Two and a half pence in today's money) so we thought we were rich. I could hardly sleep that night thinking about what I was going to spend my money on, but of course I had to wait until after Christmas when the shops were open again. I eventually went down to Drury's book shop and bought a Beano book and to another shop to buy a patterned propelling pencil. I don't know what John spent his money on. Neil my husband says he is amazed at all the childhood things I remember but I suppose when you are from a large family there is always something 'going on' and these things stick in your mind even after becoming an adult. We had to make our own enjoyment because there was so little money around. We didn't have the expensive toys that children have today, and we got pleasure from running errands for people to earn a bit of pocket money to spend, but we are only talking of a few pennies.

As I mentioned before, we didn't have a bathroom or an inside toilet and had to trudge down the entry to the draughty lavatories by Mrs Stride's house (lovely for her) in wind, rain and snow. No Andrex for us, we had to use newspaper cut into squares. If it was an emergency in the middle of the night we could use a chamber pot, but anything needing toilet paper, then we had to put on our coats and run down to the lavatory as quickly as possible. We had a few tumbles now and again when the ground was icy. Just over the wall from the toilets were the back gardens of Marriotts the bridal shop and the cafe, and our 'Gang' used to climb over the wall to a wild patch of ground where bumble bees hovered in the summer. I can still see it now, purple-pink bee flowers and buzzing noise everywhere. We tried to catch the bees by trapping them inside empty jam jars as they rested on the flowers. They used to go frantic and we knew we would get stung if they landed on us, but I don't think we ever did. I would have served us right if they had stung us! Sometimes, Mr Marriott would see us from his back window and he would start waving his fist at us. We soon scarpered after this! We had quite a few play areas, the main one was at the bottom of the

entry where some shops had been bombed and the whole place was derelict waiting for the council to demolish it. It was great for kids; we used to build dens out of all the bricks, wood and slate that lay around. Sometimes I used to play shop and John would build me a counter out of bricks, or a table and chairs, and we would make mud pies, etc. We weren't supposed to go inside the building but we did, with John and his mates tying lengths of rope around the exposed beams and swinging 'Tarzan' like across all the broken rubble lying around. I don't remember any serious accidents happening, but I may be wrong as John was often at Dudley Road Hospital at one time or another with bruises and cuts. When it was V.E. Day (Victory in Europe) someone painted a big 'V.E.' on the wall at the back of one of the shops, and I have some recollection of a stage being erected and people performing on it as a celebration, but my memory is a bit vague on this.

Another 'play' area was across the road on a piece of scrub land where we used to play cowboys and indians, with Uncle Les thinking he was John Wayne (he always did resemble him). Uncle Les and Aunt Shirley were Mom's two younger siblings, and were The leaders of our gang, but they were only a few years older than us and we didn't look on them as Aunt and Uncle, they were just Les and Big Shirley (I was little Shirley). There was a lock-up 'Nissan-hut' type building here and one day we managed to get inside to have a look. Well to us kids, it looked like Aladdin's Cave. We found boxes and boxes of boot and shoe laces in black and white and loads of books as well. I seem to remember John carrying loads of these books home but I don't know how he explained them to Mom and Dad. They must have thought he had joined Spring Hill Library and it was 'As many books you like' Day! I remember us girls tying one end of the laces onto a lace waist band and dancing as though we were 'hula hula' dancers. I think someone must have shouted "B.B.C.C." which, in Ladywood-speak meant "Bunk Boys - Cops Cummin'!" and again we scarpered as fast as we would. You know we must have all been good little 'runners' because only rarely did anyone catch us, and then it was either a clipped ear or a word with your mum and the dreaded waiting for your dad coming home. I can always remember Mom saying "wait until your Dad gets home" But I think John always got the blame because he wasn't setting a good example for his little sister. On the corner of Icknield Street and Spring Hill were the remains of a cinema which had also been bombed during the war, and was another play area but we had to be extra careful not to be caught here. Most of the place was recognisable as a cinema. The upholstered seats were still there and a piano on the stage. I suppose it must have been used as a music hall or similar as well. We had great fun running around, shouting our heads off to the echoes everywhere. We used to go onto the roof and look out over the

parapet at all the traffic below, keeping our heads down as far as possible so that the local Bobby (yes, we had them in those days) standing on the corner couldn't see us. If we thought he had spotted us, we used to alert one another with our "B.B.C.C." code and run for our lives.

Gran and Granddad Stansbie, mom's parents, lived in a flat over a grocery shop in Ickniel Street. She lived in one room on the left-hand side at the top of the stairs and he lived on the right-hand side. He had two rooms, a living room come bedroom and a side room which was his kitchen. Gran had one large sitting room come kitchen with an area at the end for her bedroom, and two bedrooms upstairs. It was a strange arrangement, because when John and I used to visit them, we had to see Gran first and then Granddad afterwards. Apparently they hadn't spoken to one another for years, but I think Gran used to cook him a meal sometimes (probably one of her famous stews). There was always the smell of pipe tobacco everywhere. Granddad used to make small wooden stools and I can remember him giving us one each, as he probably did his other grandchildren. Granddad died first and John and I went into his dark smoky room to see him in his coffin. I didn't know what to expect and I think I had nightmares for a long time after. What happened to the small stools I do not know. Dad probably chopped them up for firewood when things were tight! When Gran died at the age of 62 I think, the funeral directors had great difficulty getting her coffin out of the room and down the narrow stairs, she was very heavy, and I remember Mom and the others getting very upset because they had to almost stand the coffin upright to manoeuvre it out of the doorway.



Grandma Stansbie

John was supposed to "look after me" when we both went to Steward Street School - huh, some hope. One day in the playground some stupid friends of his decided to try and drag me into the boys' toilets outside as a dare. I was screaming my head off at the indignity calling for John to stop them and he just stood there laughing and encouraging the boys to carry on. Eventually, a teacher saw what was happening; reprimanded the boys and told John to report to Mr. Scott the Headmaster for aiding and abetting them. He got a right telling off, not only from Mr Scott but also from Dad when I got home and related this story. In those days, if the Teacher reprimanded you, then your Dad did as well! so it served John right. Ha !

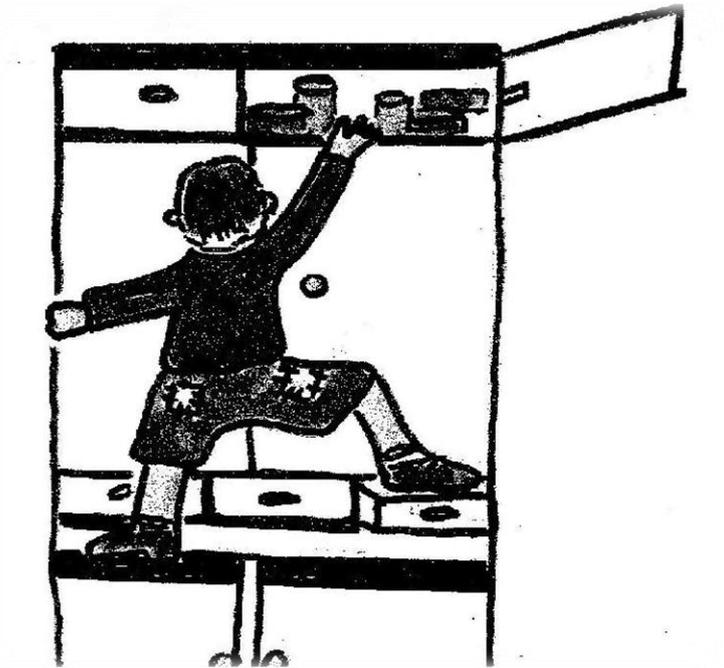
There was a boy called Dougie Watts who was big and fat and most of the boys were scared of fighting him. The girls only had to shout "Dougie, Dougie, help us" and he was there "sorting out" the rabble. All The girls loved Dougie. John moved To Barford Road Boys' School, so I was left on my own to carry the shopping bags home from Neal's' grocery shop and boy, were they heavy for a scrawny little 11 year old, but I managed somehow, having to make regular stops along the way to give my little arms a rest. Another reason why I have one shoulder higher than the other, Tough eh? Some time later Mom started having her grocery from The Co-Op on Dudley Road, which was only just at the bottom of the road, so whoever went for the grocery didn't have to carry the bags as far as I used to carry them from Spring Hill.

At Steward Street School, all the kids were crazy about playing marbles, spinning tops, skipping ropes, etc. We couldn't wait until play time or 'going home' time so that we could play these games. I remember John having a good bagful of lovely coloured marbles! and I used to chalk various patterns on my spinning top so that there would be a lovely pattern of colour whizzing around as I whipped and whipped my top in the playground and sometimes on the way home. Also, I had a skipping rope and was very good at doubling my rope to skip through a loop. I can still do this now and my granddaughter Beth was very impressed to see Grandma showing off her expertise We got so much pleasure out of these simple things. It was only at birthdays or Christmas that we had presents, and nothing expensive either, as most parents couldn't afford very much where we lived.

I remember one Christmas day finding that Father Christmas had left me a black golliwog (unthinkable these days), but I loved it so much, and then another time I had a baby doll without any clothes on! Apparently Mom couldn't afford a dressed doll, and I had to wait until she could make me some out of scraps of material. But we never felt deprived as there were very few other children having more expensive toys than us. Dad used to polish

some pennies so that they were bright and shiny, and these, along with an apple an orange and some nuts were put in a stocking at the end of our beds on Christmas Eve.

When we moved to Barford Road, Mom also added a box of Cadburys Milk Tray chocolates in a purple box just four ounces in weight, so there was only one layer. John always knew where Mom had hidden these before Christmas (at the top of a cupboard) which only he could reach. He used to balance one foot on the open drawer and one foot on the bottom shelf so that he could feel around with his one hand while holding on with the other and then hastily scramble down if he could hear Mom or Dad coming into the room. He was giving us a few laughs back then, He must have been about 11 or 12 so he should have known better. I was about 10 years old so I was innocent.



John raiding the 'Milk Tray'

In 1951 when I was 11 years old, the Headmaster announced that there would be a school trip by coach to London to see The Festival of Britain Exhibition. I can't remember the cost of this trip but we were allowed to pay weekly for it, and so poor Mom had to budget once again for this. I can't remember whether John went on this trip or if he'd already gone to Barford Road Boys School. However, the day dawned and off we went - no M1 motorway then of course, and we were all so excited. Travelling down to London was like going to the moon for us. Most of us had never been any further than Birmingham city centre. Arrangements had been made with a fish and chip café to cater for forty children along the way and we all sat at bench type tables while plates of hot lovely fish 'n chips were given to each of us along with a drink of orange juice - heaven! I can't remember much about the festival apart from the fact that it was very crowded and because we always had to 'keep together' we hardly had a good look at anything. It was supposed to be an educational visit but I don't think we learned much from it. I was hoping we would see Buckingham Palace but we weren't anywhere near it. On the journey home, we again stopped for refreshments at a little cafe in a garden setting, and there were a few chickens and ducks wandering around, so us 'Townies' thought we were in the countryside! It was a lovely adventure for us, and we were all singing songs on the coach while travelling back. We arrived back home exhausted, and even though we hadn't seen much of London, just being in the capital City thrilled us to bits.

One of my best friends at Steward Street School was a girl called Gillian Benson. She was an only child, very pretty with long blonde plaits down her back. She lived off St. Mark's Street, Ladywood in a terraced house. I used to call for her after lunch to go back to school and her mother always gave us both some little treat one of which were chocolate covered cornflakes which I'd never tasted before and they were delicious. You can now buy these from Firkins Bakery shops and I am always reminded of my first taste of these when I see them. Of course, I now wanted to grow my hair long again like Gillians and Mom managed to tie my hair into two little stick-out bunches, but eventually my hair grew longer and I ended up with two very long plaits tying them up with bows of ribbon. I also remember being invited to tea at Gillian's, and her mother made peach sandwiches. I had heard of banana sandwiches but never peach sandwiches. However, they were very nice, but I don't think Mom ever believed that this is what we had. Another friend in St. Mark's Street was a girl called Jean White but she was rarely allowed to play after school, she had very strict parents. Also There was Joyce Swain whose father was the Caretaker of the church and hall in the same street. She was an only child and I remember her having a lot of toys

to play with, but her Mother never allowed her to have friends in the house and we used to play in a shelter outside. We were very rarely allowed to play in other houses. If the weather was bad we just had to stay in our own homes and entertain ourselves.

My mother came from a large family of nine children, she being the eldest one, then Aunts Edna, Doris, Pat, Uncle Vic, Aunts Gladys and Joan, Uncle Les and Aunt Shirley. I suppose I was most fond of Shirley because she was nearer my age, but Aunt Pat was my favourite 'older' Aunt. Sadly, she had a terrible married life giving birth to seven children with two of them dying as babies. In those days it was quite common to have children to help as pallbearers to a baby's coffin and when the second baby died of pneumonia, Aunt Shirley and myself were put forward to carry the coffin. Well, even a tiny coffin was very heavy for two young girls, me being about 11 and Shirley 14, and so it was decided that only adults were to do this. I can't believe that we should have been expected to do this 'duty' but this was one of those old fashioned things that went on at this time. We were even expected to see our baby cousin in her coffin and I think I was traumatised for a long time after this! John and I had already 'seen' Granddad Stansbie in his coffin and I know it frightened me. When Aunt Pat died, she was in an open coffin in her front room for people to pay their last respects, but even though I loved her, I just couldn't go into that room. I suppose I wanted to remember her as she was. I was 16 at the time, and she was only 42 years old. I felt so sorry for my cousins. They didn't have a very happy childhood at all. I still receive a Christmas card from Brian, Aunt Pat's eldest son and John, the third eldest but I have lost touch with my other cousins, although I heard that David, a younger one had died at a similar age to his Mom. All very sad.



Aunt Pat & Children living in Monument Road

Mom's brother our Uncle Vic, before he married Mary, lived with his mother our Granny Stansbie. He was a nice character but a little bit 'slow'. However, he used to repair bicycles in his spare time, mainly in his attic

bedroom, and one day he promised to put together a bike for me — "Goggy" - as he used to call me. The reason being that I sneakily used to borrow Aunt Shirley's bike while she was at school, teaching myself to ride a two-wheeler down Camden Street, so he thought it was about time I had my own. I was so excited and kept pestering him to complete the bike quickly, and in the end I was the proud owner of a black 'put-together' girls bike. I have never forgotten this kind gesture, so always had a soft spot for Uncle Vic after that. The next bike I owned was a brand new one, bought with some of Dad's compensation money after he had had an accident to his eye at work. I remember he was in the Eye Hospital in Birmingham City centre for a good few weeks having treatment. His compensation claim went on for approximately two years, and he was awarded about £700 which he 'gratefully received'. But of course, money burnt a hole in Dad's pocket and he spent most of it treating his friends in the pub. He did buy us all bikes and a doll's pram for Pam and gave Mom some money though.

When I was in my last year at Steward Street School, because my birthday fell after the end of January (3rd Feb. actually) I could not move up into senior school at City Road for another year, and I was really unhappy about this because most of my friends were moving up. So Mom went to see Mr. Scott the Headmaster, but there was nothing he could do. However, he told Mom that I was doing really well in my lessons and that another year in Junior School wouldn't hurt me at all. The one thing I was bothered about was that the school bully, who just happened to be a girl, would be moving into my class. I would be the eldest pupil in the school but I was very shy and self-conscious then. The bully's name was Brenda Darke. She was very small but tough, and I suppose having three older brothers had made her like this. At first I was very afraid of her but then I found her 'looking up to me' because I was the Senior Prefect and we found ourselves becoming good friends. She looked after me, and I always nominated her for any help that I needed. So it all worked out well in the end.

The Headmaster told us that we were going to have a visit from reporters from the Evening Mail and some school inspectors to see how this little back street school was performing. They had heard how progressive the school was, especially doing art and crafts and expressive dancing. As I was very good doing art at the time, myself and four other children, Brenda included, were put into a spare room every morning to paint some pictures, which were to be put around the hall. You can imagine the fun we had, no morning lessons for a start, and a lot of laughter going on. However, we did make some lovely pictures and were all proud of ourselves when they were put up on the walls.

After the visitors had finished their tour of inspection, our class performed some dancing for them. The teacher put on the music, a record played with a needle, a bit scratchy, and we pranced across the wooden floorboards without any plimsolls on, getting splinters in our feet sometimes, with the finale of us sinking to the floor like dead swans. I don't know what happened to me, but I suddenly heard a lot of clapping and when I looked up, I was the only 'swan' left on the floor. I must have been half—asleep, I felt so embarrassed. However, when I 'slunk' off, I had a round of applause to myself. Talk about 'Dilly Daydream'.



Pictures of Steward Street School in its post-war heyday show (top) a lively dance class and pioneering art lessons



Birmingham school that led the way

**By SALLY HILTON
Education
Correspondent**

A FORMER Birmingham teacher is chronicling the achievements of a lively city school which paved the way for a new post-war style of primary education.

Mr John Somers wants to trace former pupils who were at Steward Street School, Ladywood from 1935-55 for a book he is planning.

Mr Somers used to teach at the old Nechells Secondary School and is now an education lecturer at Exeter University.

He said: "There is little doubt that Birmingham was a cradle for educational advance in the period after the Second World War.

"The centrepiece of the headteacher Peter Stone's

philosophy was the importance of the arts.

"Movement, drama, dance, art and music were used at Steward Street to unlock the creativity of the individual child.

"At a time when most primary pupils were still firmly fixed in desks for much of the school day, Steward Street children were experiencing the liberating joy of this activity."

Anyone who can help Mr Somers can contact him at the University of Exeter, School of Education, St Luke's, Exeter EX1 2LU or ring 0392 264824.

Birmingham Evening Mail story on Steward Street School

(I'm in the top photo in the white dress!)

I must admit, I enjoyed my last year at Steward St. School and was glad that I had had to stay on. I had a 'boyfriend' Gordon who used to send his mates to meet me as I was walking down Dudley Road to school, which I had to do every day. No bus ride for me! Why he never came to meet me I don't know. Perhaps he thought he was the Godfather. The one thing against him though was that he was shorter than me and I've always preferred my men to be taller than me!

Another 'boyfriend' was named Kevin Lamb, a very pale looking boy, and he was very naughty because he used to raid his mother's jewellery box and brought me some fashion jewellery, nothing valuable, but there was one nice set of earrings and a brooch set with imitation turquoise — at least I think it was imitation, which Mom took a fancy too. Kevin's mother never 'cottoned on' as far as I know, but when I finished with him, the jewellery stopped coming. I think I was only about 10 or 11, so I wasn't doing too badly was I. I was very good at running and could outrun all the boys at school and at home. I was very thin but I had a lot of energy.

Mom and Dad didn't have us christened in church, but I vaguely remember being baptised along with John, Brenda and Alan when we were youngsters at St. Peters Church by the recreation ground off Spring Hill. John says he remembers being christened when he was a baby (don't ask me how he would know about this occasion, but he says he can distinctly remember The Vicar saying what a "lovely baby" he was! — wishful thinking . I think Aunt Edna had Vincent and Philip baptised at the same time. We must have had a Baptism certificate each but I don't know what happened to them.

The 'Rec' was another one of our play areas with the usual swings and a slide. No climbing frames for us in those days, and if you fell off anything, you hit hard tarmac and ended up with bruises, cuts and grazes all the time. I don't think we ever ended up going home after our 'fun' without showing some injury somewhere.

Not far from here was Rosebery Street where our Grannie Neale lived. She was plump with almost black hair, which she parted at the back and plaited in two pieces and then wound them around the sides of her head. She always wore a sleeveless type of pinafore and thick 'Nora Batty' stockings, and she always smelled of 'snuff' which a lot of elderly people used in those days, it being a substitute for tobacco. Dad used to send me and John to 'visit' her and then ask for a loan of a few pennies for him. She always complained! She wasn't a very nice cuddly grandma, she always made John, and I feel uncomfortable so we never stayed very long.



Grandma Neale, young and old

We never knew Granddad Neale as he died when John and I were babies I think. All we know about him was that he had gone blind and that he read books in braille, some of which John and I received after he died, but I don't know what happened to them.

41 BARFORD ROAD
ROTTON PARK
BIRMINGHAM 16



Barford Road (Source <http://www.oldladywood.co.uk>)

Mom and Dad had a visit from the local MP canvassing for the Labour party and when he found that we were so overcrowded he promised Mom that he would 'look into it' I remember Mom saying that nothing would happen, but it did, and we were offered a house in Barford Road, near to Summerfield Park. It had two living rooms and a kitchen and three bedrooms, but no bathroom, which was a disappointment, but anyway, it was a step up the ladder as far as Mom and Dad were concerned. The rent was more than Spring Hill, but we were desperate for a bigger house, because by this time of course there was Mom and Dad, John, Me, Brenda and Alan.

Pam was actually born later in this house. I don't believe Mom ever went into hospital for any confinements; I don't think many women did at that time, it was always the local midwife and then the doctor attending a birth at home.

When we first moved into the house it had horrible green paint on the walls and the original black lead grate to heat the room and cook on. There were fireplaces in each room, but none were ever used as we couldn't afford the coal to heat all the rooms. Sometimes in winter the rooms would be really cold and you could see your warm breath in front of you. Dad always tried to keep the fire alight in the living room but at times John and I would have to go to the coal yard with an old pram to collect a small amount of coal to keep us going until the coalman called with the big bags of coal about every two weeks. I would often sit on top of the coal while John pushed the pram, but would have to get out when we came to push the pram up Icknield Port Road because it was quite steep.

Our house had been an Outdoor (pub) previously and the trap door to the cellar was still there. This is where the draymen used to roll the barrels of beer into the cellar, then used to call into the shop to buy their beer to take home. The cellar was quite clean by some standards, but I never liked it, it always seemed dark and spooky. More about this later on. Mom told us that originally, the house had been a sweetshop, and that as a little girl going to Barford Road School for a short time (I don't know where she was living then) she used to buy pennyworth's of sweets there, never knowing that one day she would live there with her own children.

Mom and Dad had the front bedroom, John 'bagged' the small back bedroom with Alan (which was the bedroom I wanted) leaving the middle bedroom for Brenda and myself. I know I was very upset because I thought I could 'make something' of the little bedroom. However, fate stepped in, because on the first or second night, two shiny eyes appeared looking through John's window and scared the living daylights out of him. Suddenly he didn't want the small bedroom anymore, so thanks to our friendly neighbourhood cat, Brenda and I got the small bedroom!

We didn't have much furniture at the time; no wardrobes for us children, but then we didn't have much in the way of clothes to hang up. I remember later, when I had moved back into the middle room with Brenda, and by now Pamela, Mom buying me and Bren a dressing table each, Pam being too young for one and there not being any room for three anyway.

Because there wasn't a bathroom, we had what we called a 'po' in the bedrooms and these chamber pots had to be emptied daily - a horrible chore! Later on when Dad starting drinking, a chamber pot wasn't sufficient for him and Mom had to put a bucket into their bedroom for him to use. All the other houses were the same, no bathrooms and outside toilets. The toilets were very cold and draughty — no hanging about in there if you could help it.

Neither did we have a washing machine. All the washing was done in a copper boiler again, but this time it was in the kitchen and not outside in the Brew house. Mom still had to start a fire going under the boiler to heat up the water. This made the kitchen lovely and warm, but also when the washing was boiling, very steamy and wet. Again, the water was used for us to have a bath in, the tin bath was brought into the kitchen, and the water scooped out of the boiler with a large saucepan until the bath was full enough.

Later on the boiler was taken out and the Council installed a gas boiler which fitted into the same corner, but the bath ritual was still the same. I remember 'walking in' on Dad one day when he was just stepping out of the bath, and he went mad at me and Mom, but there wasn't a lock on the door, so it really was his own fault for not putting one on. I didn't see anything anyway, only his big mouth bawling at me to 'get out'. You didn't get much privacy in these tiny houses unfortunately.

Later on, we were able to have the black grate taken out and a modern tiled fireplace was put in. We felt very posh then. You stepped out of the front door into the Street, and we only had a tiny backyard partly brick-paved, with a wooden gate and fence. When you went out of the gate, you were into a terrace of houses and some kind of play area where we would have bonfires later on.

There were quite a few children living here so we made a lot of friends and There was always 'something' going on in the way of us children playing, either scooters and 'mokes' (homemade buggy-type contraptions) These were made with a plank of wood and wheels, usually old pram wheels, with the steering made out of a rope tied to each end of the T-bar at the front. We really had some fun with these, careering down the gulley and frightening everyone out of the way! Just like skateboarders today.

Every Friday teatime, we would be waiting for Dad to come home from work as it would be pocket money time. We only had about one shilling each to spend and most times this was spent in Jelly's shop a few doors up Barford

Road. The choice was gobstoppers, chewing gum, sherbet dips, aniseed balls etc. but my favourite was chocolate covered coconut squares. It was terrible having to wait until next Friday before we could buy any sweets again. Parents didn't keep a stock of sweets and biscuits in the cupboard as they do today.

On the opposite side of the road to our house was an outdoor, and this place was always busy. They started to sell cold meat pies, and so every week I would go across to buy six individual meat pies which Mom would heat up for us, and I can remember them being really tasty and we always looked forward to this meal. Other times, Mom would make a huge meat and potato pie and these were really delicious. There was never any left over for seconds, and of course we didn't have a sweet or dessert in those days, so our plates were really piled up with potatoes and vegetables to 'fill us up'. John and Alan had really good appetites and were always looking in the kitchen cabinet for something to eat in the evenings, as we didn't normally have 'supper'. As long as I could have a drink of milk I was all right, but it was always sterilised milk which I now hate. Because we didn't have fridge, sterilised milk kept longer than pasteurised. You wonder now, how we ever managed without a fridge, but in those days, only small quantities of food was ever bought on a daily basis, so everything was usually eaten within 24 hours. We were always hungry though, but certainly not starving.

Bonfire night was something we all looked forward to, and we kids would be collecting old furniture and chopped down tree branches, etc. anything that would burn, for months on end. Jealously guarding the increasing pile from our 'enemies' who would try to steal some of it from us for their own bonfire. We had a good patch of ground at the back of our house where we could all gather on Bonfire Night. Someone would always give us an old settee and this would be put to good use before putting to burn on the fire. There would be some fireworks but not expensive ones, mainly bangers and sparklers and we might be lucky in fetching some chips. Everyone seemed to join in and sometimes after we youngsters had gone to bed, the fire would still be going with a few adults enjoying the last embers. Fireworks were only let off that night. You never had the lengthy firework season like you have today, lasting about 3 weeks or so.

I can't remember all the names of our neighbours in Barford Road but next door to us was Mrs Caddy and their daughter Lily who had a little boy Keith who used to call for John to play with him. He was about 5 years old and John 15. Then came Mr & Mrs Copper and their two children Raymond and Janet. Further along were the Williams family and then a few more

houses until you came to a small shop called Jelly's. At the back of our house was a terrace of houses with back gardens but no front ones. Our friends here were Pauline Smith, David and Joan Hawthorne, Paddy Lakin and his brother, Maureen, Margaret & David Salt, John and Mary Tiernan, and a few others whose names I cannot remember.

I made friends with a 'new girl on the block' whose name I cannot recall and she became very popular with the boys more than girls. However, she had a bicycle and so did I, and I quickly found out that she was more proficient than I was as she used to travel on busy roads and I only kept to the quiet ones that didn't have much traffic on them. I wasn't very brave at that time. I think I must have been about 13 years old but very unlike today's teenagers!

One day, I agreed to ride further away from my comfort zone and we headed towards the City centre by keeping to the back roads. On and on we went and suddenly found ourselves along the Bristol Road, a very busy road where the trams were still running. Then I started to panic especially when I had to overtake a stationary vehicle which meant that I was now in front of an oncoming tram, and as I started to pedal faster my shoe came off and then, horror, my front wheel became stuck in one of the tram lines.

Obviously, the tram driver could see my predicament and he slowed down enough for me to pull the wheel out, find my shoe, and then race to the pavement where I sat down, red faced with embarrassment and anger. My good friend who had been in front of me leading the way, laughed and laughed at me which made things worse and I started to cry. Boo Hoo!

Of course, I did have to get back on my bike to ride home and it must have taken us ages because I had now lost my confidence but the only way to get back home was by riding my bike. My friend couldn't wait to tell all our friends in Barford Road about this, so I was teased a lot and silly comments were shouted to me if anyone saw me riding along Barford Road, as you can imagine. Children can be very cruel sometimes!

When I was 16 years old, my boyfriend Neil was a very confident cyclist, sometimes racing the buses to get home from work. He says it was because he wanted to see me as soon as possible, and hanging behind buses would have held him up. I had hidden my bike away because the thought of him asking me to ride with him, a professional, petrified me. However, he did find out about it but understood my fear so he never bullied me into riding with him. I wouldn't have been able to keep up with him.

I made good friends with Maureen Salt who went to George Dixons Grammar School, so I thought she was clever. She was into collecting wild flowers and had a little 'I-Spy' book, so we used to walk along the dis-used railway line from Barford Road right up to the Hagley Road collecting these flowers and then taking them home to press them! I thought it was wonderful using the little book telling us what we had collected. Mom couldn't afford to buy me my own book, so Maureen was happy to share hers with me, which was nice.

Our parents never worried about us walking along this railway line and we didn't worry either, we looked on it as an adventure and educational for us as well.

Maureen had a newspaper delivery round and sometimes I used to help her, but it was a very long walk covering Dudley Road, City Road, Gillott Road and Rotton Park Road delivering The Evening Mail or The Evening Despatch. For two little 11 year olds the newspaper bag was very heavy. On two occasions when Maureen went away on holiday, I took over her round for her, being given a list of which house had which newspaper, but I was always getting it wrong and would have to go back to exchange The Mail with The Despatch or the other way round. It was lovely having a bit of pocket money but it was hard work and I was glad when Maureen came back from holiday to take over her paper round again. I also made friends with an older girl named Valerie who taught me how to do cross-stitch embroidery and she helped me make a little purse which I was so proud of. I don't even know what happened to this, probably Alan swapped it for marbles later on.

Pauline Smith had an older sister at work and Pauline used to have her sister's clothes to wear, so that she always looked nice and grown up. Their house overlooked the dis-used railway line where Maureen Salt and I used to walk along. There were a few other girls, and boys, to play with and John, Brenda, Alan and I were never short of friends. When Pam was older, she too had her friends.

Another friend of mine was Janet Copper and she lived two doors away from us in Barford Road. She had a brother called Raymond who was a little bit older than John but I don't think they were great friends. The Copper family were the first to have a television and I can remember Janet asking her Mum if I could watch 'The Secret Garden' which was on every tea-time at 5 o'clock, but I was only allowed to go in and watch it occasionally, so I never really followed the story fully. When we had our 22 inch TV later on, bought with the compensation money that Dad had received, we thought we were the bee's knees.

When Mom gave birth to a baby, and we were all over the moon to have a new sister. I played with a girl at school named Pamela which was a name I liked, and I asked Mom to call the baby Pamela. Years later when I mentioned this to Mom she said that she had chosen the name Pamela herself and that she couldn't remember me ever asking for it, but I know I did.

Somehow, the news got to Aunt Edna and she came to visit Mom. Considering they hadn't spoken to each other for quite a while I suppose it was an olive branch and they saw each other quite often after this. Other members of Mom's family eventually visited us, and one 'regular' was Uncle Vic and his wife Mary, who was a very strange character because although Vic had married Mary, he had 'married' her sister as well as They were never apart, and wherever Vic and Mary went, her sister went too. It must have been expensive for Vic always buying her sister drinks when they went to the pub as well as for Mary and himself. Mom and Edna used to get very annoyed with him for being so weak. Years later after Mary had died, Vic seemed unable to look after himself and his health was very bad. Aunt Edna used to go to his house to cook for him and generally clean up. He had put on a lot of weight and spent most of the time in bed. Aunt Edna eventually overdid things and she suffered with back problems for years after this.

When I left Steward Street School I went on to City Road Girls School but our first classroom was in the annexe of a church on Dudley Road. It was strange at first, but eventually I got to like it as it was more 'cosy' than the big school and more private. My teacher there was a Miss Navavarian and she got us involved in a Nativity play which was to be staged for our parents at our school. There was local church down Winson Green Road named St. Cuthberts and the Vicar asked us if we would stage it there as well, so just before Christmas we put on the play in the church. Apparently, it got to the ears of The Bishop of Birmingham, and he asked our Head Teacher Miss Aston if we would perform it in the cathedral in Birmingham the following Christmas. He gave us £50 towards material for new costumes, which was a good sum of money then. Some of us traipsed off to Rackhams store to buy the material. I as Angel Gabriel and was to be dressed in a gold coloured robe, not white as before. We were all thrilled to bits and very excited about it all. The day arrived in the cathedral and The Evening Mail had sent a reporter, so a picture appeared in the paper, it wasn't very clear and you could only just make out who was who, but we felt famous!

A few days later, the Bishop invited the main members of the cast to go to his flat opposite the cathedral to have tea with him and his wife — best china, dainty sandwiches and cakes, but we were so nervous we hardly ate a thing being scared of dropping crumbs all over the place. I don't know what the Bishop and his wife thought about these inarticulate and shy kids who had just performed a play and had remembered all their lines in his cathedral. It says something for our education at that time doesn't it.

American kids would not have stopped talking!

I still have the printed programme from the Cathedral performance although it is looking a bit sad now as I sellotaped where it had come apart and it has now gone all brown and sticky, but you can still see my name "Gabriel, Archangel — Shirley Neale". Something for my grandchildren! I never made it to Hollywood though!

I met my friend Shirley Brown in this first class at City Road, and although I was very good at running in races, I met my match with her. She could outdo me by a few lengths but I was always in the running team and could outrace some of the boys in Barford Road, so I wasn't so bad. One of my 'boyfriends' when I was about 15 was called Charlie Collins and he was really a fast runner, but he could never catch me and this niggled him for most of the time, but I got a lot of satisfaction out of being a good runner. It got me out of trouble a few times I can tell you!

When it was The Queen's Coronation, a party was held in Barford Road. Parents had been donating money towards the party and there were to be games and races for the children with prizes, and I just knew that I was

going to win the girls' running race. Yes, I won and was given a dressing table set comprising a hairbrush, comb and mirror in green with a pattern on it. I don't think I slept the night before thinking about the race and then the night after with my beloved prize sitting on my dressing table! I must have run like the wind! We then did a project at school about the coronation and I won a prize of a book.

When we first moved house, Mom still had her groceries from Neal's shop and I still had to fetch the weekly grocery and carry it all the way home. Considering that I was a thin little thing then, I don't know how I ever managed to carry the bags.

What was John doing then you may ask? Goodness knows, probably playing marbles with his friend. Mind you, Mom probably wouldn't have trusted him with the few biscuits she managed to afford. There would have been none left by the time he reached home.

Our weekly treat was a comic each, mine being Girls Own, but previously Sunny Stories by Enid Bytom costing an old 6d (Two and a half new pence). John's was The Beano and Dandy and then the Eagle, with Dan Dare and The Mekong! Great stuff! We used to race to Jellies the newsagents in Barford Road on a Wednesday for these comics and sometimes they would be 'swopped' with other kids after we had finished with them. We also collected cigarette cards. I used to love the smell of the tobacco on the silver foil or the card itself, and some of the cigarette packets were very colourful. I wish we had got them now as they would be collectable and worth something, but I suppose they just got thrown away eventually as 'rubbish'.

Mom and Dad smoked quite heavily as cigarettes weren't quite as expensive then as now. Woodbines were their favourite, then Park Drive. These weren't filtered and people then didn't realize what damage they were doing to their health. Smoking was looked on as a social thing, and nearly every adult smoked with a few kids smoking behind the 'bike sheds' at senior school, if you could get hold of a cigarette or two. There was more coughing and choking than inhaling going on, but smoking never interested me, and up to the time of writing I have never been a smoker. I had tried a cigarette once or twice when I was younger but couldn't see the point and I am glad that I didn't like them. The smell of cigarette smoke I hate. Mom and Dad were quite irritable if they hadn't got any cigarettes, and would send us to the tobacconists or newspaper shop to buy one or two woodbines which the shop owner would take out of a packet. He would never have trouble in selling the rest as a lot of people bought only one or two cigarettes at a time, not being able to afford the full packet even though cigarettes were far cheaper in those days than they are now.

Sweets were still rationed and to buy any we had coupons in a ration book each which we had to hand over with the appropriate money. I remember the square yellow and red lollipops especially, also sherbet lemons, humbugs, fruit drops and toffees. It was terrible having to wait to use next month's coupons, but sometimes the shop owner would take pity on you and let you use them. But then of course you wouldn't have any coupons left for the next month. So you never really 'caught up'.

Another place where you could use your coupons was at the welfare clinic in Monument Road. Here you could buy concentrated orange juice and cod liver oil. Loved the orange juice — hated the cod liver oil. I remember there was also a doctor's surgery and pharmacy here, and you could go straight from seeing the doctor with your prescription straight to the pharmacy to collect your medication, which today would be a novelty unless you need medication at a hospital where they do have a pharmacy.

Mom and sometimes Dad used to take us to the local reservoir which was situated off Monument Road, not far from where we lived. It was a nice place to spend the day because of the water, and sometimes there would be a fairground there, The entrance was free, so apart from paying for your rides on the fairground, you could take some sandwiches and a drink and have a really "cheap" day out. Later on, the reservoir was used by some sea cadets, so there was always a lot of activity going on there at weekends. In fact, Alec Bonner my ex-brother-in-law used to run the school here in 1960 and it was interesting to see his photographs of the reservoir then.

A friend from City Road School, who lived at the back of Dudley Road Hospital, and I went to the Saturday dance at The Tower Ballroom, in the reservoir grounds but we missed our bus back home and had to walk all the way back. It was very dark and deserted as we walked up Icknield Port Road and by the time we got to Barford Road, my friend was too scared to walk on to her house so I agreed to accompany her to the beginning of her road. We kept shouting to each other "Are you all right" until she finally reached her house. Of course I then had to walk back to mine. Just as I approached the toilets on the corner, a drunken man came staggering towards me (No, it wasn't Dad!) and I can remember running for my life towards Barford Road which by now had no lighting on as all the lamps went off at midnight. My heart was racing, but I wasn't out of the woods yet. Dad was waiting up for me! No excuses, "What Time do you call this, get up them stairs you bugger" Nowadays, midnight is "early" for some of our teenagers.

There is one day that will stick in my mind forever — the day we lost Brenda in Summerfield Park! She was only a toddler about 3 or 4 years old, and me and John plus Les and Shirley and other friends had gone to play in Summerfield Park, taking Brenda with us. Well after a few hours we thought it time to head back for home but on the way out of the park we stopped at the drinking water tap where you used a lead (!!) cup to drink out of. This was attached to a chain to stop anyone stealing it. You had to wait your turn, and when we had all finished, we walked down the pathway out of the park. The park was only a short distance from Barford Road and when we had nearly arrived home we suddenly realised that Brenda wasn't with us. Panic, panic, we raced back to the park, hearts beating fast because we thought someone might have taken her away with them, only to find her sobbing her little heart out and people around her asking her where her Mommy was, and of course, she couldn't tell them. Oh the relief - I was in tears myself - but we still ended up 'telling her off' for something that wasn't her fault - poor little mite. We really thought we had lost her and that Mom and Dad would kill us!

We spent many hours in Summerfield Park. I think I knew every blade of grass there. On another occasion we all got caught in a heavy thunderstorm with the rain pelting down and soaking our flimsy little summer clothes. We were running down the pathway past a single storey building which was a children's nursery, and the nurses were looking out of the window and could see the predicament we were in, so they called us inside, took off our wet clothes and gave us some hot chocolate to drink while our clothes dried in front of an electric fire surrounded by a safety fireguard. We thought we were in heaven! One time while we were playing games, I was swinging on the two-bar gymnastic thing, when my legs went up too high and my arms gave way and I fell across the bars trapping my one arm. I ended up at Dudley Road Hospital having strained my upper arm and wrist and the nurse strapped me up with a support bandage and a sling. Even though I had gone into the Accident Department in tears, I came out smiling because now I could have a couple of days off from school. I would get a lot of sympathy from my friends, and a bit of spoiling from Mom and Dad and John would probably be told off for not looking after me! This was the best part. It is sad today to think that children cannot spend hours in the local parks as we did without our parents worrying about us. I'm sure there must have been weird people about then, but certainly no drugs and no drunks wandering about. The fact that very few people had television sets to keep their children amused helped us to make our own entertainment, and this was usually outdoors, out of our Mother's hair! Mind you, if the weather was bad we used to get bored to tears because we couldn't use our bedrooms as a playroom, because (1) we didn't have that many toys and (2) the rooms

were cold as there wasn't any kind of heating there. The kitchen stove kept the kitchen warm, but the front room (the best room) was as cold as an ice box. Only at Christmas time would a small fire be lit in this room so that here we could play with our presents for the day.

I was about 13 years old and became friendly with a group of girls who lived in Icknield Port Road which was the next road parallel to Barford Road. We were all about the same age but one of the girls seemed to be a bit jealous of me (I don't know why) and for some unknown reason, I suddenly found myself on the side-lines and not being asked to play with them. I was bit upset but Mom told me to ignore them and make some other friends, but it wasn't that easy.

One night Mom asked me to go to the Chip shop in Icknield Port Road, and to get to this shop I had to walk through an alleyway alongside Barford Road Boys' School called Brandon Passage. It had one street lamp half way through the passageway. Well, it was a dark night in winter and I set off, when suddenly I saw this group of girls coming towards me. I started to feel a bit nervous because I didn't know whether they would ignore me or not. However, as I started to pass them the troublemaker whose name I cannot remember started to call me names and tried to push me to one side. Well, all I remember was feeling very angry and then lashing out at her. I hit her on the nose and she started to cry out when it started to bleed, With blood pouring down her face I scarpered as quickly as I could. As I looked back, the others girls had crowded around her trying to help her. I got to the chip shop and was so frightened that they would be waiting for me when I returned to Brandon Passage, which they were, but I wouldn't let them know how scared I was so I commenced walking towards them, prepared to fight to the death this time ! Even to throwing the chips all over them and then facing Mom's wrath because we wouldn't have had anything to eat. But low and behold! They stood aside to let me pass, and apart from Bloody Nose saying she would tell her Mom about what I had done, I managed to get home in one piece. The next day, they all called for me to play again. I suppose I had now had 'Street Cred' as they call it today and suddenly I was OK.! Would you believe it? There must be a moral to this tale somewhere.

When I was about 14 years old and at City Road School, The headmistress Miss Aston said that anyone wanting to go on a school holiday to Tenbury Wells in March (!!) could pay weekly towards this, and somehow I must have begged Mom to pay for me to go. When the time came to travel on a coach, the weather was very cold but we were all very excited about everything. The 'hotel' was a converted large house in its own grounds deep in the heart of Worcestershire, where we would be staying for two weeks. We slept in dormitories, about 10 girls to each one, and although we still had to do some school lessons, we were also involved in outdoor pursuits, mainly walking and I can remember feeling that it was like being at boarding school. We had a 'Tuck shop' where we could buy our sweets and comics, and at this time John had left school and was working at the same place as Dad, so he very generously sent me Two 5 shillings(50p) postal orders out of his wages to spend. I loved him for doing this. The downfall was the weather. It was so cold in March; we would really have enjoyed it much better during the summer months.

We were filmed doing Arts and Crafts, and I was involved in lino cutting and printing. When we saw the film later on when we were back at school, I was on the film but you could only see my auburn hair as I bent over the printing, but I was told by my teacher Miss Fisher (who had a soft spot for me) that my hair looked really beautiful so I was really chuffed!

I think Morn and Dad 'enjoyed' their break from me because at this time I suppose I was a 'Terrible Teenager' and was always arguing with both of them, especially Mom.

Dad was very fond of fresh crab, winkles, cockles, whelks and jellied eels, so most Saturdays I would go into Birmingham City centre to the Fish Market in the Bull Ring with a shopping list. I used to come back home with an assortment of what was cheap or on special offer, and mainly for us kids, crab claws. Not the big chunky ones, only the little claws, but what a treat it was. We used to sit there sucking the meat and juice out of the claws, sometimes using a pin to get the bit out of the 'tip', ending up all fishy smelling! I think if Mom spent an 'old' five shillings for the lot that was all. Today, you would probably pay about £10 or more. All I can say is that we were eating good nutritional food then. Fish was cheaper than meat, and so we had plenty of it.

Pam reminded me of Saturday 'tea' when we had eaten the above; we then had a special treat of a 'cream' cake from a shop on the Dudley Road. We had a choice of cream horns, cream puffs; cream buns cut diagonally across the top with a dollop of cream inserted. Heaven! This was only on a Saturday, Dad having been paid his wages on the previous day. We then had to wait until the following Saturday before we could have this treat again, No cakes during the week but plenty of jam sandwiches. Alan was always making himself a jam sandwich, and the mess he used to make on the pull-down shelf of the kitchen cabinet was typical of him with jam and margarine everywhere and a sticky knife and crumbs all over the place. Mom used to despair of him - but he made sure he never starved. Mom made lovely meat and potato pies, and Alan and John always tucked in, sometimes licking their plates clean.

When I was around 15 or 16 years of age further up Barford Road were two small shops; one was a grocer and next door was a ladies wear and wool shop called Zeta's. This shop was my saviour; I could get all my nylon stockings, underwear, 'monthly pads' and sometimes a dress, all paid for weekly. On one particular occasion, I asked Zeta to look out for a summer dress for me and she came back with a beautiful cotton 3-tiered one for me. I think it was about £2.19.11d (old money) nearly £3 and I felt like a model when I wore it. Mom always said it was one of the nicest dresses I had ever had. Stockings were a nuisance though; you only had to wear them a couple of times before a 'ladder' would appear, and nothing looked worse than this, so off I would go to Zeta's shop again to buy a new pair for the weekend and these would be put on my account before I had even paid for the last pair! I remember some had black seams with the heel outlined in fancy black patterning — very classy we thought (tarty more like). When Tights became the 'in' thing in 1964 I think, we felt so liberated. No more suspender belts and the worry of the suspender breaking and your stockings almost falling down. I sometimes used a button or a sixpence in place of the suspender button to anchor my stockings up. Of course, the male population weren't very pleased, and they still aren't although now most women have got a pair of stockings on one side for special occasions!

I well remember the grocery shop next to Zeta's because Mom used to have her bacon from there, and once when I went into the shop just the day before we were going on holiday in a caravan at Rhyl, I stupidly took my purse with me which contained my holiday money and I must have dropped it there. When I got back home, I realised that I hadn't got my purse and raced back to the shop, but it had gone. I knew the customer, who came in after me, but I couldn't prove a thing, so you can imagine The tears and upset. Luckily, John donated some money and Mom and Dad helped as well so I didn't go on holiday empty handed, but I hadn't got as much spending money as I would have had.

My friend Kathy came on holiday with us. She was very attractive, so it wasn't long before we found ourselves a couple of boyfriends at the holiday camp. I think they came from Weoley Castle and we arranged to see them when we got back home. This was OK until we found out that they already had girlfriends waiting for them, the Cads!

Kathy came from a family of seven girls with Irish parents. I can't remember the eldest girls' name, but then followed Agnes, Doreen, Pat, then Kathy, Vona (Brenda's friend) and then Jacqueline, the baby of the family. You can imagine what their house was like when they were all growing up; boyfriends, clothes, stockings hanging up to dry, makeup everywhere; Their poor old Dad used to go down to the pub very night to get away from it all! It

was all “BeJesus“ this and “BeJesus" that with a few Hail Mary's thrown in when the girls were arguing and their Mother was shouting at them. One thing though, their house was always spotlessly clean. The kitchen floor tiles being cleaned every day with hot sudsy water. The fact that they didn't have a bathroom must have been terrible — how they coped I do not know. It was bad enough in our house having to use the kitchen on a Friday night, taking it in turns.

When Kathy was 20 she got married to a guy called Chuck (Charlie) Hutching's and moved into a flat in Bearwood, Smethwick. I did miss her but I didn't like her husband very much so I didn't visit them much. Once when Neil my fiancé came home on leave from the army, Kathy and Chuck invited us to a supper. They had a nice flat and I was a bit jealous of her, but Neil wasn't very keen on Chuck either, so the friendship petered out a bit, although Kathy did come to our wedding, but not Chuck.

I often wondered what happened to Kathy; whether she had had any children and where she was living now. It's a shame when you lose touch and I suppose it was my fault because I was the one that had left to go to Australia and so I should have kept in touch with her. It's the same with Neil's Best Man Bryn Evans who he was in the Military Police with. Bryn lived in Watford, a smashing guy, very nice looking. We never kept in touch with him either. Although I have since found out that he married and went to live in Spain about five years ago. These are two regrets we have. Another regret is that I didn't choose either Margaret or Jean (Neil's two sisters) as my bridesmaids, which I should have done, but I had promised both Brenda and Pamela my own sisters and my best friend at the time, Sheila Holland who I worked with, that they would be my bridesmaids. Sheila, who was also engaged had asked me to be one of hers the following September. This didn't happen though because Neil and I went away to Australia a fortnight after we got married. At the time, neither Margaret nor Jean seemed bothered about being a bridesmaid, so I left it at that, but looking back now I should have had one or the other. Nothing has ever been said about this by either Margaret or Jean, so perhaps it has been forgotten.

I suppose being the eldest girl, I was expected to help around the house while my other siblings were sitting around watching the TV. or playing outside with their friends, so I did feel a bit aggrieved at times. Mom had it quite tough though, eventually looking after five children. Now I am a mother of only one child, I don't know where she had the energy or the patience to look after us all especially with Dad being on a low wage and there not being much money to spend, but she always did her best, but as children you don't always appreciate this, or understand. Also, Dad being very deaf; we didn't have much patience with him. He used to have the TV.

on so loud that you couldn't make any conversation without shouting over one another. He must have found life very difficult because at first he didn't have a hearing aid. Yet he always managed to keep a job and worked very hard, as all his jobs were manual ones. Occasionally, he would take a 'sickie' and have a couple of days off, but I think that this was because of all the stress he suffered trying to hear what people were saying and he needed to unwind. Of course he would now lose a couple of days' pay and so there would be less money in the kitty at the end of the following week which then added more stress for him.

Later on when I had met Neil and we got engaged, we were both trying to save towards our wedding and once Dad found out about this, he used to borrow money off me every week. He used to borrow on a Sunday so that he could go out and have a drink; pay me back on the following Friday, and then borrow it again on Sunday - it was like the swings and the roundabouts! Also at this time, a neighbour of Moms, Mary Lakin was also borrowing of me as well as selling me glassware etc. for my 'bottom drawer'. I felt terrible about this but she was so poor. Her husband was a very nasty man being very strict with Mary and their two boys and kept Mary very short of money. Even if I had given her the five shillings she always requested, she would be sending one of the boys with a note again the following week. I should have become a money lender, but for the fact that I wouldn't have made any profit because I never charged Dad or Mary any interest!

Just something, I remember, which my brother Alan probably won't. A friend of mine named Pat Williams worked at a manufacturing jewellers in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham. They made fashion jewellery, not anything valuable and she used to bring home some colourer stones and re jet brooch and earring mounts so that we could make up our own items. We spent hours pasting the stones, eventuality ending up with our own collection, but of course, Pat could never wear these to work. Suddenly, over a period, I found my collection slowly diminishing and then it suddenly 'clicked' with me. My little brother Alan, aged about 8 was swapping them for marbles with his friends. He will deny this even now I know, but it's the truth. Again, later on when Neil and I were 'courting' and Neil was away doing his National Service, I used to save all my love letters from him and hid them in my wardrobe, which I locked with a key. You've guessed it. When I was bossing Alan around, to "get his own back on me" he would suddenly start reciting passages from my letters, which as far as I knew, only I had read. You've guessed it - Alan had found out where I had hidden the key, so he had been reading my letters when I was out. I laugh about it now, but at the time, I could have 'murdered' the little devil.



The SPIDER !!
THAT
"CAME IN WITH THE BANANAS"

BARFORD ROAD

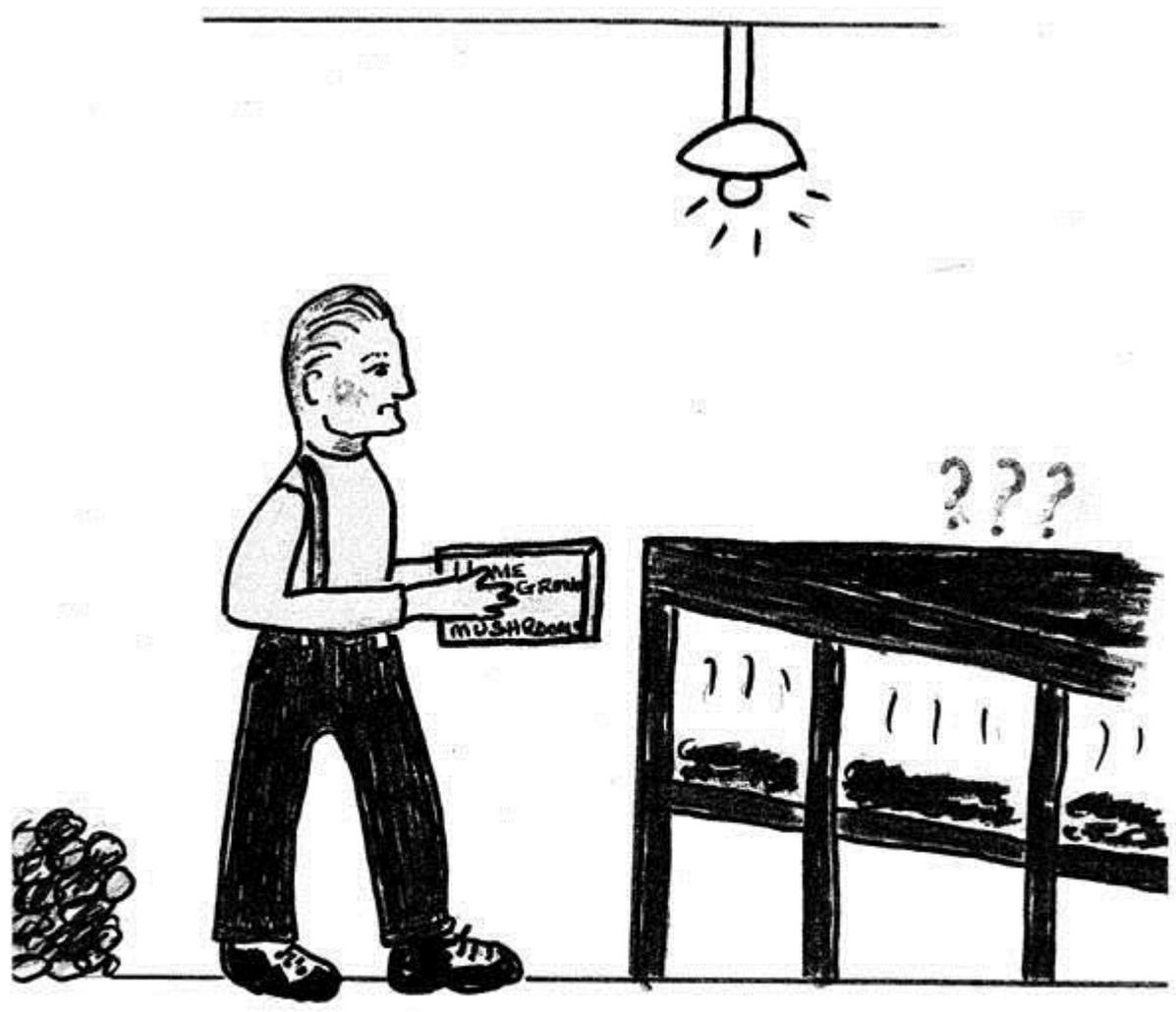
PICTURE THIS:

The house in Barford Road, about 5 p.m. teatime. Mom is in the kitchen preparing our tea. Dad is reading the newspaper, I am looking after Pamela who is sitting in front of the fire not feeling very well, eating some cool jelly out of a dish. Alan is playing with a ball and Brenda is watching TV. Suddenly, Pam cries out and when I look at her she has white spots on her face which she says is 'hurting'. I shout to Mom that it looks as though she has got a rash appearing on her face, and Mom says she will have to go to the doctors on Monday if it gets any worse. A few minutes later, we hear a "whoooooosh" and there on the hearth appears to be the biggest spider you have ever seen, with numerous arms and legs wriggling all over the place. Bren, Pam and I scream out to Dad that there is a horrible spider and that he has got to kill it, Mom comes running in to see what all the hullabaloo is about and nearly has a fit when she sees the spider. Up in the air goes Pam's jelly and we all rush into the kitchen leaving Dad with this monstrosity. He grabs hold of the coal shovel and starts to hit the spider, which 'dances' all over the place, and has now started 'spitting at Dad. We are all peering around the door; Pam starts crying and Mom is shouting that the spider had 'come in with the bananas we were having for our tea. Mrs Caddy our next door neighbour hears the commotion and asks Mom what was going on, so Mom repeats the above.

Dad just could NOT kill the spider and after quite a few bashes with the shovel, he manages to hold it down. It is still wriggling its arms and legs, but eventually they stop moving. Dad carefully takes the shovel off the spider, and when it is finally still, he looks closer at it, and with sheer relief shouts "It's a bloody golf ball! Apparently, Alan had been playing 'golf' around the house, but we hadn't taken much notice of him. He had hit the golf ball and couldn't find out where it had gone to, and then forgotten about it. Well it must have landed in the fire, which started to melt the white paint on the outside, and this was what was hitting Pam on the face giving her white spots. Next in the procedure, the heat started to burn into the elastic ball and this made it 'jump' out of the fire and land in the hearth. Then the elastic began to break up 'hence the wriggling arms and legs', and when Dad was hitting it with the shovel, well it was like a bat and ball, bouncing all over the place and this is the reason why Dad couldn't "kill it". When we all realised what had happened, Alan looked 'gob smacked' - "Oh that's where my golf ball went then", after which Dad chased him round the settee and gave him a clip on the ear. We all burst into laughter, Tears streaming down our faces. It was sheer comedy, and poor Dad, we had all run off and left him to 'fight the spider'. John was out at the time and I was about 16 years

old and I couldn't wait for Neil to come so that we could relate the event. Even then, we couldn't stop laughing, except Alan who was still smarting because Dad had 'clipped him one'.

This story has been told so many times, but there is only me to really say what happened now, and believe me, this is JUST how it happened! I think we kept the burn golf ball for a long time afterwards, still having a laugh over it. Even now, when I am eating bananas, I still think of the "Spider that came in with the Bananas" and the sheer terror we all went through. Pam was relieved that she hadn't got chicken pox (or spider pox), and Mom was able to make her another jelly!



Dad's Homegrown
"Mushroom" Project

Mom kept telling Dad that "he should take up a hobby". He didn't do any DIY around the house, in fact it was Mom that used to do all the decorating as he was so hopeless doing anything. So after reading an advert in the newspaper about growing your own mushrooms, he decided to have a go. The cellar was quite clean and so he started to build some staging to grow the mushrooms. All we could hear for days on end was him hammering away, and eventually he finished and sent off for the necessary bucket of mushroom spores and compost I Think it cost him about £4 for the whole kit. After about a week or so, we could suddenly smell ammonia everywhere in the house and it became really overpowering, but there wasn't any sign of even one tiny weeny little mushroom poking it's head through the compost. We all started complaining about the smell, and Dad kept saying "just give it a few more days". The compost is heating up. No mushrooms appeared after about 3 weeks, by which time we were almost gagging with the smell, and if I remember correctly I was going out with Neil at the time and was so embarrassed when he came into the house. Eventually, Mom made Dad throw all the compost etc. away and quite a racket was going on while Dad demolished all the staging. It was such a shame, as he was so keen. He was going to sell pounds and pounds of mushrooms down at the pub and was feeling rotten at having to tell all his customers that his mushroom crop had failed! Low and behold, a few days later on the pile of compost Dad had dumped into the back garden, appeared one solitary mushroom - quite a good size really, so Mom cooked it with some bacon and eggs and we had a really good meal. So he did have some success. But Mom kept quiet about hobbies after that.

Uncle Les and Aunt Nora were planning on getting married and they asked me to be one of their bridesmaids along with another niece of Nora's, As time went on and plans were being made it was decided that we would wear pink dresses from Mrs Marriott's shop, so of course this was very exciting for me. I went into town, bought some gold coloured sandals, and could hardly wait for the day. The wedding was to be at St. Paul's church in St. Paul's Square in the centre of the jewellery quarter in Birmingham. A few weeks before the wedding, Nora's niece was involved in an accident with a lorry which skirted the corner of a street which she was standing at to cross the road, and she suffered terrible injuries to her neck. As you can imagine, she was more concerned about being a bridesmaid than her injuries, and I think Nora and Les delayed their wedding for a little while so that their niece could recover, which she did, but the injury had left her with a terrible scar across her neck and she developed a nervous 'twitch'. It was such a shame, but she was very brave and when the wedding photos were developed you could only

just see that she had a scar. Once I asked Aunt Nora if I could look at the wedding photos because I don't ever remember Mom being given one as a memento only to be told by Nora that she had lost them in a fire and had no record of her wedding whatsoever. Apparently in those days, no copies of these photos were given to relatives so there were no photos in anyone else's possession. There is a moral to the tale here somewhere.

Sometime later, when I was at City Road School, I befriended a girl called Shirley Brown, who I referred to earlier, and at our school Christmas party we both turned up in the same style bridesmaid dress except mine was pink and hers was mauve. We thought we were the cat's whiskers!

During my last year at Senior school myself and some other girls were given the job of decorating the school hall with paper sculptures for the Christmas party and we really had a lot of fun doing this. We had a lot of compliments from the Teachers and children alike, so we were very 'chuffed' with ourselves. My Teacher was a Miss Fisher, who I liked very much and I can remember when it was the end of the year school presentation day. I received a book by Oscar Wilde for "General work over The last Twelve months" and as a special gift I received from Miss Fisher a plastic wallet for my stockings, which made me feel very grown up. I desperately wanted to leave school and start work to earn some money, and I think Mom was glad to have a little bit more money in the kitty when I did get a job and paid her my 'keep'. I think I only earned about £1.18.6d per week (nearly £2) of which Mom put aside 10/Od (5Op) per week for my clothes, I had 50p pocket money and she had the rest, which wasn't quite £1. Of course John was also at work, so she had money off him as well. By this time of course, John and I would have FISH and chips now, not just chips for our dinner.

Now my childhood was over, and I was facing the big wide world. Neil is amazed at how much I remember of my childhood, and I hope you are too.

Gallery



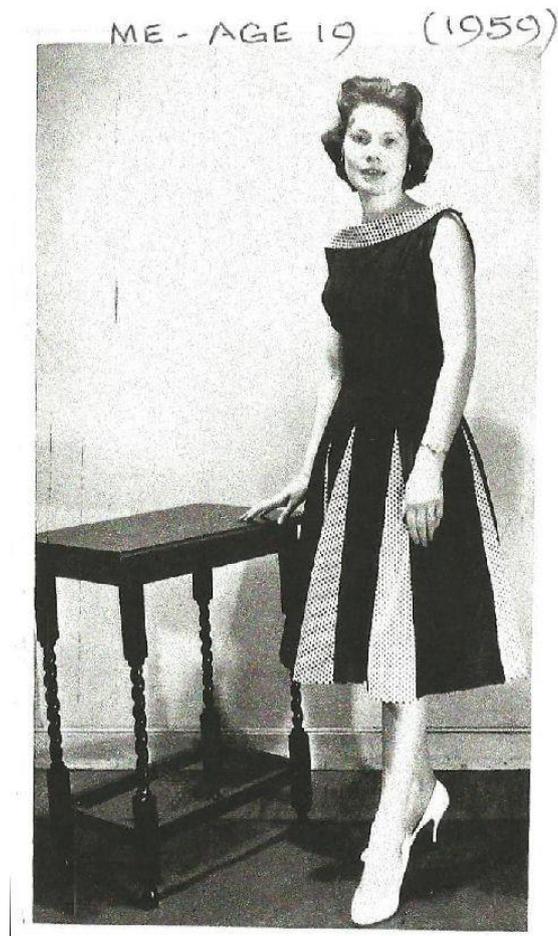
Mom (Violet Neale) in 1942



Dad (William Neale) in 1942



Me and little sister Pamela 1959



Me, aged 19 in 1959



Pamela, about 8 years old



Mom & Dad in Barford Road



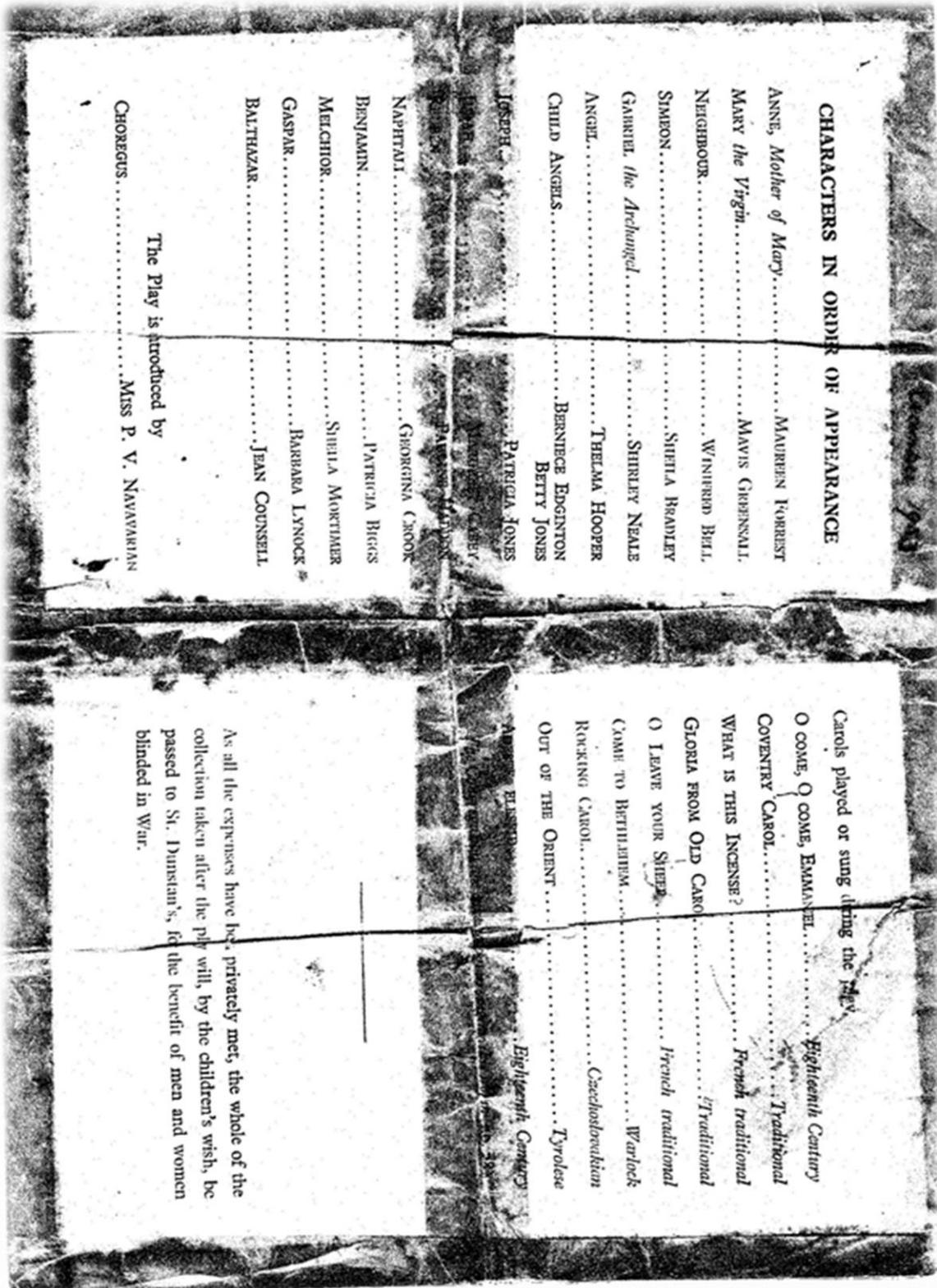
John Aged 7, Me aged 5



Alan, aged 8 & Mom in Rhyl

Programme for the Nativity play at Birmingham Cathedral

“Joyful Mysteries – A Pageant of the Birth of Christ” by Flora Abigail Macleod
 Presented by girls of City Road Secondary Modern School December 1953



CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

ANNE, <i>Mother of Mary</i>	MAUREEN FORREST
MARY <i>the Virgin</i>	MAVIS GREENHALL
NEIGHBOUR.....	WINIFRED BELL
SIMEON.....	SHEILA BRADLEY
GABRIEL, <i>the Archangel</i>	SHIRLEY NEALE
ANGEL.....	THELMA HOOPER
CHILD ANGELS.....	BERNICE EDGINGTON BETTY JONES
JOSEPH.....	PATRICIA JONES
NAPHTALI.....	GEORGINA (BOOK)
BENJAMIN.....	PATRICIA BIGGS
MELCHIOR.....	SHEILA MORTIMER
GASPAR.....	BARBARA LYNOCK
BALTHAZAR.....	JEAN COUNSELL

The Play is introduced by
 MISS P. V. NAVAVARIAN

Carols played or sung during the play

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL.....	Fifteenth Century
COVENTRY CAROL.....	Traditional
WHAT IS THIS INCENSE?	French traditional
GLORIA FROM OLD CAROL.....	Traditional
O LEAVE YOUR SHEEP.....	French traditional
COME TO BETHLEHEM.....	Warlock
ROCKING CAROL.....	Czechoslovakian
OUT OF THE ORIENT.....	Tyrolse

As all the expenses have been privately met, the whole of the collection taken after the play will, by the children's wish, be passed to St. Dunstan's, for the benefit of men and women blinded in War.

