

# My First Fifty Years

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Leonard I. Sidwell

## My First Fifty Years

Dear Leon, *[I began referring to myself as Martin after I left home]*

It has often been said to me, by people who have heard at least some part of the story which goes to make up my life to this date that I "ought to write a book" about it.

Well; so far I have resisted the idea. Not that it hasn't had its attractions, for I suppose we are all egotistical enough at some time in our lives to want to leave something of ourselves more tangible than a memory, since memories last, at the most, for the lifetime of their possessor. Also, the exercise of one's own memory, in attempting to recall all the experiences and their many facets, is enticing.

Up to now, as previously remarked, I have done nothing about it – partly through lack of time and opportunity, but mainly, I suppose, because I could not – nay can not – be sure that subjective experience can objectively be written. That is to say that I fear that, however I may try, I shall be unable to be entirely honest about those matters in the course of my life about which I still retain some sense of shame; those events which even my memory may not wish faithfully to recall lest they dim the image which all of us may wish to leave in the minds of others – especially of those whom we love.

Why then, am I attempting this task now, if I am still uncertain of my ability to be dispassionate? I think it is mainly to occupy myself at a time when I am otherwise continually engulfed by a desperate unhappiness, for I find myself, so far at least, to be quite unable to reconcile myself to the loss of your mother. Perhaps I hope, by writing this now, that it may in some way explain why I can no longer find any meaning or desire for life left in me since she died, and perhaps if I can understand this it may help me to live out whatever time is left for me here to endure.

Also, and this is only vicariously selfish, I think that either your children or your children's children may be interested to know something of their personal history so far as I can leave a record of my life and throw a little – a very little – bit of light on my own predecessors. Alas, I cannot, as you know, go back far into family history before it becomes lost, and I have always regretted this. We seem to know almost as little about whence we came as where we are going which is regrettable, since the one is only a matter of the record, whereas the other is a matter for endless – and as you know, to my mind, fruitless – conjecture.

Where and how to begin? Let me say at the outset that this will be done to no set plan and I have no idea at this moment how the thing will develop. No doubt, having as I think, completed one chapter in my life then I shall recall something overlooked and will find it necessary to digress. If I do, bear with me and hope that I do not get lost on the way.

I was born, as you know, on the 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1913 to Florrie Sidwell, nee Blackburn, at a house in Regent Street, Nelson, Lancs. I think – though I do not know the actual wedding date – that she and my father, Benjamin Whalley Sidwell, had been married at Salem (Methodist) Chapel about a year earlier.

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At the time of my birth, my mother was about 24 years of age, and she was never to see 25, for she died in August of the year in which I was born. She died, so I was much later told by my father, from pneumonia. He told me that she had a good childbirth with me (though I was a fairly large baby) and that the midwife got her out of bed too soon, causing her to catch a chill which, subsiding and recurring, finally reduced her to such a low physical state that eventually she contracted the illness from which she never recovered.

She seems to have been a much-loved person, for I have never heard anything but the highest praise of her from the few people whom I have met who were privileged to know her. My father seldom spoke of her to me but I guessed from this and know from what I have been told by my Uncle Jack (one of his brothers) that he loved her very much and was a long time recovering from her death. She is buried in a grave on the right up the main pathway from the chapel in Marsden Cemetary, Nelson; about the fifth grave, I think. My father's mother and father are also buried in the same grave. My father had an epitaph inscribed on the grave "She always did her best"; this he subsequently regretted, since it is somewhat ambiguous and may be thought to imply a faint criticism of her, whereas he intended it, sincerely, as the highest praise. Probably "she always gave of her best" would have been nearer his intention.

My mother had three [*sic – changed from two*] sisters and no brothers, and so far as I know at that time all four sisters worked as weavers in one or other of the local cotton mills. Their father was a loom "tackler"; that is to say that it was his job to keep the looms maintained in good running order and to repair them if they broke down. He once went abroad, on his own, to New England, USA where the cotton industry in that country was then almost exclusively situated. He hoped to find a good life and to send for his wife and daughters but instead he had, I believe, a very hard time of it, and came home again as soon as he could save the necessary money to pay his passage. He retired promptly at the age of 65 and died soon thereafter. His wife survived him for some time but I rather lost track of this side of the family for reasons which will presently emerge. My mother's family lived in Dalton Street, Nelson, and one of her sisters (Ada) married one Harry Singleton, and they subsequently emigrated to California. There they finally separated, after begetting one daughter who, in later years, wrote to my father. I know nothing of her except that she was rather lonely and unhappy. My mother's other sister was, I believe, named Selina, and I have no idea what became of her. You will see these three sisters and Harry Singleton on the wedding photograph of my mother and father which you will find among my effects.

After the death of my mother, my father sold his home and returned with me to the home of his parents, John Henry Sidwell and Sarah Jane Sidwell. They lived at 55 Newport Street, end house in that street and now also a shop. It is almost opposite the house in which I was born and this house also is now a shop – a fish and chip shop.

My father was the oldest child in a family consisting of six sons; my father, Rennie, Fred, Arthur, Jack and James (Jim). There were no daughters.

My grandfather Sidwell had moved, as a young man, from Coventry to Nelson; why and how I do not know unless he had moved there with his own parents, of whom I know

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nothing. He had a brother Ben, who also lived in Nelson, whom I dimly remember and after whom, presumably, my father received his first Christian name. There was also a sister Emily who owned a boarding house at Douglas in the Isle of Man. Both of these seem to have been rather more capable and intelligent than my grandfather who was withal a simple, uncomplicated, affectionate man, though given to pleasure loving and being somewhat unthinkingly selfish.

My paternal grandmother was born a Whalley (hence my father's second Christian name) and she came of a well-known and much respected family from Trawden, a village near Colne. She was an immensely capable, uncomplaining woman who, I suppose, brought up her six sons (and myself until I was about seven years old) virtually almost single-handed. She was the tower of strength in the household and worked from morning 'til night to bring up her sons and guide them into the acceptance of moral precepts which have served them well all their lives. Not one of these sons ever brought shame or dishonor on the Sidwell name and all have lived clean and useful lives – a tribute to my grandmother's unending and selfless care. I loved her dearly and it is one of the big regrets of my life that she died before I returned to England; she was worn out by a lifetime of hard work and struck down in her fifties by cervical cancer. I have no knowledge of her parents, but I do know she had at least one brother. It is my understanding that her family felt she had "married beneath her" in marrying my grandfather and had little to do with her thereafter. Her pride would prevent her from admitting this if she too had ever felt it, though I have no reason to suppose that she did.

So; my father and I returned to Newport Street and of course I know little of those early years of my life except at second hand. The first World War was looming and it was to have its repercussions in our family too. My Uncle Arthur had emigrated to America before the war started. He was working at the Goodrich Rubber Company in Akron, Ohio and he remained there until around 1929.

When war was declared none of the sons was prepared to take part in it. How this came to be I do not know, but as it was, for all of them, a strong moral conviction I have to assume that my grandmother's influence was the molding factor. Uncle Arthur was in America and Uncle Jim was still at school, so the strength of their convictions was not put to the test. This was not so with the others and they had, in their turn, to try to prove their case for refusing service to the Tribunal set up to "try" the validity of objectors' principles. My father appeared at the Tribunal as witness to their sincerity and the results were that Uncle Fred was exempted on medical grounds (the forefinger and middle finger of his right hand were joined together from birth and the tribunal, in its wisdom, decided he thus couldn't fire a rifle anyway!); Uncle Jack was exempted from full military service and was allocated to service in the Non-Combatant Corps, a decision he agreed to accept; my Uncle Rennie was unconditionally exempted from all service and my father – whose luck, if you can call it that, had by then run its course – had his own case dismissed and thus he remained liable to be called up for full military service.

It may be useful at this point to digress and to recall what little I know of my father as a young man. He had been very bright at school; so much so that when my grandfather

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decided to take him away from school and put him to work full time to help, as oldest son, to support the growing family the headmaster came to the house and pleaded with my grandfather not to do it. He pointed out to my grandfather that my father had excellent aptitude for learning and that it would be a crime to deprive him of the opportunity to harness his brilliance to a worthwhile career. My grandfather, unmoved by the plea and governed by the exigencies of economic necessity refused to reconsider, and my father was removed from school to work full time in the mill at the age of thirteen. He had been working half time since he was eleven, and when thus forced to work full time, he continued, for a time, to keep up his studies by attending night school. This effort, on top of a day's work proved in time to be too much for him and he was thus forced to discontinue his studies. He never forgave my grandfather for the decision to take him away from school as he felt that it would have been possible for him to have remained there if my grandfather had been - which he was evidently not - prepared to forgo some of his own pleasures.

My father seems to have led a fairly active, not to say athletic, youth. He was a keen and useful footballer (forward), a very good slow bowler at cricket and NE Lancs champion at hop, step and jump. He was also a good dancer and an active member of a rambling club. Most, though not all, of these activities were connected with the Salem Methodist Young Men's Club and it was through this association that he met Edith Isabel Kenyon, who was later to become my stepmother.

As the war dragged on, my father was inevitably called up for military service, which he refused. As a result of this continued refusal he was forced to spend nearly two and a half years in jail, these years being spent partly in military custody, but mainly in Walton Prison, Liverpool. The lot of conscientious objectors in World War I was an extremely hard one, for no precedent had, of course, been established and thus the objectors were subjected to all kinds of indignities in an effort to persuade them to change their minds. Apart from the predictable ones of being forced to strip and then left with no clothes other than military ones to don - and then left naked for long periods when they refused to comply, they were, as things on the Home Front deteriorated, led to believe that they were to be taken to France, to the Front, and there, if they still refused to fight, executed for "cowardice in the face of the enemy". I believe this was, in fact, seriously considered as a possibility and finally only discarded because of the adverse world publicity which it would undoubtedly have aroused.

As an alternative to military service, when it was seen that coercion would not produce results, a device known as the "Home Office Scheme" was evolved by the government. This was a plan whereby objectors would be allocated to civilian type jobs on the Home Front, such jobs being not (directly, at least) harnessed to the prosecution of the war. Many C.O.s were able, as others were later in World War II, to accept this without violating their consciences, and at first my father thought he could, too. He was sent to Bibbys at Liverpool, a firm which made - and indeed, I think still does make - soap, cattle food, and such allied products. He was quite happy there for a time until he discovered that he had taken the place of a man who had been called up for military service. This worried him, and he came to feel that there was no moral distinction between having accepted the job of a man who had gone to serve and in himself going to serve. Thus he went to his superiors and told them he must leave; they tried to

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dissuade him but, seeing his mind was made up, wished him good luck and let him go. He returned to Nelson, where he was subsequently rearrested and removed to Walton Jail, where he was incarcerated until some months after the cessation of hostilities in the war.

During this period I was, of course, still living with my grandparents at Newport Street. You will realize that even when the war ended I was only five years of age, so that my recollections of this period are partly those which I can remember of myself and others, and partly hearsay. Hence, since this part of the narrative can at the best be fragmentary I will just preface it "I remember" –

School, Beadley Infants, was not an experience which I greatly enjoyed. Or perhaps it was in the Junior School when I was unhappy. At any rate I can remember being bullied by one boy older and much bigger than myself. I was rather thin, pale and weakly and an easy subject of such perversion and I recall that a lot of my time was spent in trying to avoid this boy whose idea of fun, I recall, was to get me to dance at his command for the amusement of his cronies and to my acute shame and embarrassment – which no doubt added spice to the fun.

As I was not constitutionally strong (I seem to recall that I suffered from running ears, among other things) I was unhappy at school and took every opportunity which my fond and indulgent grandmother allowed me to absent myself from it. On one occasion these rather frequent absences provoked a visit from the School Attendance Officer – a consummate sadist if ever there was one. I saw him coming to the door – resplendent in his official uniform and peaked cap and I was seized with an immediate and unreasoning terror so that I fled into the furthest recesses of the coal cupboard under the stairs. My grandmother answered the door and let him in, as politeness bade her to do. He had seen me go into the cupboard, and, while he talked to my grandmother he picked out with one finger a tuneless melody on the piano which backed against the cupboard in which I was crouched in agonies of nameless and perspiring dread. After what to me seemed hours he finally departed and I emerged exhausted from my cave. His visit was successful in achieving my more regular attendance at school; I would have had to be unable to walk to stay away after that.

It is probably not surprising that with these experiences, and without the stability of a background of mother-love and with my father hardly even a memory since he had been away so long I was now well on the way to becoming a neurotic. My bladder was unreliable in consequence, and apart from the uncertainties of the nighttime there were daytime problems, too. I recall one humiliating experience at school during what, I suppose, was a music lesson. Some half way through the lesson I was seized with an immediate need to leave the room. In those days one simply could not ask permission during class to do this. If one had the temerity to ask, such permission would have been refused along with the gratuitous and rhetorical question of "Why didn't you go before class started?" This, in turn, would have focused the attention of the class on one's unforgivable dilemma and thus heightened one's intolerable discomfort. So I held on as long as I could, and this – oh, unhappy day – was until we were standing on our benches, singing. Alas, my self-control finally snapped and the stream ran down my leg,

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over the bench and on to the floor where it formed a pool in which I would have thankfully and instantly drowned.

On one occasion I went with the lady who is now my stepmother to visit my father in prison; I cannot recall knowing her very well at that time, but evidently I was sufficiently used to her to go with her all the way to Liverpool.

We arrived at the large wooden gate of the prison, and she knocked on the small door which is cut in this gate, and told the uniformed warden our business. He let us inside and we accompanied him through a series of clanging iron gates which he unlocked and subsequently relocked as we went through, down large and echoing stone corridors and finally into a small visiting room. A strange, pale-looking man who I knew instinctively was my father, but whom I did not recognize, sat at the far side of a wooden table which stood in the middle of the room. The warden sat down on a chair just inside the door and we sat opposite my father. I have no recollection of the conversation, but I do recall one terrifying part I had to play in the melodrama, and that was, under pretence of going around the table to kiss my father I should slip him a small note which my stepmother-to-be had given me for the purpose. Somehow I managed to perform this act, but I was in terror lest my deception should be detected by the warden and as a result I should be shut up in the prison, too. I did not see my father again until my grandfather and I went to meet him at the prison gate when he was finally released. I remember that the first thing we then did was to make for a café where my father enjoyed a meal for the first time in a very long while.

These recollections seem all to be rather pathetic and unhappy – and there are others, too, such as sitting in bed, with the turned-down gaslight, listening to the drone of the zeppelins overhead and, again, insisting that my grandmother would look in all the cupboards and under the bed to see no one was there before I would indeed dare get into bed. There were no doubt happy times, too, but if there were I do not recall them. This may be significant but whether significant of what I was or significant of what I had become or now am perhaps you may judge, for I cannot.

After my father was released from prison he returned to us and took up his old life so far as he could. He went back to work as a weaver, and for the next two years or so life was fairly quiet for us. During this time he consolidated his attachment to Edith Kenyon and the three of us gradually got to know each other better, though I was still very much attached to my grandparents who, in effect, were the only “parents” I had known.

Miss Kenyon came of a family where, in contradistinction from the Sidwells, the children were all daughters. There were, apart from Edith; Elsie, Doris and Mildred, and there had been a fifth daughter – the youngest – Alma, who had been tragically knocked down and killed by a horse-drawn vehicle when the family was on holiday in Grange-over-Sands. This was a blow from which the father had never entirely recovered.

Edith, in spite of her parents’ opposition, had, as you have seen, stayed loyal and faithful to my father during the war years although, so far as I know, there was no “understanding” between them. Indeed, I would think it unlikely that my father would have wanted to ask her to marry him while his own future was so uncertain. However,

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with the war over, and superficial normality once more internationally restored my father did then ask her and thus, when I was about seven years of age they were quietly married at the Registry Office in Burnley.

After their marriage my father and stepmother (whom I shall hereafter call "Mother") set up house at 32 Regent Street and I went there to live with them. That I did not wish to do so and that my grandparents also did not want to part from me need hardly be said, but my father was, understandably, insistent upon it. I never became particularly happy at the change, although since I continued to see my grandmother frequently the separation was not too severe.

Due, no doubt, to the hardships and privations which my father had endured during the war his health now began to give cause for anxiety, and he commenced to suffer severe attacks of migraine. Somehow he managed to get through the working week, only to be prostrate with pain most of each weekend and Mother and I had to creep quietly around the house while he tried to get some relief by lying on the bed upstairs, behind drawn blinds. Obviously this state of affairs could not be allowed to continue and my father inquired of his doctor and optician what treatment would prove effective. They told him that they were unable to suggest any prescribable remedy but that a climate with lots of sunshine would undoubtedly alleviate the worst effect of the malady.

This suggestion, while appearing sensible, also at the time seemed impossible to attain since it involved moving to a country which enjoys more of the sunshine than does Britain. However, at this time, my Uncle Arthur, who, as previously related, was living in the USA suggested that if my father wished to move there, where the summers were invariably hot and sunny, a job could probably be found for him. This seemed too good an opportunity to miss and so it was agreed that we would go. I cannot recall that I was aware of any of these intended plans until the fruition of them was almost upon us, but a late development occurred which almost prevented our going after all.

My grandmother usually came along to see me at No. 32 on most Saturday mornings, as my parents were at work on that day and I was thus otherwise on my own until midday. On this particular morning I had not felt well when I arose, some time after they had gone to work, and I was sitting in a chair, feeling even worse, when grandma arrived. It seems I must have looked as ill as I felt, and grandma insisted I return home with her where she promptly put me to bed and sent for the doctor. I understand that in doing this she incurred the wrath of my father who later discovering what had happened, upbraided her for not putting me to bed at No. 32. She told him that it was evident to her I should need nursing and that as both he and mother were at work all day what she had done was the only possible solution. It must be confessed that I was very glad she had taken me to Newport Street as this still seemed like home to me.

It transpired that I had appendicitis and if I were to have an operation then it would not be possible for me to recover in time to meet the sailing date of the ship which was to take us to America. If this date were not met, then only a proportion of the passage money would be returnable and the loss of that amount of money would have deferred the sailing indefinitely. Additionally, the job which my Uncle Arthur had by now been able to obtain at his place of work – B. F. Goodrich, Akron, Ohio – for my father, would



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probably have been filled by the time enough money had been saved for the second attempt at emigration. Thus, barring an emergency, the idea of an operation for me was ruled out, and it was decided instead to embark on a series of enemas to flush out the colonic tract. This was duly done, and enemas were applied at one end and Ovaltine (my only food for about a fortnight) at the other and slowly the inflammation subsided. Finally, when I had sufficiently recovered, I was taken by my parents for a week's convalescence to Scarborough – a place I have never visited since!

Came the time to leave for Liverpool, our port of departure, and the agonizing farewell for me with my grandmother. It was not until years later, after we had returned to this country, that I learned from my grandfather that grandmother had pleaded with my father to leave me behind with them. She loved me like her own son and would be heartbroken if he took me away. What other pleas and arguments she advanced I can only imagine, but none of them prevailed and we left Nelson and my grandmother behind; I never saw her again. My grandfather accompanied us to Liverpool to see us off so that this temporarily staved off the desolation I was to feel.

The ship on which we were to sail was the S.S. Winifredian, a small, one-class boat carrying only 144 registered passengers. She looked enormous to me, but she was only a few thousand tons. After the formalities of boarding the ship were over we crowded to the ship's rail overlooking the quay and from there I was able to pick out my grandfather who was waving his cap to us. After a seeming eternity of time the gangplank was hauled aboard and the ship began to move. My grandfather continued to wave and we returned his farewell as he gradually dwindled to a speck, and finally to nothing as we slowly receded from the shore. As he finally disappeared from sight I was overcome by a feeling of dreadful loneliness and emptiness which I thought would never end.

The voyage started uneventfully enough, and for two or three days we enjoyed ourselves sitting on the deck and walking around it, and in playing shuffleboard and other deck games. Came the evening of the third day and we, along with other passengers, were leaning over the deck rail, fascinated by the changing appearance of the sea. From the usual choppy turbulence it had become a silky, oily-looking mass, rather like molten glass. As we watched, however, in places there began a slow circular movement over a fairly wide area, which, increasing in speed and reducing in area, finally culminated in a spouting into the air of a jet of seawater. Our interest in this novelty was short lived, however, as members of the ship's crew came along the decks and ordered everyone below. As we obediently and unquestioningly obeyed, they busied themselves in battening down the hatches and soon everything was safely tied down or stowed away and we awaited – as we now realized – the oncoming storm.

And it was a storm, for it raged for three nights and as many days. My father and I were desperately ill for most of this time, and what with this and the boat rolling from side to side, wallowing from stem to stern and shaking and shuddering as the propeller lurched from the water, racing, and then biting and clawing as it reentered the sea I was hard put to it to avoid rolling out of my top berth. We had an outside cabin and the porthole was leaking badly on to mother's bed, but the crew was so busy attending to ill passengers that they had no time to attend to such matters. The trunks swished and

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thundered back and forth across the cabin floor and altogether a nightmare would have seemed mild by comparison with the situation in which we found ourselves.

Slowly the storm subsided, and we learned afterwards that, at the height of it, the SS *Acquitania* (which was a ship of some 30,000 tons) had passed us, going in the opposite direction. The storm had carried away her lifeboats and most other detachable items above-decks. After another day, mother was able to attend for meals, but my father and I, though we made several attempts, were unable to get up the stairs to the dining room as the smells from the galley, drifting upwards, proved more than our stomachs could stand. We were finally able to get up on deck only a day or two out of port. The journey had taken thirteen days, as we slowly steamed in to the Boston (Mass) harbor.

There seemed to be endless disembarkation formalities – passport examinations, medical examinations and so on – before we were at last permitted to “set foot on the *Brave New World*”. We were met by some friends of mother’s, who had emigrated to the USA several years before, and we were guests at their home in Lynn (near Boston) for a fortnight before continuing our journey to Ohio where Uncle Arthur lived. This fortnight is not memorable for me except for a gentleman who owned the corner drugstore to which I was one day dispatched to buy ice cream for lunch. He had apparently never come across an English boy before and was vastly diverted by me. He seemed to find my every spoken word a riot, and although I was vaguely flattered at being such an instant success, I wasn’t too sure that being laughed at was entirely complimentary.

We arrived at the railway station in Akron where we were met by Uncle Arthur, who thence conducted us to his home at 347 Union Place. There we met again his wife (my Aunt Ethel) and their son Richard, who was then about three years of age and who, so far as I know, I had not seen before. We lived with them from then (Sept) to the following summer, and before long I was enrolled at a nearby school.

School was much happier for me there than it had been in England, and I have no recollections of being bullied or indeed of any incidents taking place which may have made me feel otherwise. There was, as I afterwards learned when leaving High School, some uncertainty about what American “grade” corresponded with which English “Standard” and due to this I was evidently put in a grade too low and I finally found when graduating from High School in 1931 that the others in my class were, almost all, a year younger than myself. Probably, this error would have been discovered had I remained at the same school throughout, but in fact at the start of the next scholastic year we were in Texas and the miscalculation went undetected.

There are a few memories remaining of this period which makes me wonder by what luck I survived it. We (which includes a friend or two I made who lived nearby) used to walk along the main railway line of the Baltimore and Ohio railway, for about a mile, to some disused gravel pits which had filled with water. As the trains thundered along we would step off the tracks and wave cheerfully to the engine driver who shook his fist at us as his engine pounded by, and then we would step back on the track and resume our walking. On reaching the gravel pits we would strip off all our clothes and wade into the icy water. None of us could swim and the water was very deep.

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Another equally hair-raising diversion we evolved was to climb over the railings of the road bridge crossing this railway line and sit on the supports underneath as the trains roared by on the tracks below. We would emerge thereafter choked with smoke and covered in soot but filled with a rare sense of adventure.

We also discovered that if we went to the local bakery at the end of the week and asked if they had any stale donuts they would give us, free, all we could carry away. One of my new friends had a tent which he had erected on a plot of spare ground behind his house (more about this spare ground later), and we decided that it would be an excellent idea if we stocked up with donuts, retired to this tent, and, with an adequate supply of cold water to wash them down, experimented to see how many donuts we could eat at a sitting. I cannot now remember what figure we achieved, but I do recall how ill it is possible to feel after such an exercise.

One of my friends (evidently an embryonic capitalist) one day propounded a scheme for making some money. The plan was a simple one; he would obtain some lemons and sugar from his house, we would "borrow" some ice from the ice-wagon which delivered ice for the domestic ice-boxes (before the days of refrigerators), and we would, having thus armed ourselves with iced lemonade and glasses – also borrowed from his home – go to the local park and tout for customers; and we did. The question of hygiene was, I fear, rather overlooked and it may have been this, together with our extreme youth, which made sales a trifle sluggish. We did, in fact, sell about two glasses of the stuff, and thereafter retired from business on the proceeds.

The most frightening and alarming experience in which I was at this time involved was in connection with the "spare ground" mentioned earlier. It was a sizeable tract and extended between the front of my uncle's house and those of his neighbors, and the rear of the houses which fronted the main road. At one end stood a large garage which housed several private cars. This garage and all the houses were, as is common practice in America, made of wood.

One day at someone's suggestion we three or four friends decided that it would be an excellent idea to light a fire in the center of this patch, and accordingly we cleared a small area free of the long, tinder-dry grass which otherwise covered the whole of it. A match was provided and before long we had a fire burning briskly; too briskly in fact, for the surrounding dry grass caught fire too. As matters began to get out of hand all the boys ran off in fright except for one other boy and myself – and soon he fled. For a little while I tried, ineffectually, to stamp out the burning grass, but it was hopeless on my own and thus, last of all, I also ran off to hide in terror behind my uncle's house, while the fire swept across the field. Someone in the surrounding houses saw the danger and called the fire brigade; I was later told that three engines arrived, but they were too late to stop the fire from spreading to the garage and burning out two vehicles which were inside it. For several days thereafter I lived in constant dread of a visit from the police, but none came and gradually the fright drifted from my mind.

There followed these incidents a winter with weather of the most intense cold we had ever experienced, with temperatures falling to below minus ten degrees Fahrenheit. My

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father, who had by this time started work at the BF Goodrich Co., continued to dress in a manner more befitting an English than an American winter, and paid for it by being struck down by a severe chill followed by influenza, and was away from his work for more than a month in consequence.

When Spring came he and mother began to wonder where we should live to be on our own, since we did not wish to burden Uncle Arthur's hospitality interminably, and after looking at various places settled on a furnished bungalow in a semi-rural location at Goodyear Heights, on the other side of town. By the time all was settled and we actually moved there school was over for the summer.

It was a pleasant summer for me, since mother was free to spend her time with me for much of the day, and each afternoon we would go for a walk somewhere. There was one particular spot which we both liked and on which grew a large oak tree. This we named "Our Tree" and on at least one day a week we would buy a carton of ice cream and go there to eat it. Behind the bungalow was an expanse of swampy, marshy ground out of which grew a small jungle of stunted trees. It required careful intrepidity to find one's way through and about this place and I spent many happy hours exploring it on my own. There lived in this swamp the largest dragonflies I have ever seen anywhere.

During this period, and through an introduction by Uncle Arthur and Aunt Ethel, my parents came to know a Mr. and Mrs. Verne Read. The Reads, like my Uncle Arthur, were Theosophists, and Verne and his brother owned the Read-Benzol Company, a large dry-cleaning firm in Akron. The Reads had been down to the Rio Grande Valley in South West Texas a year or two before and had there bought a tract of land which they were anxious to have husbanded. In the course of my father acquiring this information and remembering how he had suffered in the previous winter it was suggested to him that he might be just the man to perform this function and after considering the matter he agreed. We left for Texas in the September and as I have already written this Texan experience elsewhere, I will not here repeat it. That tale was, as you know, written in 1958 while I was away from work for three months, due to my having contracted infective hepatitis. I am aware that it is not a well written tale – and indeed this one may be little better told – but it does cover the period of the next three years of my life's story and so can be referred to in conjunction with this narrative to complete the story. It is presently stored in my desk with the other furniture in Bath, but if the occasion arises and I ever complete this task here undertaken I will file the both together for your future amusement – or boredom.

When we drove away from the farm leaving Rover sitting in the roadway we went no farther that day than to our nearest village, Rio Hondo, about four miles distant. It was already late in the day, as my father had known it would be, and he had arranged for us to erect our tent on this first night on the back lawn of a friend's house there. We managed this task eventually and spent an uneventful night there, continuing on our way early the next day.

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We traveled northward up through the Valley and I cannot at this time remember exactly where we camped on every occasion and shall thus have to content myself with recording such events and places as now remain in my memory.

We went, for instance, through the Texas oilfields and the sight of so many derricks rising from the ground so close to each other is quite a sight.

The first stop we made of any duration was at Corpus Christi on the Gulf of Mexico, where we booked a beach cabin for three or four days. The sea was warm and inviting and I was very keen to get into it, and wasted no time doing so – which was a mistake. Everyone, of course, gets water in his ears if he puts his head under water, but for most people there are no after-effects once the water is shaken out again. Unfortunately this is not so with me, and already, through experience of swimming back in the Arroyo I had discovered to my acute discomfort that if I got water in my ears within a couple of days thereafter the glands in my neck would begin to swell and before long I looked as though either I had mumps or was beginning to change into a hamster. Alas, this occasion was no different from any other and within the next two days I paid the penalty for failing to take time enough to plug my ears with cotton wool before going in the sea. Incidentally, the sea there was alive with jellyfish, which were then something of a novelty to me. I soon found that they had a painful sting and by the time I came out I was covered in red prickling blotches where we had made contact. That was my last swimming experience there.

One morning my father hired a pair of fishing rods and lines from the camp office and we repaired to a wooden road bridge spanning an inlet of the sea. We fished with some success for about an hour and had a string of fish in the water and secured by a string to the bridge. On a fancy my Dad crossed the bridge to try his luck off that side and I followed him; we left the string of fish where they were. Some time later I glanced back across the bridge at these fish and saw, bearing down on them rapidly, a large alligator garfish. These fish have a mouth and teeth not unlike an alligator and have a respectable appetite, according to their size. This one, I could see, was intent on a quick and satisfying meal and if we didn't manage to get there first would have all our catch in one mouthful. At that critical time two or three cars came across the bridge and by the time we were able to cross there was nothing left but the string, dangling empty. Thus fishing ended for the day.

From Corpus Christi we made our way across river and lake (Lake Charles is quite large and we crossed it on a ferry) and eventually found ourselves traveling down the Mississippi towards New Orleans. For mile after mile as we traveled south the levee grew higher and higher. We stopped at one point to climb it and were quite breathless after doing so. At that point it stood some 75 feet or more above the road and it was an awesome thought as we stood atop it envisaging the river as it must be at flood time. The houses on the one side were far below and the river on the other side was much lower and farther away still. The river itself was very wide, but later, as we crossed it by ferry my father had time to remove, repair and replace a flat tire before we reached the further shore. We stayed three days in New Orleans. It is a quaint old town, with a French flavor but I do not remember very much about it.

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From New Orleans we set out for Birmingham, Alabama, but before arriving there had an interesting experience late one evening. We had, in fact, become completely lost and to make things additionally unhappy for us it was pouring with rain. We were traveling along some small country lane, traveling from nowhere to nowhere when our old Dodge, apparently also fed up with it all decided to stop. There was no other vehicle and no house in sight and we had passed none of either for some time, so Dad got out to see whether he could, by torchlight, discover what was amiss with the engine. Although no mechanic, he was soon able to see that the trouble was probably due to the electrical system being drenched in water splashed up from the road as we had traveled along. As rain continued to fall heavily there was nothing he could do except either to wait for it to stop – which it showed of sign of doing – or until help in some form eventually arrived.

After what seemed hours a faint light appeared ahead and as it drew nearer we could see it was a car approaching. As it came to us, finally, it stopped and a cheerful voice from inside it asked Dad if we were in trouble. Dad assured him we were and our benefactor (for such he proved to be) said that he was taking home a little girl who had been a guest at his own daughter's birthday party and that after doing so he would return and help us. Some half-hour or so later he returned and as it was still raining said he would tow us to his home, where we could spend the night. His car was only an old Ford but it made light work of towing us to our friend's farmhouse some two or three miles distant. By the time we arrived it was rather late, but our host insisted that his wife should cook us a huge meal of bacon and eggs – which she willingly did – and he roused all his children (who were all asleep and of whom there were about five) to see us and they sat around and watched us solemnly as we ate.

In the morning the car had dried out and was soon running again. We were ready to go, but our host and his wife were very reluctant for us to do so. We had to inspect his farm and tobacco sheds, where the large leaves hung drying, and he presented us with two large sacks of apples which, for shortage of room, we had to stow one on each side of the car wedged between fender and bonnet. They would accept no payment whatever for their kindness and repeated that they would be only too glad if we would stay another day or two as they seldom had company and had never before met any "foreigners". But we had to get on our way, so eventually we managed to do so though not without much gratitude for their kindnesses. Our friend said his name was Flat. "You'll never forget that name", he said. "Just think of how I always am – flat broke – and you'll remember", and he grinned. What a pity there are not many more such good-hearted people in the world.

In Birmingham we stayed for a week with some distant relatives of Mother's. He was a bank manager and she was a snob, and thus a disappointment to Mother. However, the stay was – at least so far as I can recall personally – a pleasant one. We were taken to see the city sights, which included a trip to the top of a large hill from which one could see the whole busy, bustling city spread below. It was quite a picture at night. I remember going into the colored section of the town and being very surprised to find that there were no white people to be seen; all the shops and banks were staffed by negroes and for negroes, and I had never seen so many of them before.

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From Birmingham we journeyed north and on one occasion found ourselves in a camp full of refugees from a Florida hurricane which had devastated the southern part of that state a few days before. One of those to whom we talked was quite alone; he had lost his wife and child and his brother and his wife in the storm. Apparently as the storm developed he had taken his wife and child to the one brick and concrete building in the town, where he thought they would be safe. Leaving them there, he had gone back to look for his brother and his wife, but found their house demolished and flooded. Realizing that with the fury of the storm mounting he could not hunt for them further he fought his way back to the building where he had left his wife and child. In his absence this had collapsed, burying his loved ones, along with others, in the debris. The following day their bodies were recovered, but he had been unable to find any trace of his brother and his wife. His own home had been completely wrecked too and he had simply fled the scene and was going, anywhere, away from it.

We carried on our own journey north, camping out each night on the way. Our tent was a lean-to, folded over the car, and we slept on camp beds. We had to cook over a wood fire, so that the whole affair was primitive and time-consuming, but we managed.

Our next stop, for a few days, was at Noblesville, Indiana, where we were guests of Mr. Baker, who owned and wintered on the farm next to ours in Texas. We were shown around his gravel pits and enjoyed our short respite from camping.

Finally, some three months after we had left Rio Hondo we arrived at Uncle Arthur and Aunt Ethel's home on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Cuyahoga Falls (about four miles from Akron) and once again they were good enough to accommodate us. I was entered for school at Broad Street School and my father set about looking for a job.

Work at that time seemed hard to come by and my father continued his search unsuccessfully during the whole of that winter. We lived happily enough, apart from that, and I found school quite pleasant. Being now in my fourteenth year I was duly promoted to High School Status at the end of my first term and began at Cuyahoga Falls High School the following term. You will understand that, due to my life having been so disoriented up to this point there had never been any chance for me to make any friends, so that already I was beginning to be rather solitary and lonely although at the time I of course didn't realize it, never having known anything else.

As winter passed into Spring and still no work came along for my Dad, things became increasingly difficult. I have no idea what financial arrangement existed between Dad and Uncle Arthur and there was never any friction between them, but obviously the situation could not continue indefinitely, and it was changed in a rather unusual manner.

Uncle Arthur's neighbor, Archie Season had his elderly father and unmarried sister living on a farm out in the country on the way to Cleveland. The sister was a semi-invalid and was finding maintaining the large house and all that entailed, together with looking after her father, a strain which it was becoming increasingly hard to bear. Archie suggested that if we would take on this task we could live there rent-free, and no doubt this included our board too. Accordingly, since this seemed a temporary solution to our

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difficulties, Mother and Dad accepted – and once again I changed schools, this time to Stow High School.

We passed the summer there in some ways pleasantly and in others not so pleasantly. I recall that desperation drove Dad to seek what then seemed to me humiliating ways of making a little money; now they do not seem so, but I was becoming very self-conscious at that time. One of these methods was to pick daffodils (in which the farm abounded) and, after bunching them, take them up to the main road and stand by the roadside offering them for sale to passing motorists. We also found lots of blackberries and Dad and I took them to various shops in town to try to persuade them to buy. Neither of these projects was very successful and I was relieved when further attempts at salesmanship were abandoned. We also picked wild strawberries (of which there was a plenitude) on the railway bank, but these we ourselves ate.

Later that summer Dad finally got a job, once more at BF Goodrich Rubber Company, but this time packing boots and tires on the night shift. I went to school, some five or six miles away, by school bus, and I recall that during this period I went to a radio show in Akron and saw an amateur radio station there, with which I was greatly enthralled.

As my Dad continued at work he was transferred from night to day work, and very soon was off manual and back to clerical work. This carried with it an improvement in salary and very soon we moved back to Cuyahoga Falls. This time we took rooms in a large detached house on Grant Street, and I returned to school at Falls High. The following March, when I was fourteen, my half-sister Madge was born.

The house in which we now lived was a large one, standing in its own grounds, and it was my job to cut the very large lawns at the front and sides of the house – a job which occupied some hours. There were also several large trees in the grounds, and by now I had developed a keen interest in amateur radio and one of these trees proved a useful support for an aerial which I presently attached to it. I had no license, of course, but this did not – I ought to be ashamed to say – deter me from “borrowing” a call sign and going on the air for the first time. With the aid of Grant Mackinson (W8DBC) and Mr. Dipple (W8VO) both of whom lived in Cuyahoga Falls, I managed to build a one tube receiver and a one tube transmitter, and with the further aid of Bob Hale (W8EZ) I got them into working order. The power used was infinitesimal, but I managed one or two contacts with stations in Akron and one in Cleveland, to my great delight.

School work I did not find very difficult, so that I managed without doing any homework. We had two “free study” periods each day and these were adequate for me to make such preparation as was necessary. I did not make a lot of friends, either then or ever, at school – my only real associates were James Limber (whose father was a lawyer), Joe Vinczellar (whose father was a baker and who had immigrated from Hungary some years earlier and who could not speak English), Paul Bennett, whose father was an executive and James Ashworth, whose father owned a small engineering works. I have lost contact with all of them, but know that Jim married young and went into the police force, Joe went on to become a doctor, Jim Ashworth went into his father’s works, developed chest trouble and moved West, and Paul, always rather lugubrious, committed suicide in his thirties.



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About this time I began to develop a romantic interest in girls, but never had the courage to approach any directly. There were one or two during the course of my High School days to whom I was much attracted, and to whom I dared to write notes – but I was unable to progress beyond that point. I would think of them when I was in bed at night and spin impossible dreams of how it would all be; but it never was.

As our financial condition improved, it was decided that we would move into a house of our own and thus we came to move across town to 347 Northland Avenue. There was at that time only one High School in the town, so for a change I was unaffected by the move. By now I was seventeen years of age and my interest in radio grew apace. I had managed to build a larger transmitter, and was now having contacts over two to three hundred miles and decided that it was time to legalize my operations, though this did not at first prove easy. As my father had not become a naturalized citizen I was unable to obtain a station license, though this did not preclude me from applying for an operator's license. Accordingly I sat for, and passed this latter exam and managed to get around the station license difficulty by persuading an old friend of my father's (Archie Wood) to take out a license at our address. Officially, the station was thus his, though in fact he never saw it, and at last I was able in 1930 to go on the air openly and correctly as W8COD. As soon as school was over for the day I would rush home and go on the air, and had to be prized from the apparatus to eat meals and go to bed. It became an all-absorbing hobby and filled my life pretty thoroughly for the next two years.

For a time, life was fairly pleasant and uneventful; my Dad bought a new car – an Overland – and we made infrequent trips out in it. He never really enjoyed driving and tried to persuade me to learn. I said I would if he would let me have the car for my own use occasionally, but this he refused, so I refused to learn to drive – which was rather gratuitously nasty of me, I suppose.

Just as we were settling down to this period of comparative affluence, and I could – apparently – see my way clear to the end of High School, the 1929 Wall Street Crash began to show its full effects. People were being dismissed from their employment in a wholesale manner, factories were going bankrupt or retrenching, and bread lines began to form as things worsened. The BF Goodrich Company, where Dad worked, was affected too, of course, and as part of their combative policy merged their footwear department with that of the Hard Rubber Company in Massachusetts. This caused the closure of the footwear department in Akron, where my father worked, and once again he found himself out of work. I had worked at Goodrich during my three month summer vacation the summer before and they had tried to persuade me to stay on and forget about my graduation, but I had refused, since it had been drummed into us at school that a graduation diploma would, all our adult life, provide us with the key to success.

Thus, here we were again in financial trouble, and with virtually no hope in sight that my father would be able to get another job. Of course he tried, but although people were still talking about prosperity being "just around the corner", they were showing no confidence in it by refusing to be adventurous enough to produce goods for sale. After

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a few weeks of this my father became very disheartened and worried to see his small capital draining away, for there was no unemployment insurance and thus we had no income at all.

At this time – once again – Uncle Arthur came to our rescue. He, Aunt Ethel and Richard had previously returned to England, were Uncle Arthur now had a job with the British Molded Hose Rubber Company at Watford, Herts. He wrote Dad to the effect that if he would return to England he could be fairly certain of obtaining employment at Watford. Dad quickly took stock of our position and decided that he would sell up our home as soon as possible. However, it was necessary that he should go back to England first to secure the job, and so it happened that he went and Mother and I lived on our own for several months. Dad got his job and after a while Mother, with the aid of my friend Jim Limber's father sold the furniture and she went to stay with some friends named Varley, at Port Washington, Long Island, New York. I went to live with Reads, who now lived at Stow, and continued to journey back and forth from there each day to school in Cuyahoga Falls. This was in the autumn of 1930, and I was due to graduate in summer 1931.

In parenthesis, I should say that two summers previously, I too had been to Port Washington on holiday. Mother went by train and Dad, Uncle Arthur and I went in Archie Wood's car. We went via Niagara Falls, where we had a good look at that magnificent sight, and stayed overnight in Buffalo. From there we went across country and traveled down to New York via the Storm King Highway, which follows the Hudson River through the Catskill Mountains. While we were there we visited New York City and "did" all the usual things – walked down Broadway to Times Square, visited Grant's Tomb on Riverside Drive, walked down Wall Street and finally went across to Bedford Island and up to the Statue of Liberty. There is a lift up the plinth to the base of the statue and from there one climbs a circular staircase, finally emerging into her crown. There is room for about five people at a time to stand on the platform in the crown, and from here, through the windows which are the "jewels" in the crown, one gets a magnificent view of New York harbor. While we were up there the airship Shenandoah came sailing past. It is well worth climbing this statue if ever you are in New York.

Dad's job at Watford lasted only a few months, as he was dismissed for union activity. There was no trade union representation at the factory and he had been trying to organize some. He had always been – and was always, to the end of his life, a staunch Socialist, of the Keir Hardie school. I remember once going with him to Nelson Cricket ground to sell copies of the "Daily Herald", which, before being taken over by Odhams Press, was the outspoken organ of the Labor Party – which was then in its infancy. After his dismissal at Watford, Dad traveled north to take up residence with his mother and father, who were by then living in Regent Street. My mother soon followed from Port Washington, and it was during this period that my grandmother died.

I continued on at High School, and living with the Reads, and so reached my eighteenth birthday. Graduation was due to take place early that year, on the grounds of economy, so that school could close a month earlier than usual. So, in May 1931, I along with some 120 other classmates, duly graduated. I was 7<sup>th</sup> – not dizzy heights, but reasonably good. School had been a fairly happy period at Cuyahoga Falls and in some

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ways I was sorry to see it come to an end. I went to Baldwin Wallace College, at Berea, to sit for their university scholarship exam; unfortunately there was only one scholarship, and I came second.

For one season at school, I had been employed by the local Akron evening newspaper (Beacon Journal) to report the High School basketball games, and had quite enjoyed it, and the money it provided, so that, among other things, I tried to see if, now that I had left school they could offer any more permanent employment, but they could not.

There followed a period of anti-climax for me. The graduation diploma had been our aim for four years, and, as I have already said, this was cited constantly at assembly as being the key to the future. Now, alas, I could find no door which it would fit, and for my own experience and that of others whom I knew, the chance of finding a job was slim indeed. Years later, I was told that Reads had offered to my father that they would pay for me through college to train as an industrial chemist (I was interested in and quite good at chemistry), and that I could replay them when I was working, but my father refused the offer. Probably he did not wish to be further indebted to them and also, if he were to accept the offer, he would not see me again for some years – and, possibly, even, not at all.

Instead, he sent me a boat ticket to return home, and though I had no wish to return to England, I was left with no choice. I said goodbye to my various friends, and in the course of doing so nearly failed to leave America after all. One of my friends, who had a car, said he would take me around to see my other friends and we hopefully set off one evening to do so. We were following another car and my friend decided to overtake it, and pulled out to do so. As we drew abreast of this vehicle we saw one coming from the other direction approaching rapidly. My friend decided to drop back into his original position, behind the vehicle we were trying to overtake. Unfortunately, the driver of this vehicle, seeing we could not pass in time, also slowed to allow us to go through, so that, as it happened, the position of our two vehicles relative to each other remained unchanged. Not so, of course, with the oncoming vehicle, who was now much nearer. My driver decided to pull across the front of this vehicle to avoid involving both of these other cars, and this he did. We careered along the verge of the road until we hit the first telephone pole, and thereafter turned over on our side and rolled down the road banking towards a lake at the foot of it. We stopped before arriving at the water, but I and my co-passenger were badly shaken, and our poor driver had instinctively put his arm through the window to brace himself as the car turned over and the car roof had crushed and broken it. He was still in hospital when I left, and I visited him once or twice before leaving.

The trip back to England was by the SS Doric, a ship of some 20,000-odd tons and a much more comfortable one than the Winfriedian had been. She sailed from Montreal, so that there was a rather long train journey first to be made. I boarded the train one evening, and was seen off by the Reads. Pullman accommodation was reserved for the night, and I arrived at Montreal the following afternoon. For some reason we were not allowed aboard until the evening; probably because the ship was still loading, so there were several hours to "kill". I dared not go off the docks as one or two people warned me that there were some very rough characters about and generally filled me with such

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nameless dread that I hung around almost afraid to move until, finally, we were allowed aboard.

The sail up the St. Lawrence River was a most enjoyable one, for the river is quite large, with towns and villages dotted along its banks. We arrived at Quebec in the afternoon and were allowed an hour ashore. I went ashore with two of my cabin-mates (there were four of us in the cabin), but didn't dare venture far in case the Doric went on without us. Actually two were left behind and had to hire a motor boat to catch us up and had to climb aboard up a rope ladder thrown over the side to get back aboard again. Quebec was a pleasant, very odd-looking town, built around the hill, so that each street seemed almost a house-height above the one below it.

As we left the St. Lawrence and went into the Bering Straits the air became steadily colder, and it was obvious to most of us that we were near ice. Later, I was told that we were the first ship through the Straits that summer, and it was then July. A permanent lookout was stationed in the crow's-nest for a day and we saw one or two icebergs in the distance, sparkling like jewels in the sun. We also saw a whale spouting and were, as is usual, followed by a school of dolphins. The weather was not too bad, being rough for only about 24 hours of the whole trip. Many people were sick, but this time I missed a couple of meals, but was relatively unaffected and the journey seemed quickly and uneventfully over.

My father and grandfather were awaiting me at Liverpool, and my Dad was feeling justifiably annoyed because I had not bothered to write to tell him that I had received the ticket and would come as arranged. This put him to the inconvenience of asking the steamship company to check with their Montreal office to see whether I was on the ship. However, he was so glad to see me again that his anger soon subsided, and we were soon back in Nelson, to be greeted by Mother. We continued to live in this house (No. 67) for about a year, until we obtained the council house at 114 Regent Street, where Mother still lives. Number 67 was an old stone terraced house, two up and two down with no bathroom and the WC in the back yard. It wasn't easy for us all to fit into such a small house, but three of us, at least, had received a good initiation in Texas.

My father was at this time working as a supervisor for a local general outfitters and he appointed agents in the various towns nearby to run "cubs" for him. He contacted these agents to collect the monies they had collected from customers and supplied them with whatever goods were ordered. Mother had enough to do to look after the five of us, particularly as grandfather was now on pension and thus at home much of the time.

After looking around in vain to find some job which I could do, Dad decided that it would be an excellent thing for me to get into the Civil Service if I could. I had no ideas about this at all, since I was still feeling very much out of my element after being so long away from England, and still, I suppose, a bit unhappy and resentful at having been forced to come back. Thus, since I had no better ideas, it was decided I should try for the Customs and Excise, for which a competitive entrance examination was to be held in Leeds the following Spring. In the meantime I was enrolled for a correspondence course designed to prime me for this, and I conscientiously worked at this each day during the week, though I found it rather dull on my own.

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During this period I became friendly with Jack Edmundson, Clifford Walker and Wilf Pope, boys about my own age. How I met them I don't know, but probably through Wilf, whose widowed mother had a baker's shop almost across the road from where we lived. Anyway, these three were already firm friends, and I simply made up the fourth. We played cricket together on the Kew nearby, went for walks at weekends, to the pictures (when we had any money) and generally enjoyed each other's company. They were good friends to me for several years until fate and the changes "growing up" brought separated us. For a time I became very enamored of Wilf's older sister Hilda; she was then about 23 and a very nice, though serious-minded girl. She came to view our association with ultimate marriage as a prospect, which was much ahead of my own emotional state, so that I finally became frightened off when she suggested I ought to take her home and introduce her to my parents and that ended the matter. She subsequently married and tragically, died while giving birth to her first child.

In addition to studying for the examination, I made a small amount of money by installing and servicing radio sets for a gramophone dealer, who had recently been forced into the trade by the slump in gramophones and boom in radio. He had the luck or foresight to become an appointed Murphy dealer (at that time only one Murphy dealer per town was allowed by Frank Murphy) and as the manufacturing capacity of Murphy Radio was 100 sets per day and they were well ahead of all rivals in the production of quality radio at a reasonable price the demand for sets was much greater than the supply so Mr. Tom Croasdale was a happy man. Later he arranged for me to go on a short servicing course at Murphy's at Welwyn Garden City. The course was quite interesting, and the hospitality at Guessens Court very good. During the fortnight I had the pleasure to meet Frank Murphy and we had a pleasant chat.

During this time I became reacquainted with Minnie Bland, who was the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bland. Mr. Bland was a long-standing friend of my father's and had been a conscientious objector during the war and had, like Dad, suffered a long term of imprisonment for his beliefs. Minnie was about my own age, and a very bright, friendly and intelligent girl of whom more – much more, later.

Spring eventually gave way to winter and before long I found myself on the two-day examination in Leeds. It was something of an ordeal, and though I had worked diligently on the correspondence course I was not too hopeful that my efforts would prove successful as I was in competition with English grammar school types and the examination had been designed for their kind of background and not for mine. It later transpired that some 1,200 candidates sat for 120 vacancies, and I came around 350; not a total disgrace, but well out of any chance of entering the Civil Service.

By a strange circumstance at about this time my own part-time employer and my Dad's fulltime one decided to join forces and set up a radio shop together; this would give them a finger in the new and profitable radio pie and at the same time to continue in their own business as before the radio boom. This new business came into being and I was appointed the service engineer at a wage of 35 shillings per week – my first real job.

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For a time I was reasonably happy, although with 30 shillings being given to my parents, leaving me with the odd five shillings pocket money, I found this budget rather stringent, especially when I began to take a more active interest in girls. As the shop began to prosper the manager employed a second service man who offered to work for 15 shillings per week – an offer which was duly accepted but which did not endear the new man to me. He was a plausible, smooth-talking character with taking ways and he managed to augment his modest income by sundry “illicit deals” which he made on the side. He had lots of charm though, and to some extent I fell under his spell. Also he was a passable serviceman, and we shared the work although officially I was “head” serviceman.

It was during this time that I met “Paddy” Fairey, who was a telephone operator at the Nelson exchange. She was about 25 and auburn haired and very attractive. She was my exaltation and despair for over a year. There were a few other girls whom I met and with whom I entered into close personal relationships at this time, but I will not be so tedious as to go into details since these could be of not much interest to anyone except myself.

After about a year at Radio Services, I began to feel that it might be a good idea if I had a change of employer since there seemed little chance either for me to progress to a better job or to obtain more wages where I was. It so happened that the then manager of Radio Service decided to leave and set up a Nelson depot for a Bury firm of radio dealers, and he offered me more money and better opportunity if I would go with him to this new branch. I asked Dad what he thought about it, and this Mr. Cohen came along and discussed it with him too. Dad said that if the offer were as good as it sounded and I wished to accept it, I should – and I did.

The new branch was a very modest enterprise, I soon discovered, and its premises were on the first floor above another shop and were entered from the back street. The public thus had no access to the place and it was merely used as a base for the storage and servicing of sets and by the small number of salesmen employed on “commission only” basis as a place where they could make their cup of tea and discuss their successes and otherwise. My own workbench was small and ill equipped and it was not long before I realized that it had been a mistake for me to go there. Occasionally, I dropped in at Radio Services to have a chat with my old associates there and very soon I was persuaded to return to them. Mr. Cohen’s new branch closed after a few months, but also, alas, so did Radio Services the following year. From a promising beginning, somehow things steadily deteriorated, not helped by a succession of managers, each with their own – usually costly – ideas of how the business should be run. Also, by this time unemployment was beginning to rise, trade to slacken and money altogether becoming increasingly tight.

After the collapse of Radio Services I was able to secure a job with Viking Ltd., at their Blackburn depot. This firm had vacuum cleaners and radio sets made under its name by subcontractors and sold direct to the public by canvassing. Thus, like Cohen’s principals, they had only an office and storage and servicing sites – no shops. I had to have a vehicle to travel back and forth to work and for use in attending servicing calls and after buying (with financial help) a large but expensive-to-run Morris, finally settled

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on a 1927 Austin 7 tourer. I was never happy in this job, mainly I think because I knew that the salesmen were pushing sets on to people who were obviously unable to afford the repayments and the depot manager was conniving at this practice in order to bolster up his sales record. The manager and I had several minor clashes and finally he told me I was no longer required on "advice from Head Office". I knew that this had been his doing and when I pressed him on the matter he eventually admitted it; this gave me the pleasure of telling him what I felt about him and his underhand methods and we parted company.

There followed a period which was extremely unhappy; I had to sell the car and "sign on" at the Labor Exchange. At first it seemed to me that I would surely not be out of work for long, but week followed week and no work came. I tried advertising for freelance radio servicing, and though one or two things came up there was never much to hand and I became very conscious, not only of being a financial liability my parents could ill afford, but of a feeling of uselessness, hopelessness and despair of the future that only those with experience of long term unemployment will understand. I went for long walks to pass the time away and became so desperate that I wrote to the Navy and received a travel warrant to attend for a medical examination in Manchester, but had second thoughts and sent it back unused.

Eventually, and again by chance, my Dad came across a letter in the Manchester Guardian referring to a voluntary "unemployment camp" which had been started by two London doctors in conjunction with the Woodcroft chivalry movement, attached to the Cooperative Wholesale Society. The camp was situated at Godshill, near Fordingbridge, Hampshire, on the banks of the River Avon.

At that time, during the days of the iniquitous "means test", the amount of "dole" one could draw after normal benefit had been exhausted through prolonged unemployment was determined by the overall income of the family. My father was earning then something like 45 shillings per week, and the 10 shillings per week Old Age Pension which Grandad enjoyed was also taken into account when the question arose of whether I could obtain "transitional benefit" once my ordinary benefit was exhausted. Apparently, had my father's wages been 40 shillings instead of 45 I would have been entitled to draw 12 shillings per week, but as things were I was unable to obtain anything. This knowledge – that I was now totally dependent on my father was a spur to me to apply for admission to the Gyth Fyrd Camp.

As a result of the letter which I wrote to the address stated in the "Guardian" letter, I was invited to attend for an interview at Toynbee Hall, Edmonton regarding my possible admission. The interview turned out to be very pleasant; it was not much more than a formality and I was accepted. That night I stayed at the home of one of the officials, and the following morning he put me on the bus to Fordingbridge where I was met by one of the camp members.

It was a walk of approximately a mile and a half along the road to Godshill and then through the woods to the camp. The camp had at that time approximately 25 inhabitants and most of them were in a similar state to myself, although there were two

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university students there on the usual summer holiday – included, so I suppose, as a kind of intellectual leaven to the rest of us.

The camp consisted of two huts used as dormitories, another as an office and a fourth as combined kitchen and dining hall – if one can dignify a rectangular framework of poles, covered by Hessian, open all along one side and furnished with trestle tables, as a dining hall? The dormitory huts were similarly constructed, except of course that they were enclosed on all sides. Inside these latter huts were upper and lower bunks, three on each side, with one upper and one lower at the end opposite the entrance door.

Camp duties were operated on a rota system over a weekly period, so that one week one found oneself on kitchen duties, on another on garden duties and on yet another on general camp duties and so on. These various duties, with the exception of the kitchen one, usually ceased at midday, so that from then on one was free to pursue whatever diversions one wished – and could afford.

There were, of course, few things one could do in the afternoons – walking, swimming or attending a class in Esperanto run by one of the students were the possible alternatives, except for the one highlight of the week when each Friday, we went to the Labor Exchange in Fordingbridge to draw the “transitional benefit”. Of the 12 shilling benefit we were allowed to keep 2 shillings for our personal use, the other 10 being pooled to provide the necessary resources to run the camp. On this affluent day each week four of us would repair to a café to share a civilized pot of tea and enjoy a cake each. Thereafter we were able, as a concession, to enter the cinema at half price. You can imagine how much we looked forward to this day each week.

Life at the camp was not particularly eventful except on one occasion when I nearly drowned in the river in an attempt to teach one of the other chaps how to swim. He got into difficulties and in his panic grabbed me and dragged me down with him. Somehow I managed to get both of us out but it was a bit frightening while it lasted.

The son of the man from whom the camp land was leased had a motor-carrier business and carried other people’s goods between Fordingbridge, Southampton and Ringwood. He was having some domestic trouble and was much in need of a holiday, so his father one day came to the camp to ask whether any of us had a current driving license – and if so whether any such a one of us would drive the lorry for a fortnight. It transpired that I was the only one who had a license in force so that I got the job. For the fortnight I had to move out of camp and sleep in a loft over the Folk-House as a center. Each morning we drove to Southampton – usually to the docks – after collecting items in Fordingbridge to be shipped away, and each evening we returned to Godshill via Ringwood where we deposited items collected at Southampton. I did not enjoy sleeping in the loft of the Folk-House as it was very large and lonely, but I found a pile of books up there and recall reading, amongst other things, Shaw’s “Man and Superman”. Alas, the money I earned during the fortnight did me no good since I did not have it for long. As we had nowhere safe in the camp where we could keep valuables, I put the money under my mattress, only to find some two days afterwards that it had gone. I was fairly certain which of my companions had stolen it, but of course I had no proof. So the only



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benefit I had as a result of the fortnight's work was the change from camp routine – and I suppose that was something worthwhile in itself.

One of the big drawbacks to being in the camp was that we were so cut off from the bigger world outside. We had no newspapers, and we received no visitors so that we were unaware of what was taking place in the world and worse, from our personal viewpoint, we despaired of ever being able to find work again. Luckily for me, my father was keeping a look-out for me and he was able to secure an interview for me with Ferranti's at Hollinwood, Lancs., with a view to my being employed as a "trouble shooter" in their radio production line. He sent me the fare for the bus ticket and I set off northward that October.

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At this point the narrative was discontinued, and it is now January 1968. When I first began this story, in September 1967, I had just returned to London from Cheshire (which will emerge in due course if this "epic" is ever finished) and was hopefully waiting for a job in the Civil Service to materialize – which it did, in October. Since then and until now I have been too preoccupied, with one thing and another, to continue with this story. It may well be that from now on I shall be unable to write very often; only time will tell, but if, as I presently hope, I may soon be in a flat of my own I may have more time than I think. I will still try to finish it, having begun it, even if it should become increasingly disjointed though being written in small quantities at infrequent intervals.

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The interview which took place at Ferranti's was not a very alarming or exhausting one, and I got the job. I was to learn later that several others were engaged at the same time; apparently the practice then was that the Company, enjoying a boom consequent upon the trade-filling given to the industry by the Radio Show in September, hired an extra number of workers whom they subsequently dismissed when trade began to decline again in the Spring. I went out and obtained lodgings with a very nice couple – whose name I remember was Garlick – in Failsworth, and there I lived until the following April, when all those of us who had been engaged the previous October were dismissed.

The job itself consisted in waiting attendance on the conveyer belt. Any radio set which refused to function properly when put to the final test before being packed was placed on this belt and it was the job of myself and five others to take them off as they came past us, diagnose the fault with the aid of our test instruments, and, having noted the fault and the replacement of faulty parts needed to repair the set (on a tag attached to the set), to replace it on the conveyer. With luck, and if our diagnosis had been correct, we should not see any particular set twice since when the part replacements had been made farther along the conveyer the set should function correctly on the second test and would then be packed and shipped away. Occasionally we got a really bad one which kept reappearing no matter what apparent fault we diagnosed, so that, after a while, one tried to look the other way when it came along on the belt!

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So the job came to an end, and once more I returned, out of work, to Nelson – with again no apparent prospects in sight.

It was now 1934; the year in which I attained the age of 21 although, under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that this event passed almost unnoticed.

The prospect of facing yet another period of unemployment and knowing the feeling of hopelessness this would engender was too terrible to contemplate. Casting around in my mind for some way out of this situation I suddenly thought of Uncle Arthur, who was at that time working in a fairly responsible job with the British Tire and Rubber Company (the British counterpart of BF Goodrich in the USA), at Burton-on-Trent, Staffs. On the impulse I wrote to him and asked him whether there was any sort of work at all to be had at the factory and telling him that I would be willing to do anything – including sweeping the floors, if necessary. It seems that he showed my letter to the factory foreman who, upon reading it, formed the view that anyone who wanted a job so desperately as that should have one, and he told Uncle Arthur that if I would go down to Burton he would see the Company employed me.

So in May I went down to Burton and Uncle Arthur and Aunt Ethel helped me to find lodgings. I duly started work, making rubber boots. The work was done on a "unit" system, consisting of a team of three girls and two men, and these five assembled the boots from the cutout parts so that they could go on to be cured in the ovens. Each unit had a certain number of boots of various kinds and sizes to make each day and there were approximately ten of these units in production. The quota of all the boots to be assembled daily was known as the "ticket" and the responsibility for this rested with Uncle Arthur.

For the next two and a half years I worked in this factory, changing my lodgings some three or four times for various reasons. The first lodgings provided adequate food, and I remained there for about two years, but my landlady, who was a widow (or so I thought, but I learned later that her husband had deserted her) became a little too possessive and I felt it was time to move on. During this period I played cricket for the factory's second eleven, and even finally achieved the honor of being promoted to opening batsman, though my abilities were very modest; I was a better fielder than anything else.

At weekends I frequently went out to Branston, a village some two miles outside Burton, to spend the time with Uncle Arthur, Aunt Ethel and Richard. The latter was at that time still at Grammar School. We traveled around considerably in the summer, as Uncle Arthur had a car, and we spent some memorable days at Stratford-on-Avon, Dovedale and once, even, all the way to Rhyl and back in a day. We also often went to Nelson. These were the happy times; I found life in the factory dull and unhealthy, and although promises were made to promote me nothing came of them. Not being of either a pushing or gregarious nature I began to feel rather lonely, unhappy and vaguely unwell and I was relieved when fate again took a hand in my affairs and forced another change.

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I happened to be back in Nelson for a weekend and was reading through a copy of "Peace News", the weekly paper of Dick Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union, when I noticed a small paragraph in it referring to the fact that the PPU was setting up a mobile film unit and were looking for a suitable person to operate it. Upon returning to Burton I wrote to PPU HQ in Regent Street, London and applied for the job. A few days later I received a friendly letter inviting me to travel up to see them, and this I did.

When I arrived at HQ my first impression was one of bewilderment, for everything seemed to be chaos. People were rushing about, full of infectious optimism, in and out of each other's offices, joyfully calling each other by their Christian names, and it was quite impossible to tell who was in charge of what or indeed whether anyone really knew! Eventually, I discovered that the person who had been delegated – or who, more likely had volunteered – for the film exhibiting responsibility was Nigel Spottiswoode, scion of the famous publishing family, and lately down from Cambridge.

He was a charming, if somewhat "fey" sort of person, with that kind of appeal which, I am sure, would have made most women want to mother him. He showed me the projector – a 16 millimeter sound-on-film RCA, and told me that the film I would be exhibiting was a German classic, "Kameradschaft" [*a 1931 film with English sub-title - description, courtesy of the Internet: A mine disaster in a French/German border town leads to an extraordinary display of worker solidarity. The Germans' whose economy has collapsed attempt to get jobs in a French mine. They are treated brutally by the French who carry bitter memories of the First World War. National prejudices melt away as the Germans dig furiously to save their seemingly doomed comrades trapped in a mine cave-in.*] and that the show would consist of this and a short preceding film in which Dick Sheppard spoke of the origins and aims of the PPU, and a brief closing speech by Stuart Morris asking that any of those present who agreed with us should sign the Pledge "I renounce war and will never support or sanction another", and join us in working for peace.

The salary I was to receive was three pounds per week, and hospitality with local PPU groups would be arranged for me wherever I went to give the show. The transport provided was an old Ford 8 saloon, and with considerable care plus brute force it was possible to get all the equipment except the screen stowed inside. The screen, which was in a case, had to be tied on the roof. I accepted the job, returned to Burton to give in my notice and thereafter traveled north to Nelson. A few days later I joined Nigel at Halifax where he gave our first show. The following day we went in to Harrogate and gave a show in the Winter Gardens under considerable technical difficulties. The next day Nigel left me and returned to London, and as there were no shows booked until four days later I went back to Nelson and familiarized myself with the equipment by giving repeated showings in the living room.

From then on, throughout that winter, I traveled back and forth and up and down the country giving shows in all sorts of places and under all kinds of conditions. To go into detail would require pages of writing – and all of it probably of no more than passing interest to anyone except myself. Suffice it to say that a very considerable amount of traveling was involved, since bookings were never made in any sort of order to minimize this and were merely taken as they were received. This resulted in one hilarious week

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when I traveled from Epsom to Burnley, thence to Mountain Ash, Glamorgan, Runcorn, Cheshire, and finally back to Carshalton in Surrey. I was involved in one accident, just north of Bedford, which resulted in the vehicle being off the road for a week whilst undergoing repairs amounting to a total cost of some fifty pounds. Luckily no one was injured.

When Spring and Summer came it would not have been a practicable idea to continue with film shows, and so it was decided to buy a new Morris ten hundredweight van and equip it with PA equipment, using it to hold outdoor public meetings. At the time of the changeover I was in Carlisle and Nigel drove the new van and equipment up there to meet me. There was some small mechanical trouble with the new van due to the gearbox being faulty but this was soon put right and the publicity tour began. The PA equipment was capable of a considerable output and we had no difficulty in attracting crowds.

Meetings were held all over the country, in towns and villages, with audiences varying in size from a handful to several hundreds. Most of these audiences were interested and well behaved, and we had no rowdiness at any of them.

As remarked a paragraph or two ago, this period of approximately two years duration was full of incident, but I now realize that if ever I am to finish this narrative at all it will be necessary to dispense with a lot of such detail. As one moves in time nearer to the present one can remember more and more, and as at the time reached at this period in the story I was only 23 years of age and I am, at the time of writing, now 55, it is evident that either some economy of writing will have to be made or I shall tire of the task and abandon it.

So to continue; from the time from 1937 until the start of the war in September 1939 I drove the van, winter and summer, up and down the country, stopping only when there were no bookings for it, which was seldom. On occasion I was six or seven weeks at a time on the road each day, but occasionally there was a lull and I then would help out at Head Office (Regent Street) in any way possible, and would put up at a bed-and-breakfast place in Guilford Street, Bloomsbury.

During this period, too, I was married; in June 1939 I married Minnie Bland. I had known Minnie before we went to America, as our families had always been friendly, and I had been pleased to meet her again on my return and to find that by then she had grown into an attractive, intelligent and vivacious young woman. Off and on during the time that I have described since my return from the USA I had been out with Minnie. I had also been interested in a few other girls, of course, and had been through a few highly emotional experiences with some of them, but somehow these passed and, again, details of these can hardly be of interest to anyone except myself and the others involved – and they have probably forgotten them by now. So it seemed that it was to be Minnie in the end, since she, too, whilst also having her own experiences always seemed to be there when I needed her.

In this way we, I suppose, rather “drifted” into marriage. She and her father found and furnished a little stone cottage at Roughlee – which you will remember is over the hill

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(Nogarth) and in the valley (Happy Valley) on the way to Pendle. This was while I was on tour with the van, and I left it in Westmoreland long enough to go to Nelson and get married. We were married at Wheatley Lane Methodist Chapel, and after a few days off I returned to the van and Minnie to her teaching; she was a nursery school teacher.

Looking back on this period I am rather staggered both at the casual way we entered into this marriage and by the fact that we expected it to endure when we continued to be separated by our work. The thought that it might not stand such a strain never, so far as I can recall, occurred to us. I traveled back home when work permitted and on one occasion was off work due to flu for about a month. On another occasion Minnie joined me on the van for a week or so and by these means we saw each other as often as possible. We also went via a CWS cargo boat from Liverpool to Rouen for 13 days, and apart from a terrible seasickness I suffered in the early part of the voyage we enjoyed it very much – especially traveling on a sightseeing trip to Versailles and Paris. It is true that both on the ship and on the van Minnie did a bit of flirting with other males but I was to some extent amused and even, if you understand, pleased that other men found her attractive and I was the lucky one to have her. I only mention this latter in view of what later transpired.

The situation politically in Europe was rapidly worsening, and in September came the declaration of war by Neville Chamberlain. At the time, I was with the publicity van in Norfolk, and it was decided by the PPU that the van should be taken off the road. After putting it in a garage at Beccles I returned home by train. Soon afterwards I was requested to go to London HQ and help out in the office, so once again I left Roughlee and went back to lodgings in Guilford Street.

There followed a period of a few months during which I was far from well or happy. I had a small and uncomfortable room at the B&B place, and what with that and the fact that the food was poor and I was extremely lonely, especially at weekends, I became very run-down and eventually caught a heavy cold, which I could not shake off. Finally I became so unwell that I was unable to continue and on doctor's orders had to take to my bed; he said I had a "tired heart". But this seems now to me to be a euphemism for being thoroughly run-down and needing a rest. The circumstances under which I was living were not conducive to an early recovery, but after a few weeks I became sufficiently better to travel home.

After I had been home a week or two and had recovered sufficiently Minnie and I traveled down to Burton to spend a weekend at Uncle Arthur's and during that weekend Minnie, with what I can only now regard as misplaced honesty, told me that she had recently been on the brink of an affair with a young married man who, with his wife and young child, occupied the cottage behind ours at Roughlee. She assured me that it was all over and had never developed beyond a few kisses, but you will understand what an emotional shock this was to me. You can say – as I would now – that the sort of life we were living was inviting this kind of trouble, and it seemed clear to me that, since there was no hope of my getting work in Nelson then Minnie would have to give up her job and we would have to live in London. She made no objections to this, since I think she also realized the danger of continuing in our separate lives if our marriage was to survive and the possible dangers of being bombed in London seemed the lesser of two

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evils. We went to London and after "going the rounds" of the estate agents, finally secured a top floor flat in Randolph Avenue, Maida Vale and moved in a week or two later. Minnie came to work in the literature dispatch department at the PPU, and I was in charge of that department.

For a time all went reasonably well and on the whole we were fairly happy, although temperamentally we were almost too much alike to provide a satisfactory balance for each other. Also, of course, the uncertainty of the demands the war would make upon us and our consequent inability to see or provide for any future put an unseen and indeed unrecognized strain upon us. There passed a summer of waiting for the unknown, with barrage balloons floating on high at almost every other street corner – a reminder of the menace which was always there. The PPU, predictably, wilted and as the demand for literature faded it became evident that it could not indefinitely support both of us and it therefore came as no surprise when Minnie's services were no longer required.

The life of a domestic housewife in a small flat was not a very demanding one for Minnie and though at first the novelty of it appealed to her, inevitably and understandably before long she found it inadequate and found time beginning to drag. We did what we could to amuse ourselves at the weekends, visiting friends in Hampstead and so on and even going Youth Hostelling once or twice, but these measures were hardly sufficient to offset the weekday tedium for her and the fact that we were now having a struggle to make ends meet did not help either. On at least one occasion Minnie was invited to have a cup of coffee with the odd predatory male she somehow seemed to meet on her domestic round, and remembering the all-too-recent past I began to worry a little about what may happen.

During this period we used to read the "New Statesman" – both being, as we thought, left wing progressives, and one week we saw an advertisement which was completely to alter our lives. This advert was to the effect that a small London private school – Fortis Green – evacuated to Bedfordshire, was looking for – primarily – a trained nursery school teacher who believed in modern methods, with a husband who could act as gardener-handyman and take a turn occasionally in teaching the older children carpentry. This seemed to offer possibilities for both of us and we went along to see them.

As a consequence of this interview we were accepted – although I was really only a make-weight; it was Minnie they wanted and would have preferred on her own. We were to have one pound per week each, a room of our own (which we furnished with our own rapidly depleting stock of furniture), and our keep. This was far from affluence, but it offered us a chance to get out of London and start what we hoped may be a pleasant and meaningful life.

Aspley House, Aspley Guise, which is where the school was, stands in a small village near Woburn Sands, on the edge of the Duke of Bedford's estate. It is a large two story building, topped by what, presumably, used to be the servants' quarters and which was used by the school staff at this time, the children's dormitories being on the floor below and the class rooms on the ground floor. There are extensive gardens and orchards at

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the rear, enclosed by a high brick wall, and large lawns on three sides. All these required considerable work to maintain, but I managed, with the aid of an elderly man who came in daily from the village, to cope with this and looking after the boiler which supplied hot water. I also coped with the occasional handyman job which came along.

To say I was happy and contented during this period would be to exaggerate somewhat. I was the only male adult on the place, and there were nine or ten females, so that I was rather starved of male companionship. We were virtually isolated from the village life as the villagers regarded the school with great suspicion, so that we saw no outsiders except at weekends when such of the children's parents who could, came to see their offspring. Minnie was rather happier, for she was once again doing the job for which she was trained and which she much enjoyed.

At this school your mother was matron. She was in sole charge of the health and well being of the children, and as you would imagine, made an excellent job of seeing them well fed and cared for at a time of severe food rationing.

She was small, weighing not much more than seven and a half stone, and had very fair, golden hair, cut in a shingled bob and with a fringe. She was, as ever, very determined and forthright and I can recall seeing her on more than one occasion doing battle with the rather formidable headmistress, Beatrix Tudor-Hart, and emerging victorious. She was always unafraid – unlike me – and my heart even then began to go out to this small, delicately made woman who, with eyes flashing, was prepared to "take on" the whole world if need be, and I guess that, without knowing it, I was already beginning to feel in love with her.

After a while things began to move for me in connection with the war. At the time we were in London I had to register, as did everyone else of military age, and I had registered as a conscientious objector. This meant that, sooner or later, I would have to appear before a tribunal and try to prove to their satisfaction that my objection was genuine. I was called to appear before the tribunal at Cambridge, and as a result of that hearing I was registered as a CO "conditional upon my remaining in employment at the private school". The tribunal was presided over by a very pleasant individual, who I seem to recall was a High Court Judge, and who was doing his best to administer a piece of social nonsense – the ascertaining of the validity of a man's conscience.

I regret to say that, lacking both experience and humility at that time, I took umbrage at the tribunal accepting that my objection was genuine and yet placing a condition on my interpretation of how I could best apply myself to serve the community but not the war effort. In short, I felt that I should have been accorded unconditional exemption and so I lodged an appeal to have my case re-heard at the Appeal Tribunal.

About this time I began to feel unsettled at the school. The factors I have already mentioned were no doubt contributory to this feeling and I began to find myself increasingly resentful at seeming to be little more than an evil which the headmistress had to accept in order to have Minnie's services. Consequently, I began to get a bit difficult and this "bloody mindedness" finally focused itself on the boiler. The HM felt, and stated openly in the staff meetings (Heaven protect you from such ordeals!) that I

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ought to rise at about 5 am and get this wretched thing going so that hot water would be readily and plentifully available when the rest of the staff, and the children, arose. To this I replied that my day was already long enough considering all I was expected to do and that I was not prepared to extend it still further. Thus we reached deadlock, and as neither of us would yield the HM later raised the matter at the meeting of the school's governors and it was decided I should be asked to resign. I could, I suppose, have asked to have my side of the case heard, but as it was seriously suggested at this Board meeting that this only applied to me and that they would very much like Minnie to remain I felt that it would be better to hold my breath and my temper, so accordingly I rather acidly resigned and Minnie did the same.

At the time of this resignation we had no place to which to go, but fortunately we were invited to join the pacifist Hillside Community, at the other end of the village, and this we were pleased to do.

We had come across this community quite accidentally one afternoon whilst going for a walk. We had been walking along a lane some half a mile from the school when we came to a hut standing at the edge of a cultivated field. There were two or three young men outside this hut, and they were obviously of military age. It was strange to see young people out of uniform unless they were obviously farm-worker types, which these were not. We struck up a conversation with them and it presently emerged that they were C.O.s voluntarily living together in a house in the village and working together on this 40 acre parcel of ground. They had pooled their financial resources to make this possible, though most of the capital had been provided by one of them – Graham Roberts – whose father (now deceased) had held a responsible position in the Indian Civil Service. We were invited to visit them at their house in Wood Lane, and this we did a few days later.

There were several members of the community at that time; apart from Gray and his wife, Muriel, there was a middle-aged woman whose name now escapes me (Simonette!), Edward, Fred and John, not to mention odd ones who came for a day or two at a time. The "permanent" residents were all exempted from military service conditional upon doing land work and the visitors who came from time to time were before or between tribunals and seldom stayed long. At the time we were invited to join the community, it was in its second year.

Fortunately, we did not possess much furniture, so there was little trouble occasioned by the removal and we were soon installed as residents. I went to work on the land, and Minnie helped in the house.

It was not an easy period in which to live, for by this time the war had entered a new phase and bombing was fairly widespread. Planes were heard overhead most nights and on one occasion a small German plane had flown over the school and dropped a stick of bombs – which were presumably intended to fall in the village, but which fortunately overshot the target. Nightly raids on most of the main cities were a commonplace and no one knew what further developments may be imminent. Although we were a segregated "community within a community" we were conscious of the growing world misery and our own insecurity and this, together with the day-to-day



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living in such close proximity to each other proved something of a strain which I am sure we all felt.

During the first few months we were at Hillside, I received notice to appear before the Appeal Tribunal in London, and I went along to have my case heard. This time, unlike the first hearing at Cambridge, there was no feeling of relaxed consideration in the air and it soon became evident that I was going to receive short shrift on this occasion. I heard one of the members of the tribunal suggest that they dismiss my appeal, whereupon another pointed out that as I had already left the school they could not do that. In the end they decided to disallow my appeal and ordered that I be placed as liable to be called up for non-combatant duties in the army. This was a blow to my hopes and, I suppose I must admit it, to my pride, and I came away from the appeal feeling both bitter and hopeless, and returned chastened and battered to the community to await further developments. These were not so very long in coming, as I fairly soon received a notice to attend for an army medical examination at Bedford.

After considering the implications of taking the examination, I decided to do so. If I had refused, then, theoretically at least, I could have been repeatedly imprisoned for this refusal and would have not been entitled to have my case re-heard. In fact, many C.O.s were imprisoned for six months or more (your cousin Richard was one of them) for such a refusal, but as it transpired few, if any, of them were imprisoned a second time. I had to make a decision the only way one could be sure of getting one's case re-heard was to take the medical and then, when called up, refuse to serve. This refusal would, in the end, mean a court-martial, for after being medically examined one was automatically in the services and in my case I would thus be subject to army law. At the court-martial I would have to plead that my refusal to serve was due to conscientious objection, and at the same time, ask the court-martial to award me a sentence of "not less than three months". If they accepted my guilty plea and request for the sentence I would, during the period of serving it, be entitled once again to have my case re-heard. Of course if my appeal was still not upheld I would remain in the army and if I still refused to serve the whole process would be repeated – except that the prison sentences would become ever stiffer. I later met one C.O. who had failed his appeal and who, on the second sentence had been sentenced to two years imprisonment. He was a simple half-Italian lad who was heartbroken and bewildered by the savagery of it, and I was much moved with pity for him and despair at the blindness of humanity – he would never, under any circumstances, conceivably have made a useful soldier and the sentence passed upon him was entirely punitive.

So I went to Bedford and took the medical, and after much prodding and poking by a succession of five doctors who were each specifically interested in only their own part of my anatomy and finally a sixth who looked at me as a whole person I was pronounced fit to serve.

By this time my marriage to Minnie had ended and if I gloss over this and my subsequent union with your mother, you will understand that the reasons, causes and events are all too private and personal, both to myself and others, ever to write them and I will thus pass over a period of perhaps a year, during which time much transpired

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and at the end of which your mother and I were living in and sharing a flat with two others in Gloucester Place, off Marylebone Road in London.

When we first moved in to Gloucester Place your mother and I were financially broke and without a job, but we were very happy and, which at any rate was unusual for me, seemed not to worry unduly about either the present or the future. I managed to buy a bit of time for us by selling my radiogram for a few pounds, and before we were obliged to think of more desperate measures your mother had found herself a job, serving in an open-air stall in the Kilburn High Road. A week or so later I was re-employed by the PPU as receptionist/telephone operator and thus we continued for a little while, enjoying our weekends at Regent's Park, Kew and Hyde Park.

Your mother was the first to make a move, and after a successful interview with Paddington Council, she was appointed assistant matron at a children's day nursery in Queens Park. On the strength of this and in order to have a place of our own we set about flat-hunting in Maida Vale, and quite quickly found a most suitable top floor, self contained flat overlooking Paddington Recreation ground – for one pound per week. It was not much of a job to move our few possessions, but we managed to rake enough things together to make a start. It was at this time that I contrived to make the table which I now (in "normal" times) use to hold my radio equipment. I sawed off the head and foot boards of the bed to make it, and for chairs we used the bed for one of us and the sewing machine cover for the other! As we became a little more solvent we added a few small articles, but we were happy to be together and so tried not to worry too much about anything.

For all that, after a time I did begin to worry as to what my fate was ultimately to be and how this may affect our life together, which had only really just begun, and as time went on I began increasingly to feel that I wanted it settled. Looking back on it now I do not know why I could not have been content to leave matters well alone and let things work themselves out, but I suppose that was too simple a solution for me and eventually I began to feel more and more compelled to "have it out" in some way. I have to say this to try to explain to you – and even to myself – why I tried, unsuccessfully, to join first the St. Pancras Civil Defense and then the National Fire Service. Neither of them was prepared, for some inexplicable reason, to accept volunteers at that time. Perhaps it's just as well, for I doubt whether I should have been resoundingly successful at either activity.

There was still not a great deal for me to do at the PPU, and I became increasingly restless. One could not, I suppose, be indifferent to the stresses and strains of the war and eventually this "marking time" became too much and I went along to the Labor Exchange to ask them about work on the land. After initially registering astonishment at anyone voluntarily inquiring for such work they finally gave me a traveler's warrant to see the Hertfordshire W.A.E.R about a job, working from their hostel at Northchurch, near Berkhamsted. I went along to see them and was duly enrolled, to start work on land drainage, and thus took up weekday residence at the hostel in July 1943, returning on Saturday mornings to spend the weekends with your mother. I should add that your Aunt Amy was by that time living in one of the rooms in the flat, so that your mother was not on her own.

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Looking back on it now, and at a time when I am – unless there is a hereafter in which we may all meet again one day – permanently deprived of the love and company of your mother I find it incomprehensible in myself that I could have voluntarily cut myself off from her during the week. In the whole of the time we were together – 25 years – this was the only time I did, and I can only suppose that my reason for doing so then was due in part to the hope that, as I was now “usefully” employed on the land, I may be allowed by Authority to continue to be so and that our separations may thus be only short ones. Of course none of my decisions were made without the knowledge and agreement of your mother, so there was no question of my behaving despotically towards her.

Incidentally – and to digress for a moment – while we were in Gloucester Place I got a temporary job (through the Evening Standard) doing some commercial 16mm film shows in village halls in Essex. This ended when the proprietor got a contract to cater for the island of Stornaway in the Outer Hebrides and asked me to go there for him. Need I say I refused?

The work at Northchurch proved to be very heavy and exhausting for one, such as myself, who was neither used to the work nor endowed with a muscular physique. Digging ditches and cutting trees and bushes proved something of an ordeal, especially as the food in the hostel was indifferent and sometimes inadequate. Slowly, however, I became more accustomed to it and less often fell asleep on the train journey to Maida Vale on Saturdays.

A lot of the work we laborers were doing was connected in some way with the excavators; we were either clearing the way ahead of them, or, if this was impossible because of immovable obstacles, we would hand dig the sections which they could not reach. It transpired that the “War Ag” was in the process of acquiring a few more of these excavators and were in need of drivers for them. The senior officer came around one day to look for possible trainees and asked me if I would be interested. As it seemed to offer more scope and was something of a challenge I decided to accept and was soon placed as a trainee mate with Ernie Hundleby from Nasty – a tiny village, near Ware, as you know.

Ernie was also staying at the Northchurch hostel while his excavator was being used in that part of the country, as was one Arthur Lucas, whose excavator was also in use in the area. These excavator drivers were something of the elite of the hostel and were afforded a certain amount of deference and preferential treatment such as presumably befitted their enhanced status! There were some 30 “inmates” altogether – some COs, some exempted from service on the grounds of national interest, and at least four (three of whom were epileptics) unfit for military service – rather a motley assembly.

After the initial introductory period when I suffered doubts as to my ability to acquire the necessary skill to be a successful driver, I began to feel more confident and evidently my superiors were satisfied with my progress for when it was decided to move the machine to the north-eastern part of the county I was asked to go with it, along with Ernie, and accepted. Ernie’s parents were kind enough to offer me accommodation

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too, so that in the summer of 1943 we moved the excavator and began to work on the brooks and rivers and on the farm ditches in that part of the county.

The story has now reached a point where the places, and, increasingly the events will be familiar to you. If, therefore, any of what follows is "old hat", I trust that you will bear with it so that I may not otherwise have to sacrifice coherence for the sake of avoiding repetition for you. What I will do, is to avoid going into detail as regards places and events with which you are already well acquainted.

So, as already stated, Ernie and I began what, for me at least, was a period of excavator driving for the War Ag which was to extend until about 1951, interrupted for about a year while I was away when, at last, the military machine caught up with me – but more of that a little later.

During this period our "home" arrangements continued as heretofore, and I went back to Maida Vale each weekend. The War Ag provided me with a solo motorcycle (the "combinations" came later) and by this means I was able to travel to and fro from the excavator to my lodgings, and also to the nearest railway station on Friday nights where I stored the cycle for the weekend before catching the next train to London.

It was in this situation and atmosphere that you were conceived. I have already written in letters to you of my own feelings and thoughts on this matter and will not therefore now repeat them, but you will understand how I felt. Your mother was 35 years of age and I could understand how she felt – at least as much as any man can understand a woman's feelings and needs, and I have never had cause to regret that she carried the day, although I was filled with a mixture of excitement and misgiving when she first told me the news.

Unhappily, almost coincident with this event came a sudden increase in the bombing of London, and so now, more than ever, I began to worry about your mother being up there alone. As I moved around from farm to farm I tried, with increasing desperation as the months went by, to find somewhere – anywhere – where we could live together in the country so that as the critical time approached your mother could live in comparative peace and safety. I had almost begun to give up hope when a workmate, who was allocated to me temporarily and who lived locally told me of a furnished cottage in Albury which was soon to become vacant. I went over to see the owner that same lunch time and arranged to take it, and the following weekend was the happiest your mother and I had spent for many a month.

We moved into the cottage – which you know well – in the September and there followed a few months when we were contented though impoverished. The cost of renting the cottage, heating it, and buying our necessary food took all our weekly money, so that I had need to work any overtime (including weekends) that I could get. Your mother was very well during this time and was much looking forward to your arrival. We speculated endlessly on whether "it" would be a girl or a boy and spent much time in trying to think of a suitable name for either. We had no preference as regards sex, but tried to cater for either!

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Finally came the great event, though not without some anxiety for me. Mum went into Bishops Stortford Hospital (then Haymeads) on the Wednesday, when the doctor was convinced you were on the way; you evidently had other ideas and delayed your arrival until Saturday. By that time I – who had previously not smoked for some two and a half years – had become almost a chain-smoking nervous wreck. At the same time that all this was going on, and with a timing that only a malignant Fate can achieve, I got “calling up” papers to report to Buxton (Derbyshire) for military service in the Pioneer Corps.

When I first saw Mum after your arrival I could hardly recognize her. That she had not found it easy was evident; she looked very tired and her face seemed to be swollen and bloated. The birth had been long and difficult and she had subsequently developed a bladder infection. She prevailed on one of the nurses to allow me (against hospital regulations) to see you. When I did so I was surprised to see you looking quite pale and composed and not at all like the other red and squalling and obviously newborn babies there. Apparently the nurses found it unusual and diverting too, for they nicknamed you “the professor”! Under the circumstances I could not that day bring myself to break the bad news of my “call up” to Mum, though I was – as you can imagine – very worried about what to do next and about what would become of us all.

The first thing which became apparent was that I needed to play for time. My call-up date was only about a week ahead, and it was obvious that, with you and your mother still in hospital, some respite would have to be found to allow time to make some arrangements for the future. Thus I wrote to the Commanding Officer of the regiment to which I had been ordered begging for time though I did not then tell him that I had no intention of serving. I dared not risk the possible consequences of doing so until I had been able to make plans for the two of you. He was kind enough to grant me a month’s extension – which was quite a relief, though it made me feel a bit furtive and deceitful, too.

During the next week I was able to tell your Mum what had happened, and after the initial shock she took it with all her usual courage and we discussed what to do. I wrote to Gray Roberts, back at Aspley Guise, telling him how things had transpired and asking whether they could possibly find room for you and your mother while I took whatever was coming to me. He replied that he would be only too glad to help and that as the community had disbanded and only Muriel and himself were left at Hillside there would be plenty of room for the two of you for as long as may be necessary. This was a tremendous relief to us, as you can imagine, and we gratefully accepted the offer. When you two had come out of hospital and a removal date had been fixed I wrote again to my Commanding Officer and told him that while I had very much appreciated his kindness in granting me an extension I had never had any intention to serve, as I objected to such service on the grounds of conscience. I further said that if he would send the necessary traveling warrant I would willingly report and give myself up to avoid the need for him to send an escort for me. By return of post, and without comment, came the traveling warrant, and so, after a very difficult farewell, I left for Buxton.

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The journey northward was uneventful enough, though I derived a bit of wry amusement from the fact that my traveling companions were American soldiers and by the time we got to Buxton we were nearly old friends!

It was not difficult to find the HQ of the Pioneer Corps. It had taken over a very large "white elephant" of a hotel, (the Empire) which had stood empty for some years previously as it had proved uneconomic to run. I went to one of the two guards who stood at the gate and told him my story – or at least as much of it as seemed pertinent. He made no comment, but escorted me to a sergeant somewhere on the first floor of the hotel.

This sergeant was apparently in charge of reception and I repeated my story to him. He said that so far as he was concerned there was nothing to be done that night except to billet me and I would be "attended to" next morning. Thus, after a few preliminaries, I was taken along to a room containing some dozen or so two tier bunks, each bunk being equipped with a thin straw-filled palliase. I was issued with three blankets and then left to my own devices. There were some half dozen or so lads in uniform in the room and they soon made me welcome. They were most interested in my intention to refuse service and encouraged me to "stick it out". At the time their attitude surprised me, but I was later to discover that the Pioneers was a regiment mainly composed of throw-outs from other regiments and were thus generally reluctant soldiers, though not on grounds of conscience. Anyway, from whatever motives they were generally rebellious and were thus sympathetic to anyone who was prepared to refuse. This applied only to "other ranks", of course – the officers were "traditional" soldiers.

After an indifferent night's sleep I arose in the morning with the others – at the bugle call – and went down to queue at the ablutions for a wash and shave. After this we were summoned to breakfast and I lined up with the others on the stairs. Eventually we arrived at the kitchen and collected our food and passed into the dining hall. Until then I had little idea of how many soldiers were billeted in the hotel, but there must have been close on 300 in the dining hall – and I was the only one in civilian clothes, and arouse a good deal of interest.

After breakfast we returned to our room and after a short interval a sergeant came along to see me there. He had evidently been told of my intention to refuse to serve and, no doubt with the best of intentions, took me aside to tell me of my folly. He said that such a course would do me no good and would only get me into serious trouble and that I should take his advice and accept the uniform. I told him gently that he was wasting his time, and having got the message he took me along to the Stores. There he offered me the Field Service cap, as being symbolic of the uniform, and told me to put it on. I refused and he offered it to me a second time and I again refused. Before offering it the third time he pointed out to me his "stripes" and cautioned me on the consequences of refusing an order by a superior officer and then formally ordered me to accept. I again refused, upon which he took me along to see his captain and told him in set formula – in fact, almost a ritual – what had just transpired between us. The captain asked me whether this was correct and I replied that it was. He then asked me "why?" and when I told him he instructed the sergeant to place me under close arrest, pending being taken before the Commanding Officer next morning. I was then taken to

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a room on the ground floor, furnished with two or three bunk beds and a pail for a latrine and was there locked in.

The problem now arises as to how much I should go into detail in the events of the next few months. To do so would take many pages of writing and would perhaps weary you in the reading of it, so that it would seem better to go over it rather more briefly and to highlight the main events only, to maintain the continuity.

The following morning I was arraigned to see the Commanding Officer and eventually, after about an hour's wait, I was marched into his office.

He was far from friendly, and after being very nasty at my deceitfulness in having asked for a deferment and then refusing to serve, finally told me that I was to be held under close arrest to await a court-martial.

Thus, I was marched back to the cells and once more locked in. For the next few days I was kept there, being allowed out, under escort, to fetch my meals from the kitchen. I was also taken to empty the lavatory pail and to use the lavatory once a day and a guard was kept at the lavatory door in case I tried to escape or commit suicide. Once a day I was taken, under escort, around the grounds for exercise. Most of the guards (military police) were quite human and once we were out of sight of the main building they usually offered me a cigarette and we had a friendly chat about things.

After about a week, I was again taken before the Commanding Officer and he informed me that there had been some mistake in my call-up and that I should not have been called up for the Pioneers at all, but should – as I knew – have been called up for service with the Non-Combatant Corps. What I did not know until that time, was that the NCC was a separate entity; I had assumed that it was a part of the Pioneers and thus had no reason to suppose that all was not in order. The C.O. went on to say that the mistake was being rectified and that as the correction would not take long, I would do well to remain at the Empire rather than to go home and be called up again. I told him that I was prepared to stay although there was no question of my accepting service in the NCC, since I had, in my ignorance, assumed that was what I had been refusing all the time. To this the C.O. made no comment and merely remarked that I would be released from custody and that I was free to come and go as I pleased for the time being.

It was almost three weeks before the new papers came through, during which time I passed the time as well as I could, and frequently pestered the officers to know when this period would end. As the Empire was a training center, there was a frequent turnover of soldiers and the sight of me in civilian clothes provoked continued – almost continuous! – questioning and it began to be rather wearisome. I had a battle one day with an NCO over my refusal to join the meal parade. The congestion on the stairs had become so bad that he had decided to line everyone up on parade outside and to allow only a line at a time into the dining hall. To avoid coming under this regimentation and provoking a "scene", I decided to hang back until everyone else had gone in, and then to tag on at the end – as I hoped, unnoticed. This worked for a day or two until a few of the other lads began to do the same and this NCO spotted what was happening. So

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when I came down, at the end, for dinner the next day he ordered me out on to the parade ground. I refused to go and he refused to allow me to enter the dining hall, even though I assured him I had been excused parades. He just did not believe me, so I had to go and search out the Regimental Sergeant Major and ask him for written permission to be excused. This he was good enough to give me, but not before we had an hour-long argument and discussion on what pacifism was all about. I don't think he really understood, even after that, but he was always very decent and friendly to me thereafter – as will presently emerge. The NCO had to excuse me the dinner parade, but it hardly endeared me to him.

At the end of this period of waiting I was duly presented with the NCC cap and the whole procedure which obtained on the first occasion was repeated, with one useful concession. On being remanded again for court-martial (which was a week or two away) I was told by my friend (?) the RSM that, considering all the circumstances and that I had given them no trouble he was, for the first time, going to depart from procedure and would, instead of keeping me under close arrest pending court-martial, allow me to be under "open arrest". This meant that, provided I did not leave the hotel or grounds I was free to move about as I pleased. The only proviso was that the night before the court-martial I was to report to the Guard Room and spend the night in the cells. Also, he said, woe betide me if I ran off – and it would also mean that, if I did, no one else would ever get the same concession. I assured him that he had no need to worry and that if I had been intending to give trouble I should either not have come in the first place – or else should have run off before when I had endless opportunity to do so.

So began another period of waiting, but this too passed in time and eventually I found myself before the court-martial. The room seemed to be full of officers, and of course there were many cases, of various kinds to be heard so that it was nearly midday before mine came up. The prosecuting officer stated his case with considerable vigor and a certain amount of venom and my defending officer pleaded "guilty on the grounds of conscience" on my behalf and asked for a prison sentence of "not less than 3 months", so that I could have my case reheard. I was just a little apprehensive of the inviting phraseology of my defending officer, but the court-martial took no advantage of it except to add "hard labor" to the 3 months they gave me. From the courtroom I was taken back to the cells where, a little later, the adjutant came to read the sentence to me. The following morning, I was taken, under escort, to Strangeways Prison, Manchester.

The first impression one has, on admission to reception at a prison, is that time has ceased to exist. The whole atmosphere is totally different from anything one normally experiences, and one feels to have been completely removed from life. One is divested of all one's clothes and personal possessions, which are laboriously checked and listed and stored and one is made to don ill-fitting and very old – though clean – clothes of prison gray. I suspect that it is no accident that the prison wear is so drab and ill fitting and I believe it is part of a conscious attempt on the part of Authority to divest a man of the last remnants of his self-respect. In support of this I would cite the nature of the medical exam which precedes the actually locking into one's cell. One is examined as if one were an animal and the doctor makes – certainly in my own case he did – remarks



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about one to the accompanying prison officer as though I were either not there at all or was mentally deficient. I recall that he remarked to the warder "This is a hairy one", and so on, to their mutual amusement. I was so disgusted as to pity their ignorance and it did not even offend me.

Eventually, I was taken to my cell and locked in and there I remained until "slopping out time" at 7am next morning. I could go into detail about the next 9 weeks (I was granted 3 weeks remission for good conduct) about life in prison both in general and in the particular, but this would take a very long time and while it may, possibly, prove of interest to you I feel it is rather outside the scope and intention of this present narrative so that; if I ever do write about it, then it would be better to do so separately and entitle it "My life and impressions in Strangeways" or something similar.

During these nine weeks my case should have come up at the Appeal Tribunal, but it so happened that the Tribunal had taken its annual holiday and thus I had to serve the sentence and be escorted back to the Empire Hotel, there to wait so long as my be necessary.

Accordingly, when my sentence was completed I was given back my clothes and put into a cell to await my escort; this at about 8am. My escort, I learned afterwards, decided it was too good an opportunity to see his girlfriend to call too early for me, so that in the event it was about 3:30pm before he eventually arrived. He was apologetic and said that had he known what sort of a person I was he would have come for me earlier, and to try to make atonement he took me to a café and bought me tea and cakes. The brightness and noise and bustle in the café was almost more than I could bear after nine weeks of confinement and I was glad to get on the train back to Buxton.

There followed another period of waiting of about three weeks' duration before the date was set for the Tribunal hearing. During this period I was free to come and go as I pleased for I had served my sentence and nothing further could happen until after the decision of the Tribunal had been made known. Then I would, if my appeal was successful, get my discharge from the Forces; if it were not, then the whole performance would be repeated – except that, as I have remarked before, the likelihood was that at the second court-martial I should be given a sentence of two years.

When the date and time of the hearing had been fixed (one morning at about 11am) an escort was attached to me to insure that I duly arrived on time. He came to see me and proposed that if I was agreeable we could go the previous night to Manchester and he could have a night at home there, I could go on to Nelson and we could meet at the Central Library in Manchester (where the case was to be heard) at 10:30 the next morning. At first I thought this rather trusting of him, but realized on thinking further that he knew that if he was going to have any trouble from me it would be after an adverse verdict from the Tribunal and not before the case had been heard. Since your Mum had traveled up to Nelson a few days previously – taking you along in a carry-cot, on the train – I was delighted to have the chance to see you all again and was very pleased to accept the corporal's suggestion. This was all put into effect and the following morning my father and I met the corporal as arranged and we went into the

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Library where we found Stuart Morris awaiting us. He (the Secretary of the PPU) had been kind enough to come along to represent me.

Fortunately for me – and, on reflection, perhaps because they had just enjoyed a long holiday – this Tribunal was much more friendly and reasonable than the previous one, in London, had been. After asking me various questions they eventually came to the conclusion that I was sincere in my convictions and that I had made efforts to be consistent in them and yet continue to serve the community without helping the prosecution of the war any more than could, indirectly, be helped. Accordingly they granted me exemption, conditional upon my doing agricultural work. Since I had already been doing that kind of work from choice and had learned my lesson about paying too high a price for preserving one's pride when many were losing much more than that, I was pleased to accept the terms of exemption. After thanking Stuart, and taking leave of him and my Dad, I returned with my escort to Buxton to await my discharge. This arrived in about a week, and my Commanding Officer, whose duty, apparently, it was to see each soldier before he left, was predictably sarcastic as he gave it to me. He indicated my service record and asked me if I didn't think it was "a fine one". Answering the words and ignoring the intention, I answered with as much gravity and sincerity as I could muster that I thought that it was. He reddened a little and seemed about to answer but apparently thought better of it, and we parted without any further words. He was a war-promoted colonel, quite unlike a professional one who had taken his place for a while earlier in my stay. This latter Commanding Officer actually came up to me while I was standing in a cinema queue – during one of my "free" periods, and asked me whether I was being treated all right. He said that there were things which had to be done which he found unpleasant and that he hoped no one was making life any more difficult for me than it need be. I assured him that I had no cause for complaint and he seemed relieved. I was most surprised and touched by this incident.

So at last I was free to return home; but before going on with the story I would like here to pause to pay tribute to your mother. It would have been quite impossible for me to have taken the stand I did had I not been sure of her loyalty and support, and neither of these were ever in doubt. Her own position was far from secure, for we had very little money, never having had the opportunity to earn or save much. During the period through which we had just passed – some six months – there had been no income at all, as I had refused to accept army pay. Your mother acted as an unpaid housekeeper for the Roberts and she must have had a very hard time financially, as well as being lonely and very uncertain of our future. Yet not once did she even suggest or hint that I should temporize; she left me to do what I felt I must and never questioned it. It was not that she was a pacifist, even, for I doubt whether she had ever heard of pacifism until she met me; it was just that she loved and trusted me and was thus then, as always, loyal to the last degree. I hope and believe I have never betrayed her faith in me, but you can understand better now, perhaps, how her death has left me emotionally bankrupt.

When I rejoined your mother and you at Aspley Guise I had a sort of holiday for a couple of weeks, for the strain of the previous months had left me a bit run-down – and anyway I had some time to catch up with the two of you.

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Eventually, however, the financial pressure and the feeling of wanting to get a home together again began to affect me and I began to ponder what to do. At first I considered getting a job excavator driving with the local Great Ouse Catchment Board, but on closer investigation I found that the wages and conditions were inferior to those on the Herts W.A.E.C. and after discussing it with your mother I applied to them for my old job again. They were pleased to have my application and to know that I was available once more, and so within a month I was back with them. At first there was not an excavator free and so, until one became available, I filled in the time lorry driving.

For the time being I had once again to go into lodgings during the week, and at the weekend I used to motorcycle to Hitchin, where I stored the cycle for the weekend. From there I went by bus to Bedford and thence by train to Aspley Guise, where more often than not your mother used to meet me, with you in your pram. This state of affairs lasted for some months, until finally Ernie Hundleby offered us a room in his house, together with use of the kitchen, and, with some misgivings on account of previous experiences of "sharing" – which we stifled in our eagerness to be together again – we accepted the offer. Thus we moved to 2 Agricultural Cottages, Nasty (Great Munden). You will find in the album photographs which were taken there.

For a while all went reasonably well, but as time went on friction between your mother and Ernie's wife Gertie began to develop and it became not uncommon for me to arrive home from work and find your mother in tears as a result of some incident which had taken place during the day. It became evident that we would soon have to be on the move again.

During one of the jobs I had been doing for the HWAEC I met Eddy Mildren, a farmer at Cherry's Green, about two miles north of Great Munden. He was a Jehovah's Witness, and although I could not support his beliefs entirely, we had enough in common to strike up a friendship. He farmed some 1,000 acres of land, and on 500 acres of this stood Wakely Cottages – a ramshackle row of miner's cottages but the important thing to our house-hungry selves was that one of these cottages was empty. I told Mr. Mildren of our plight and he, kind hearted man that he was, said that we may live in the cottage rent-free provided we did not ask him to effect any repairs to it. I was, as you can imagine, delighted with this piece of good fortune, as was your mother when I told her about it, and we walked the very next day the three miles or so to see it.

Alas it rained heavily the whole time we were out, and by the time we had walked through the mud and puddles, across the meadow and along by the woods we were nearly saturated. Everywhere was overgrown and sodden and as we peered through the windows and saw the stone floors in the cottage, covered in dust and grime, our hearts sank. We saw the pump and realized that all our water would have to be carried in and the waste out; the lavatory was a "thunder box" down the garden and would have to be emptied by me; the nearest shops were in Buntingford, some three miles away – via the muddy and overgrown lane to Aspenden, and we felt that we just could not face it, and returned sadly to Great Munden. A few days later, after yet another upheaval with Gertie, we reconsidered and went to have another look. This time the

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sun was shining and everything looked different; even the admittedly rudimentary nature of it no longer seemed insurmountable and we decided to move in: and with the aid of a borrowed tractor and trailer we did.

When we arrived at Wakeley you were about two years of age, and we stayed there until you were five. This was probably in many ways the happiest time in the whole of our married life; for the first time the oppressive shadow of an uncertain future had been lifted from above us; you were at a delightful age and seemed to unfold daily so that you were a constant joy to us; we were in the heart of the countryside which we both so much enjoyed and appreciated – and if we did not have much money, we did not need it either. Your mother and I were still young enough and in love enough to derive much happiness in physical nearness of which we had been, for reasons already explained, previously rather starved and the hardships of the primitive life did not, for a time, weigh too heavily upon us.

As, however, the time approached when you would have to go to school we realized that here was an additional difficulty which, on top of the others, was considerable. The nearest school was at Westmill, some three and a half miles distant, and as we had no transport this would mean your mother walking this distance twice a day – to take and fetch you. So what with this and the fact that we now felt the need for some amenities in our life and the lessening of drudgery for your mother I began to press hard, through the HWAEC (which had a hand in the allocation of council housing) to be re-housed in a modern house. At first my plans were to no avail, but eventually, by good fortune, I reached a sympathetic feminine ear and we were granted tenancy of No. 7 Abbotsfield Cottages, Wareside. It was another great day when we moved in – this time in spite of the rain which cascaded down all day; this time we really felt we had come into harbor at last.

Thus began our life at Wareside; and you will remember all of the story from now on, so that it may be harder to tell.

For some little while I had begun to feel rather uncertain about the future of the HWAEC, since the war had ended in 1945 and it was now 1949. The Agricultural Committees had been set up as wartime entities only, so that it seemed likely they may be closed down at any time and I should find myself out of a job. When I pressed various of my superiors on this point they became somewhat vague and evasive, so that I formed the impression that they really knew nothing about it either. Having had enough workless experience never to wish to risk a repetition of it I decided to contact the Lee Conservancy Catchment Board (which maintained the main brooks and rivers, permanently) to see whether they had any vacancies. They were favorably impressed by my application and offered me a job as excavator driver which I accepted, as it offered me – for the first time ever – a secure job with a pension at the end of it.

Unfortunately the salary was not very high, so that I felt constrained to try to find some means of supplementing it and I advertised in the "Mercury" for a part-time job at weekends. There were not many replies to the advertisement, but one of them was from Ware Park Hospital, and I went along to see the Admin Officer there. He offered me a job as a ward orderly, but as it was a TB hospital I felt it unwise to accept since it

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seemed to me possible that I could somehow bring a germ home to you if I were in contact with patients. A week or so later the Admin Officer came out to Wareside to see me and offered me a job on the telephone switchboard, in the office, at weekends and, since this was well removed from the wards I was pleased to accept. Of course it meant that I would see hardly anything of you both on Sundays, as I had to be on duty from 9am to 10pm, but the money made all the difference to our ability to make ends meet, so that there was, in the end, little choice.

The work itself was not difficult, since the board was a small one – 5 main lines plus 20 extensions. Actually, on Sunday the board was little used so that apart from the hours of visiting when I had to act as receptionist to visitors coming for the first time to see patients, I was virtually on stand-by duty. This enabled me to clear personal correspondence for the week, and to do a bit of reading as well.

Soon after I began working for the Catchment Board my father was taken to Salford Royal Hospital to have a prostatectomy. He had been troubled by enlargement of the gland for two or three years, but was reluctant to undergo an operation since a few years earlier he had been suffering from myocarditis and he was fearful that he may be unable to withstand the shock of the operation. However, eventually an operation became imperative and the hospital apparently did not think any special danger was involved since they did not see fit to warn Mother of any. Dad went through the operation successfully and when Mother saw him next day the hospital staff seemed to regard his condition as normal. Dad was apparently not happy in how he felt, however, and asked Mother to see the doctor and tell him so. This she did, but the doctor said he was satisfied that Dad was as well as could be expected and that everything was taking its normal course. Mother went home somewhat reassured, but she was aroused by the police at 2am the next morning with a message that Dad's condition had drastically worsened and that she was to go at once to the hospital. By the time she reached the bedside Dad was comatose and blue. He was being given oxygen, but to no avail, and soon after Mother arrived he died.

I was heart-broken when the news reached me; I was at work at Widford at the time and Winnie Surrige, who had a bicycle, cycled out from home to bring the telegram to me. I shut down the excavator immediately and went home, stopping there only long enough to change, before catching the train to Manchester.

When I said, at the opening of the previous paragraph, that I was heart-broken on hearing the news, I was to some extent anticipating events. The telegram, which was sent by Uncle Jim actually said "Father worse, come at once", but obviously he was dying. In fact, he was already dead.

As the train approached Manchester, I began to wonder where I should go. Should I go to the hospital – or would anyone now be there if the situation had changed since I left home several hours before? I decided that the most sensible thing would be first to telephone the hospital from the station and decide then where to go first. I got through to the hospital without much difficulty and asked them if they would tell me how my father B.W. Sidwell was now. The person at the other end repeated casually – almost absent-mindedly – "Sidwell? Sidwell" "He died this morning, didn't he?" "Yes – that's

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right; he died this morning." It took me about a month to get over the shock and grief – but I did, that time, have your mother to share it with me and thus to make it easier.

The next few years passed fairly uneventfully, apart from the arrival, upheaval and departure of Patrick, about which I can write nothing which you do not already know.

There were also one or two babies – Cecil being the first – whom we fostered for the Herts CC while we were still at Wareside. As you continued to grow up, and after the departure of Patrick, your mother began to find time heavy on her hands and to feel a need for greater fulfillment and this idea of fostering was the outcome. Later, of course, we acquired Pamela too.

About two years before we left Wareside I went to the coast at Burnham-on-Crouch to operate the excavator in assisting to rebuild the seawall, which had been breached by exceptional tides early that January. This operation, which was successful, took about four months to complete, and when I at last got back to home territory my "stock" appeared to stand very high with the various Engineers and they began to talk about my being promoted to Area Inspector. This sounded encouraging and attractive and I began to feel that they really meant it.

However; time went by, and a year or so later I began to wonder whether this was not to be a repetition of B.T.R. at Burton, where unsought hints of promotion – which never materialized – fell thick and heavy around me. Nearly another year passed and still nothing had happened and at last I began to feel a little restive and even resentful. "If" I argued to myself "They had no intention of fulfilling their promises, why, when I hadn't asked for them, did they see fit to make them?" And discontentment and disillusionment began to seethe in my soul and was reflected at home, where your mother could see I was unhappy and bored.

At about this time Mr. Tebbit, the Superintendent on the Prudential was calling to collect our premiums, as the Agent for Wareside had recently left to work for another company. When he called one day, Mum jocularly said to him "What – still collecting? Haven't you got an Agent yet?"

He replied that suitable people were not easy to find, and that so far he hadn't been lucky.

"Well" said Mum, "What about my husband then? I know he's discontented in his current job."

Mr. Tebbit knew me, as he had a few months earlier called to arrange an insurance contract for me when I had decided to increase my holding. He told your mother he would call to see me, if she thought I may be interested – and so it all began.

I listened to the proposition he outlined, and it seemed attractive, although there were a few "matters arising" which made me hesitate.

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The biggest of the snags was that if I were to accept the job – assuming I was adjudged satisfactory by the District Manager – then immediately it would be necessary to start looking for a new house. The Council House in which we were then living was rented to me on an “agricultural” tenancy under which there was an irrevocable obligation upon me as tenant to be employed in agricultural or in some ancillary capacity. If I left this type of occupation then I must give up the tenancy of the house. As it was still impossible to find a house to rent, we would have to buy one – and I did not possess sufficient money for that.

Anyway, pushing this matter into the background for the time being, I considered whether to make the change and finally decided to put the matter to the test and to make the decision when that was the only thing left to do.

Accordingly, I went along to an interview with the District Manager, Mr. Milton, and he seemed to think I would be satisfactory except for my age. Chief Office, however, was evidently feeling benevolent that day for when he telephoned them and told them the details of my application they said that so far as they were concerned he had their permission to employ me.

I went home and wrote a letter to the Chief Engineer of the Lee Conservancy Catchment Board, telling him that I had an opportunity to accept a well-paid, pensionable job, but that if he could give me his assurance that the promises of promotion which had been made to me from time to time would be implemented in the near future, then I would remain. Otherwise, I said, I felt that the offer I had just received was too good to refuse especially as, at my age, I could not expect to receive many – if any – other such offers.

A most courteous reply came, to say that they understood my position and were appreciative of the good work I had done for them. They then went on to say that while, as I knew (?) promotion prospects were reasonably good for me they were unable to give any indication when it may be possible to offer me such promotion.

This, then, cleared two points; I could have the new job, and if I were to refuse it then promotion was not imminent in my present one. There remained the problem about the house, but Uncle Arthur promised to lend me the necessary money for a deposit, if I could find a suitable property. So, after some six or seven weeks of deliberating and agonizing I finally decided to take the plunge; I accepted the new job, resigned from the old and we began house hunting.

It took several months to find and to move to 53 King Edwards Road, Ware and during this time the strain of learning a new and somewhat involved job and worrying about the possibility of the Council discovering I had changed my job and sending me a “notice to quit” 7 Abbotsfield before I had found another house to which to move was considerable. In the event we did receive a letter saying that they understood I had left agricultural work and inquiring what arrangements I was making to give up the tenancy of my cottage – but happily by that time negotiations were taking place for the purchase of No. 53, so that they were satisfied and we were able to complete our tenancy

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unharassed by threats of eviction; and we were able to move to Ware in time for you to commence, from there, your education at Hertford Grammar School.

The rest of the story you know well; so well, in fact, that there is no need for me to tell it, for you can do so yourself, in the years to come, if you wish.

I started out by expressing the hope that if, by writing this story, I could find some explanation for my no longer having any interest left in living it may help me to find one – and if I cannot to enable me to accept my inability to do so. Well; I think that at any rate I do now understand why I feel so empty since your mother died. It is simply that everything since that shattering event is for me simply anticlimax. It seems that for years we were looking forward; to our life together, to you, to a house of our own, to the end of the war and the end of doubt, again to a house, to a new job, to a house we would buy, to a car, to your education, to Patrick, to Pamela, to a better job and – for years – to that “little shop in the West Country”. And suddenly and impossibly when the last of it was achieved it was all over, almost before it started. The thing we had saved and worked for over those many years, finally won and then it and everything else, overnight almost, became as nothing. None of it, without your mother, for whom it was all intended, meant anything at all; and so it was with my life.

Well; I shall go on living it, until, in the natural course of events, it finishes. I may even – who knows? – patch up some sort of pattern again sometime, but I know that my soul is virtually dead and whatever may happen to me in the future nothing will ever; can ever, resurrect it and this, too, I must accept. When your mother died I arranged to have an epitaph to her written in the Book of Remembrance at Coombe Down Crematorium in Bath. On the anniversary of her death, each year, this Book is opened so that the entries for that day may be seen, and though you may never see it you should know that what I wrote expresses now, as it did then, exactly what I feel:

The Light of my Life  
Burnt out this day.

Dad, June 1968