

FOR ALL MY DESCENDENTS, WHOEVER YOU MAY BE,
WITH LOVE
AND FOR THE PEOPLE OF WORLE AND WAUNLWYD

Waunlwyd to Worle

Villages I have loved.

Raye Green, formerly Smart, nee Jones

2/1/2010

This little tome is not a history book, it is a personal memoir of a childhood surrounded by lovely people in two villages. It follows my parents' book, 'Bet and Merv' and puts 'Life in Worle' into a family context.

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1. Arrival

I was born in the first year of peace following the Second World War, at the Lydia Beynon Maternity Hospital [now the Celtic Manor Hotel] in Caerleon, just outside Newport in South Wales. My mother's maiden name was Elizabeth Mary Charles, and she married my father, Mervyn Jones, in 1944.

My parents were born and bred in the same valley village. Waunlwyd is in the valley of the River Ebbw, three miles south of Ebbw Vale. The valley is narrow and bounded by mountains - to the west by Domen Fawr and to the east by Mynydd Carn-y-Cefa. At the time of my birth, coalmines and the factories of the steel manufacturers, Richard Thomas and Baldwin, had taken over the floor of the valley for a distance of seven miles. The mountains to left and right had been augmented over the previous century by the addition of slag heaps and a sulphurous pall hung overhead. I grew up loving the smells and sounds of that valley.

There were only four streets of any significance in Waunlwyd. Beginning at the bottom street, they were Cwm [valley] Road, Park View [which overlooked the Park Hotel, the only Public House], Excelsior Street [reflecting, no doubt the Chapel traditions of the area] and Hillside Terrace [self explanatory].

Dad was born at 40 Cwm Road, his grandmother's house, and grew up at 27 Hillside; Mum began at 30 Park

View and continued at 39 Cwm Road; both were educated at the village primary school until they were ten or eleven and then went to the County School in Ebbw Vale, which was the local grammar school. Despite attending the same schools and knowing each other's families well, they were never in the same class, since Dad was three years older than Mum. Neither of them was ever called by their full Christian names. Mum was called 'Betty' by the family and 'Bet' by friends; Dad was universally known as 'Merv'. The love match between my Mum and Dad was approved by both families, and positively encouraged by their parents. Dad obviously adored Mum and would do anything at all to ensure her happiness, and Mum responded as any sane woman would: she married him.

Mum belonged to the Congregational Bethal Chapel, Dad and his family were big noises at Caersalom, the Baptist Chapel. Meetings after Sunday services, walks up to the peak of Carn-y-Cefa, weekly visits to the flicks, boxes of chocolates galore and much love and laughter secured my Dad his heart's desire. They became engaged secretly, as they thought, but both sets of parents had been told the news within a few days, via the two women, distant cousins, who worked in the 'jewellers' where Mum and Dad bought the engagement ring.

By this time Dad was in the Royal Signals, having been called up in 1941, and he and Mum were apart for two years following their engagement. An extended leave of three weeks in November 1944 enabled them to arrange a

hasty, but impressive wedding, and to honeymoon, significantly, in Weston-super-Mare.

My parents were both thrilled [they all say that!] when I was born on March 8th, 1946, as their letters to and from an occupied Germany show, and I was named Raye for both my grandmothers, who were Rachael's, and Elizabeth for Mum and two of my great-grandmothers. After the wedding Mum had continued her teaching job at Cwm primary school, just down the valley, and stayed at home with my grandparents at 39 Cwm Road 'for the duration' of the war. So it was to my grandparents' terraced house that I was taken as a newborn. Dad



returned from the British Army of the Rhine seven months later and, at last, moved in with us. Mum always told the story of my birth, as all mothers do, and in particular, she resented not having been allowed to hold me herself in the taxi that my grandfather hired to bring us back up the valley. Aunty Hilda, Nana Charles' younger sister, insisted upon accompanying Grandpa to collect us, and was determined to carry me home. Ever after

she claimed she was 'like a godmother to Raye', and indeed

I am very like her in temperament and not unlike her in mannerisms. [Depressing, I fear, for my children!]

My earliest memories of my parents are of a small, slim bouncy pair with equally- matched, unflagging energy and an optimism that bordered on insanity. Everything amused them, nothing daunted them. I was doted upon,



and the three of us laughed our way cheerily through life. I felt that I was their friend and their equal from the start - we were just Bet, Merv and Raye, and those words, preceded by 'lots of love from' adorned Christmas and birthday cards for the many happy years of my early childhood.

I inherited my father's dark brown, straight shiny hair, but not his blue eyes. My greenish-hazel eyes were from Mum. My love of life and my energy came from them both. Grandparents, and scores of other relations who lived close by all had pet names for me: Sugar, Shiny Eyes, Blossom, Flower, Sunshine. Mum called me 'Annie', and Dad called me 'Kid' or 'Young 'Un', and later, 'Raa'. I was a confident, happy little girl, with a high forehead and a big mouth.

Both of my maternal grandparents, I am glad to say, spoiled me. Grandpa always called me Sugar, a privilege never accorded to anyone else, and I could usually get my way with him. Nana, on the other hand, was much more formal in her affection, calling me Raye Elizabeth, never a pet name.

Born Rachael May Davies, but invariably known as May, she was quite a big woman by the time I knew her, tallish and well covered. Her long hair had all but lost its original auburn, and was coiled up around her head in a smooth roll, which was old-fashioned even then. She had been something of a beauty in her day, with her blue-grey eyes and red hair. As a young woman she began a career as a pupil teacher in a local school but courtship with my handsome grandfather led to pregnancy and marriage, in that order, when she was twenty-three and Norman was twenty-one. Norman and May married quietly, May wearing a restrained navy-blue suit. Norman's mother drew the blinds on the wedding day, in mourning for lost reputations.

2. 39 Cwm Road

The family home, at 39 Cwm Road, was on the 'cellar side', which was deemed to be an advantage, since the houses were three-storeyed and sported an extra kitchen, scullery and pantry, not present in those opposite. The front doors of **the cellar terrace** opened onto the middle floor. From the narrow passage, the doors to the left took you into the Parlour and the tiny Middle Room. At the end of the passage a staircase went up to two little bedrooms. But the hub of the house was DOWN another staircase and through a door immediately at the foot of the stairs, which led into the back kitchen.

This wonderful room was home. Mum and Nana Charles were always there, fussing around the old dining table under the window, seeing to the black-leaded range, which was always hungry for illicit coal, brought back from the pit by Grandpa Charles.

Hours were devoted to filling the tin bath, which served the whole family. Grandpa always had priority treatment in all things, including the bath, and Nana invariably referred to him as 'your poor Grandfather', though I never understood why. My father was given second priority after Grandpa, presumably because he was a married, family man with responsibilities. I can see now that this must have galled my mother's younger and only brother, Wyn, who after all, was the son of the house. Wyn returned from two years in the R.A.F. to find his

sister married, and a brother-in-law and niece in residence.

Mum talks of those early years with great affection and says she and Dad were never happier, despite a lack of money and space. We officially occupied the parlour and middle room of the house, using the middle room as a bedroom for the three of us, the parlour as a living room. There was no running water in either room, as Mum always mentioned when reminiscing, but my memory is of the whole family using Nana's kitchen, so I don't believe it really mattered.

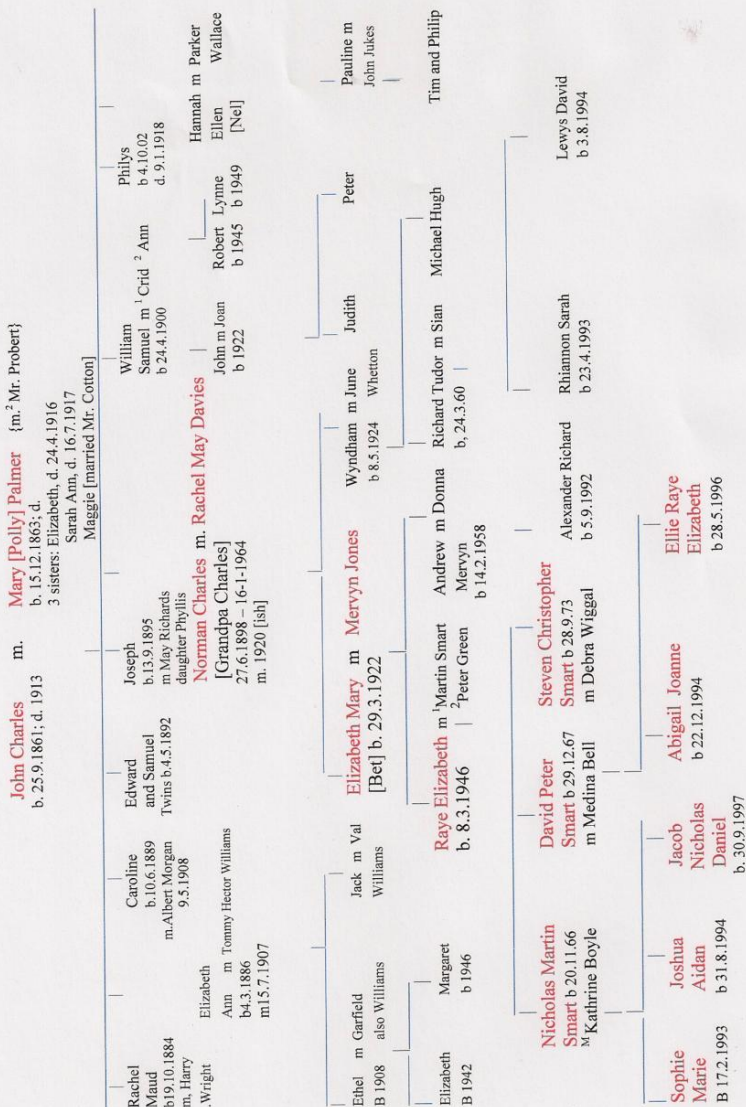
The house, in common with most others in the village, had no inside lavatory, and I was quite used to using a chamber pot at night. The pots were emptied first thing each morning, and I have fond memories of my ladylike grandmother 'emptying the slops'. She would cover the pot with a cloth, and walk through the kitchen, then the scullery, and out to the lavatory at a steady pace and with the expression of a butler engaged in silver service. She must have borne the slops down two flights of stairs, since she and my grandfather slept in one of the rooms on the top floor, whilst Uncle Wyn occupied the other little room.

The pit and the steel works, which so dominated life in the valley, provided more than wages and coal. It was also possible to pick up good quality wood no longer needed to prop up the mines. Grandpa and Dad made my potty chair and doll's house from such gleanings.

Grandpa [Norman] Charles worked at the pit, and was on shift work. He was not an easy man and was much affected by the disruption of shifts. His footsteps on the stairs down to the back kitchen instantly changed the atmosphere from cosy chatter to apprehension. He breathed audibly through his teeth, and would emerge into the kitchen with his braces flapping around his knees and one hand grasping his baggy trousers. Usually he continued straight on through the scullery to the lavatory, and was not seen again for some time. Mum and Nana would exchange meaningful glances, and the chatter would resume.

Our immediate household of Grandpa, Nana, Uncle Wyn, Mum, Dad and me was often swollen by visits from and to scores of relations living nearby, not least by William and Rachel Jones, Dad's parents. But before I talk about these others perhaps I should fill in some background about the families of my four Grandparents.

The Charles Family



3. The Charles's

Grandpa Charles was the seventh child of a family eleven, as the photocopy from the family Bible shows. Photographs show his mother, Polly Palmer, [Great-Gramma Charles] and his father, John Charles. Grandpa was born on June 27th, 1898, and was christened Norman.



Norman Charles at 22

Grandpa and his brothers were reputed to be the most good-looking boys in the valley, and the most mischievous. Joe Charles, three years older than Norman, was particularly notorious for his pranks at the pit head, where he was responsible for the lifting gear which took the men to the coal face and retrieved them. Many a local miner told the tale of Joe Charles stopping the lift and leaving the night shift dangling.



John Charles, my grandfather's father, was mayor of Ebbw Vale and a much-respected man despite the exploits of his family.

When he died in 1913 his funeral was reported in the local paper at great

John Charles. Norman's father

length, and the lines of mourners following the coffin was said to stretch from Waunlwyd right up the valley to Ebbw Vale. John Charles' father, named Edwin, had been a fireman in the mine works.

My grandfather's family was stricken with tuberculosis when Norman was a young man, and several brothers and sisters died, so I can only remember three of them: Elizabeth Ann Charles [Lil], 1886-1961; William Samuel Charles, [Willie] 1900-1962; Hannah Ellen Charles, [Nell] 1907-1985. These great-aunts and uncles were certainly characters. Aunty Lil was my mother's favourite aunt and a source of security to Mum in her childhood. She was a warm, affectionate woman and so provided a contrast to my rather cool grandmother. It was always Aunty Lil who was called on in a crisis. She nursed and tended most of the villagers, laid them out after death and helped to deliver the children. It was Aunty Lil who was called when my mother went into labour. My memory of her is of a white-haired, lantern jawed woman, with an angular body and a broad Welsh accent. She married a man named Williams in 1907 and had several children, of whom I know Ethel and Jack.

Ethel Williams and her husband, Garfield [also Williams], lived in Vale Terrace, Tredegar, close to Neil Kinnock and his family. Ethel was well known as a chatterbox and gossip while poor old Garfield was legendary for his silence. Aunty Ethel would go on

inconsequentially for hours, and on one memorable occasion stopped abruptly to shout,

'Talk, Garfield, talk'

We would often visit this unlikely pair and their two daughters when I was small, not a happening I relished. The girls were named Elizabeth and Margaret, presumably after the royal princesses, and since Margaret was my age, I was expected to play with her. Sadly, she was a plain, fat child, who had inherited her father's taciturnity, and I only ever tolerated her. Last year I spoke to her for the first time in thirty years. Tragedy had befallen her - her only son had died of drug abuse - and I felt I must phone. I would have known her slow measured tones anywhere, and I felt a deep remorse for the antipathy I had concealed as a child.

Aunty Ethel Williams' brother, Jack, often visited Weston to have lunch with Mum and Wyn, who are his first cousins and much the same age. Jack and Wyn displayed family similarities, as do other Charles' men of that and subsequent generations. Strong genes.

Back a generation, Uncle Willie [William Samuel Charles] seems to have been the brother who was closest to Norman. He was only two years younger than my grandfather, and they must have shared the grief of losing so many of the family to TB. Willie was notorious in the valley for his exploits with women. He married a local girl, Crid Harris, at about the usual age, and had a son, William John Charles, always known as John, who lived

much of his adult life in Bleadon, Weston-super-Mare.

Willie and Crid were not particularly happy and Willie's wandering eye was unrestrained. He had several affairs, culminating in a divorce - an unheard of scandal in Waunlwyd at the time, and not to be lived down. Young John was brought up by his mother and two maiden aunts [Poll and Ol] and never recovered from the bitterness he felt over the business.

Mum and John were the same age, born in 1922, and Wyn only two years younger, so they were brought up and educated in the same village schools and at the same grammar school. Mum and John both did their teacher training at Dudley Training College, but tell conflicting stories about life in the Midlands in the war. John loved it but Mum [Bet] was homesick most of the time.

Wyn and John were rivals in all things. Wyn's brilliance at academic subjects and at sport was renowned, and although he was two years younger he could hold his own against John with ease. At school Wyn excelled, and he was also very popular with the girls - he had inherited Norman's good looks, and his mellow voice always resembled Richard Burton's. The cousinly rivalry extended to a fetching young woman, Joan, who was friendly with Wyn for some time. When Joan switched her allegiance to John and married him, a sharp intake of breath could be heard throughout the family. John and Joan moved to Weston, and kept quiet about the reason for the quick wedding, since sadly the child was lost only weeks after he

was born. It was almost twenty years before they had children, Judith and Peter Charles. Wyn married an English girl from Bath, of which liaison more later. As young married men Wyn and John continued the competition in their careers when they both applied for the headship of the same school in Somerset. The school was St. Andrews Junior School in Burnham-on-Sea, and Wyn won. Honour was restored. He was the youngest ever headmaster in Somerset.

Willie Charles did not remain single following his divorce: he married a rather coarse, loudly spoken woman whom I called Auntie Ann, and these two had a new family. Robert Charles was a year older than I was, and his sister, Lynn, a couple of years younger. I hero-worshipped Robert when I was a child, and was always happy to visit the family.



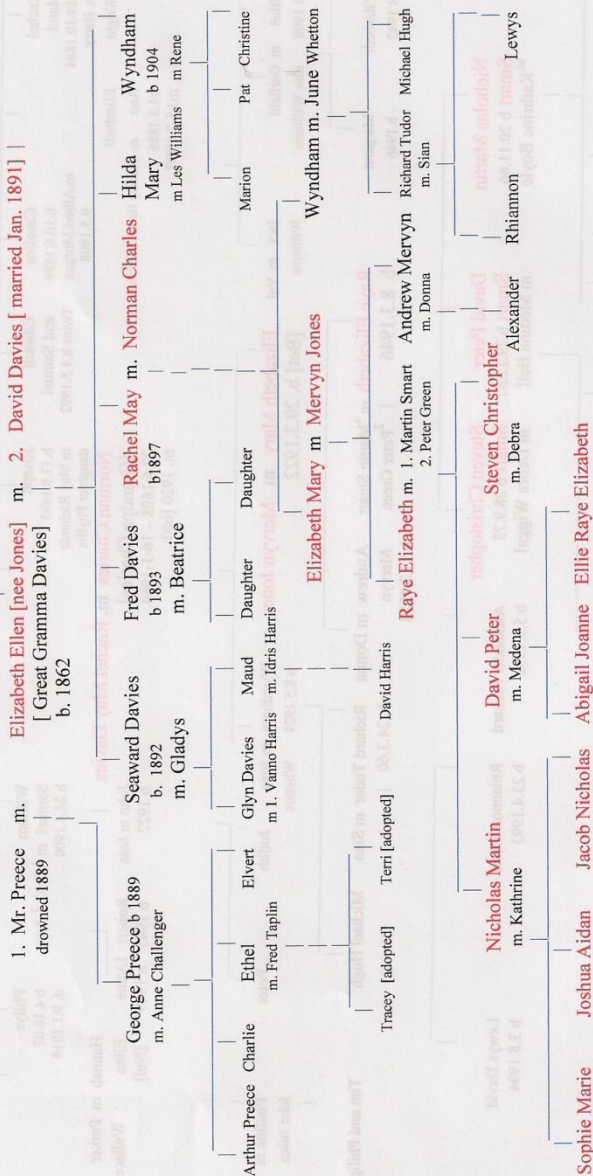
The matriarch of this large ebullient clan was Great-Gramma Charles, formerly Polly Palmer. She was left a widow in 1913 when John Charles died on 21st May at 30 Park View, Waunlwyd. The death certificate gives influenza, meningitis and cardiac failure as causes of John's death - a pretty comprehensive catalogue of disaster.

Polly kept some family records, which are invaluable in tracing back and sorting out who's who. Her birth certificate gives her date of birth as 1864, on what looks like December 15th, and gives her father's name as Samuel Palmer, a coal miner. Her birth was registered in Crickhowell, though she was born at Llangattock in the County of Brecon, just north-east of Ebbw Vale. An entry in the family Bible gives the date of the marriage of John Charles Snr. and Mary [Polly] Palmer as January 7th, 1884. Other records include lists of the deaths of John Charles' brothers and sisters, the deaths of other people known to the family, the births of children of the marriage and other marriages in the family.

So much for the Charles clan. It is much easier to understand it all with the help of the family tree.

The Davies Family

Sidney Jones [Miner] born 1820s



4. The Davies's

Nana Charles was born Rachel May Davies on 14th October, 1897.

Rachael May Davies,
later Charles, my
scholarly grandmother
with a book, as usual



Her family was not straightforward, as her mother, Great Gramma Davies, had been married previously. Great Gramma Davies [nee Elizabeth Ellen Jones] first married a man named Preece. The union was blessed with one son, George, before Mr. Preece was drowned in the canal at Gilwen. He was a natural jester, and his friends thought he was fooling around when, in fact, he was in serious trouble. His widow, Elizabeth, after a decent interval for the expected Victorian mourning period, married David Davies on 24th January, 1891, as witnessed by a copy of the marriage certificate.

Little is known of the antecedents of Elizabeth Ellen Davies [nee Jones]. We do know that she was born in 1862, and that her father was Sidney Jones, a miner, himself born in about 1820. A photograph exists of

Sidney Jones. He was reputed to be 'the biggest man in the valley' and in the photo has an impressive beard. Nothing is known of his wife.

George Preece, then, was my Grandmother's half brother, and greatly looked up to by the younger members of the family. Elizabeth and David Davies soon produced a clutch of offspring to keep George company. The eldest of the Davies' was Seaward - a name which fascinated me as much as 'Garfield' - followed by Fred, Rachel May [Nana Charles], Hilda Mary, [Aunty Hilda] and finally Wyndham, for whom Uncle Wyn was named. All these great aunts and uncles I remember well from my childhood.

Uncle George Preece was a very good looking, but dreadfully boring man. He had a shock of white hair and was well preserved, mainly, I think, as a result of a reluctance to exert himself. I do not remember his wife, Ann Challenger, but they had four children, all good lookers, but rather ponderous in manner. I have met the three boys, Arthur, Charlie and Elvert, but it is the daughter, Ethel, whom I know best. Aunty Eth is a year older than my mother and they often met as children at Great Gramma Davies's. Mum and Aunty Eth were both bridesmaids when Aunty Hilda [Davies] was married. Rosettes were made to adorn their dresses and the photograph shows them as vain teenagers: as senior citizens, they became known in the family as 'the golden

girls'. A similar picture taken at my son's wedding in 1989 shows them as vain as ever.

Aunty Eth married Fred Tamplin, a tall fellow with the personality of a soggy cucumber. He was in my mother's class at school, and Mum could never understand why Eth chose him. Eth and Fred were unable to have a family, and so adopted two girls, Tracey and Terri [what names!] who gave their adoptive parents all the trouble you can imagine. Fred died in about 1987 worn out by long years of ill health and struggle to bring up his girls. Aunty Eth still visits Mum several times a year, and is very much a part of our close family.

Eth's brother, Arthur, was a teacher, trained at Caerleon at the same time as Jack Williams and Les Jones [Dad's brother]. Arthur, though bright, lacked charisma and was acknowledged to be a useless teacher. Elvert Preece married Joan, and I know they had children, but I had no contact with them until a few years before Joan and Elvert died, when I met them again at Aunty Eth's. Elvert was a lovely man, and my youngest son, Steven, particularly liked him. The other brother, Charlie, I don't remember at all.

Uncle Seaward Davies, apart from his name, was a rather distant figure to me, though he is reputed to have been affectionate and funny. He was married to Aunty Glad, and they had two children. Glyn, their son, was blessed he the charm of the Davies's men, all of whom were chauvinist socialites. He was reputed to be a

drinker, and since he suffered from severe diabetes, lost his sight young. His legs were also affected, and he died in middle age. Glyn married Vanno Harris; Glyn's sister, Maud, married Vanno's brother, Idris Harris - quite a family affair! You can imagine the trouble caused when Vanno ran off with Cliff Osbourne, a close friend of Norman Charles.

Following his divorce from Vanno, Glyn unexpectedly re-married, and he and his bride, Elizabeth, turned up on my parents' doorstep unannounced. Glyn and Elizabeth had wed that morning. Goodness knows why they needed to call on cousins. Mum and Dad fed them, took them out in the car for a drive and after a very long, trying evening, deposited the reluctant lovers at their hotel. Mum took some photos to mark the occasion and sent them to Glyn, promptly. Nothing more was heard of Glyn and Elizabeth for years - what gratitude, and how odd!

Uncle Fred Davies was a dapper chappie with the Davies's usual neat, slicked back, dark hair. He and Uncle Wyndham were very alike to look at. Fred and Beat [his wife] lived at Cwm when I was small and seemed to have a happy, but eventful, family life. The house was always full of people, and fun to visit. Uncle Fred died some years ago, but Aunt Beat, at well gone ninety, is still going strong. She lives in Cwmbran with one of her daughters: another daughter lives close by: they all fight happily.

Aunty Hilda was my favourite Great Aunt. She and Uncle Les Williams did not marry until Hilda was 39, in 1939. Hilda was the youngest daughter, and looked after Great Gramma Davies until she died: only then did Hilda and Les marry. Aunty Hilda and Uncle Les lived at



36 Cwm Road, three doors down from us, in Great Gramma Davies's house.

Goodness knows why this photo of them was taken outside number 35, but the drain pipe on the right

is adorned with red, white and blue ribbons for Coronation Day - 2nd June 1953.

Aunty Hilda and Nana Charles were close sisters, though quite different in temperament. Hilda was warm and enthusiastic: she hated to miss anything, and always expected to be at the heart of what was going on. Nana would much more happily take a back seat. They complemented each other, and relied on each other a lot. Hilda ran the chapel choir, attended 'Arts and Crafts' classes, ran coach trips and organised the neighbours. Uncle Les went to work at the 'By Product' and supported Aunty Hilda. His hair was very dark, so everyone called

him 'Blond'. He was the most amiable man I knew, only ever responding to nagging by whistling in an exaggerated way. Uncle Les's elderly mother, Granny 'Williwums', lived with them.



This photo of her was taken in the well loved little garden at 36 Cwm Road. She was a happy old lady and would chat even to a little nuisance like me. The household was completed by a talkative budgie and a scrappy old cat, called Blackie. I can still hear Blond shouting 'Black, Black' when he arrived home from work each day. Dear old Les died in 1977, and Hilda in 1980. I still miss them, but can listen to a treasure of a tape from 1962, with Hilda and

Mum chatting and 'That was the Week that Was' playing in the background.

Uncle Wyndham was the youngest of Nana Charles' siblings. He knew how to enjoy life, did Uncle Wyndham. Another dapper chauvinist, he married Auntie Rene and they had three daughters. All four women happily waited on Uncle Wyndham, who went out each evening either to the pub or to play snooker with his mates. Naturally enough he was in a constant good temper and lived to be over ninety. He died on Christmas day 1995, having made sure of his presents first, and with his eldest daughter, Marion, in attendance. Mum, my husband Peter and I went to visit him six months before he died. He was very sprightly and eager to introduce us to his lady friend, Phyllis, who lived in the flat next door. Characteristically he had found another female to look out for him after Auntie Rene died.

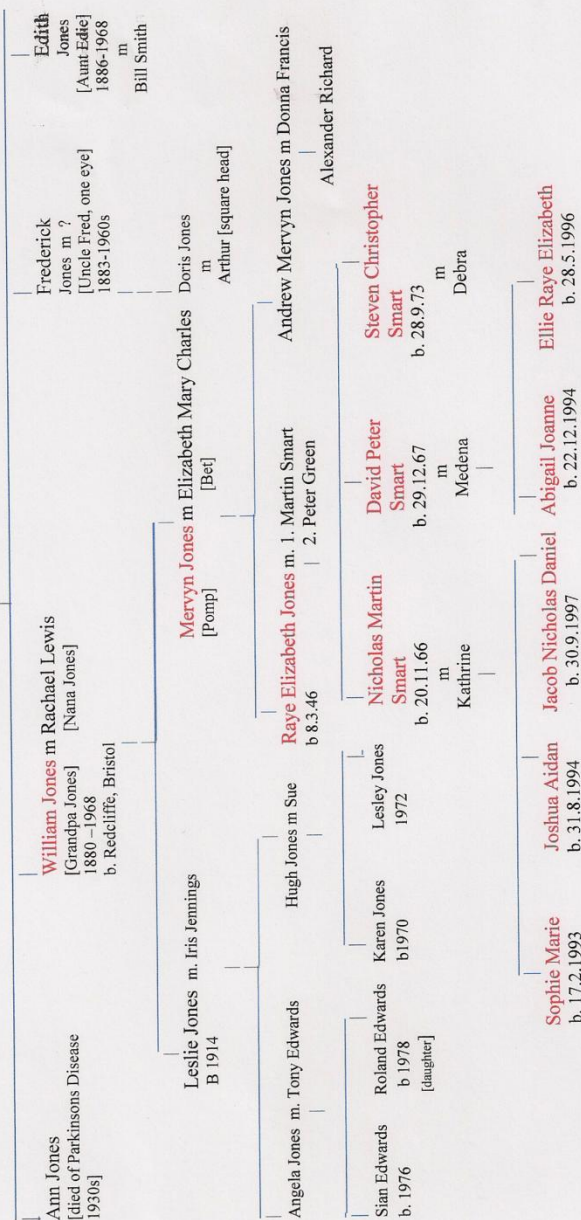
So these folk are the family of my gentle grandmother Charles, born a Davies. There was no doubt that she thought the world of all of them. Her father, David Davies, died when she was about twelve years old. There was some sort of accident in the pit where he worked, and he developed typhoid fever as a result of his injuries. Great Gramma Davies was widowed for the second time, but her sons supported her manfully, and Uncle George, her oldest child, acted as a substitute father to them all. Gramma Davies managed to live in a remarkably ladylike fashion, considering her



circumstances. She never did any washing. It was collected and returned, ironed, by Mrs Hendy who lived opposite. Heaven knows how she afforded that! She lived out her life at 36 Cwm Road, cared for by Aunty Hylida. The picture was taken in the garden, late in the 1930s.

The Jones Family

Great Gramma Mitchell [see photo]

Great Granddad Jones m Miss ? Mitchell
[40 Cwm Road]

5. The Joneses

My lovely father, Mervyn Jones, was universally known as Merv. His father, William Jones, was not actually born in Wales, but in Redcliffe, Bristol, in November 1880, but I deduce from his name that he must have come from Welsh stock. His mother's maiden name was Mitchell, and the family settled at 40 Cwm Road, where my father was eventually born in his grandmother's house.

William Jones, Merv's father and my grandfather.

Close family and friends normally called Grandpa Jones 'Will', and certainly this was how his wife usually addressed him.

Grandpa Jones had an interesting mix of characteristics. Apparently upright, staid and proper, he could display moments of wickedness, and definitely had a twinkle in his eye. He was a deacon of the Baptist Chapel, and

ran the Sunday School for years, but also played the mandolin with a local band, and encouraged my father to play the drums with the band when he was old enough. Grandpa often recited in public, too, but usually chose



pious, emotional Victorian poems with a virtuous message. He was fond of Shelley, and taught me to recite several of his poems when I was quite small.

I have clear memories of one of his brothers, whose name was Fred, and of his sister, Edith.

Although this says 'Bristol' at the bottom it was taken in Clevedon at No.29 The Triangle by W. Guttenberg!!

It shows from left to right:
William Jones
Fred Jones
Annie Jones
Edith Jones [the little one]
Gramma Jones

The family lived in Bristol at Claremont Street during William's early years.



Uncle Fred was a small, slim man. He, in common with Will and Edith, suffered in later life from diabetes, and this led to the loss of one eye, but he was lively and bore some resemblance to my father.

The over-riding factor in Uncle Fred's life was his membership of the Baptist church. Along with the rest of the Joneses, he not only attended regularly on Sundays but also was a leading light in all chapel activities throughout the week. No meal was eaten until grace had been said, and no opportunity was missed to discuss theology with anyone who was willing. Uncle Fred's greatest friend in life was another of my uncles, George Preece, and the two men kept the Baptist Chapel in Ebbw Vale going.

Uncle Fred married, but I don't remember his wife, however, I do remember their daughter, Doris - not a desirable relation to possess. She was a plain, downtrodden woman with no spirit whatever. Doris remained a spinster until well into 'meddle' age, but then formed a liaison with a chap called Arthur, whom she eventually married, though not very happily. Arthur had a square head, the shape generally attributed to German soldiers, and described so vividly by Dickens in 'Hard Times' when he talked of Mr. Gradgrind. To add to his cubic head, poor Arthur also had noticeable eyebrows: they were dark and bushy and met over his nose. He was a miserable, serious individual and I was shocked when Aunt Doris settled for him. He had been married before,

and was divorced, not that I was told this at the time: it would have been much too shocking. It is interesting to realise, whilst writing this, just how often divorce or shotgun weddings seem to have occurred in that society, although neither was ever alluded to. Doris's father, Uncle Fred, must have found it hard to accommodate himself to this sinful marriage. Maybe he turned his blind eye to it. My brother, Andy, says that Fred would take out his glass eye to show it to Andy, something he never showed me. I expect that, being female, I was thought to be too tender!

Edith Jones was the youngest of Grandpa Jones' siblings and normally called Edie. I knew her much better than Uncle Fred. When her parents [my great-grandparents] died Edie and her husband, Bill Smith, took over the house at number 40 Cwm Road, which was next door to my childhood home. Aunt Edie and Uncle Bill were constant visitors throughout my childhood and I have a

clear picture in my mind still of a small, neat, white-haired, rather prissy woman, and a tall, kindly, bald-headed man. This photo shows a lovely old pair, spoiling me.

Aunt Edie had the tidiest drawers I have

ever seen. Each item was meticulously folded, straightened and laid in its proper place; there were never



Aunt Edie and Uncle Bill with me

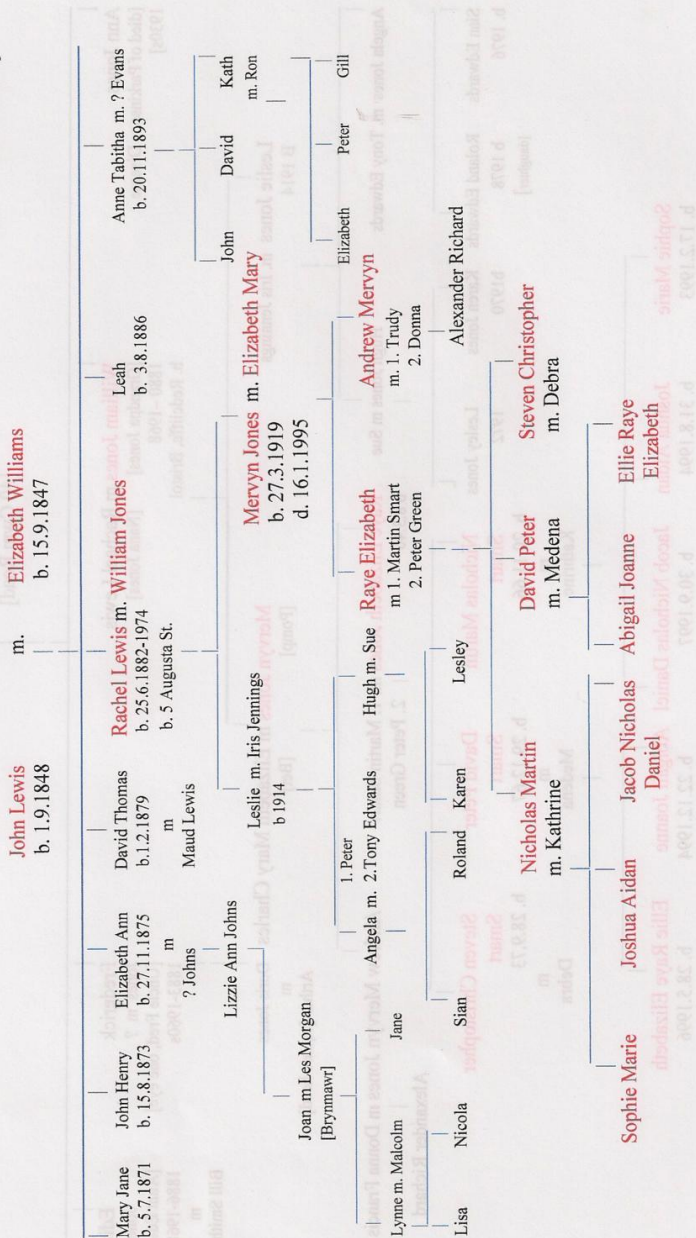
two layers in one drawer. Uncle Bill Smith passed his time, once he retired from the steel works, in telling tales of his experiences serving with the army in World War 1. He repeated these stories with such monotonous regularity that the whole family could prompt him if he omitted a bit, and, indeed, we often did so. We knew every inch of the Salonica Road, and Dad would say 'You missed out the third stone on the left, Unc'. Uncle Bill was a good-natured chap, luckily, and never took offence, if indeed he realised the implications of our prompting. As Edie and Bill had no children - I think they married quite late - they spoiled me when I was small, and though they could be tedious at times, I was very fond of them.

Grandpa Jones's remaining sister, Anne, who was the oldest of the family died, before I was born, of a shaking complaint, which sounds like Parkinson's disease. Mum remembers Anne, who, of course, lived next door to her. Because Anne was ill and unable to go out Mum was always asked to go next door to show Anne her latest frock. I can just imagine Mum swanning about in her finery. I wonder if this cheered Anne up or depressed her further.

Grandpa Jones was a patient man, which was just as well since his wife [Nana Jones] was inclined to be difficult. She was very family minded, but only counted her own relations and had very little time for the Joneses, especially disliking Aunty Edie, and making no secret of it. Even Uncle Fred was not popular with her, and in later

years when Grandpa lost his sight, she refused to write to Uncle Fred for him. I have no idea why she resented them so, but Grandpa never complained. He was very polite to her, but seemed to be in control in a gentle way. It was his habit to drink two cups of tea after each meal, and having finished the first cup, would lean back in his chair and say, 'another cup of tea, Rachel, if you please'. And the tea would be poured, without protest.

The Lewis Family



6. The Lewis'

Rachel Jones, my paternal Grandmother generally known as Nana Jones in my family, was an impressive woman. She was born on June 25th, 1882, at 5 Augusta Street, Victoria, Ebbw Vale. This little terraced house has now been pulled down, but was very similar to the houses in neighbouring Waunlwyd, except that Victoria was always looked down upon by the inhabitants of Waunlwyd, who considered the houses inferior. I visited the house several times as a child, to see Nana's spinster sister, Leah,



who still lived there with scores of cats. I remember small, dark rooms, but a warm, cosy welcome. Nana Jones's parents were John Lewis [born 1st September 1848] and Elizabeth Williams [born 15th September 1847]. The family Bible gives the date of their marriage as October 1870. Elizabeth looks rather forbidding in her photograph, taken in middle age. Her sharp features were passed on to her daughter, but softened somewhat in the younger woman.

Dad [Merv] was proud of his family, and told a story about one of his mother's antecedents who hid a fugitive from the Chartists' Newport uprising [1839] in a cupboard, to help the rebel evade arrest. This heroine must have been Elizabeth Williams's mother, to judge by the dates. Who the fugitive was I do not know, but it would be good to think of John Frost himself under the stairs in Augusta Street.

This branch of the family is reputed to have another claim to fame. Elizabeth Williams spoke of a famous ancestor. Oliver Cromwell's father was born with the surname Williams, but changed it to Cromwell in the hope that it would help his professional advancement, and Elizabeth Williams was descended from these dubious forebears. I say dubious because my own loyalties are with the Stuart kings. The Welsh connections of Oliver Cromwell are mentioned in some history books, but Williams is a common name, and it would take considerable tenacity to trace the line effectively.

Elizabeth Williams's husband, John Lewis, seems to have been less illustrious, and was said to be a heavy drinker. Their son, [Nana's brother] Uncle Dave, once told my parents that this contributed to his early death. When Mum and Dad asked Nana Jones [Rachel Lewis] about this she sucked sharply on her one remaining tooth and said 'Our Davey has no business to discuss things', thereby confirming the truth of it!

Nana Jones had six brothers and sisters. The Lewis family Bible, kept by Elizabeth Lewis, gives details of the birth of her family. Mary Jane was born in 1871, John Henry in 1873, Elizabeth Anne in 1875, David Thomas in 1879, Rachel [Nana Jones] in 1882, Leah in 1886 and finally Anne Tabitha in 1892.

Uncle Dave Lewis, Nana's only brother to live into adulthood, never had children, so the name died out. Dave did marry. His wife, Maud, was a very precise woman, and inclined to be mean in later years, but in fairness this may have stemmed from the fact that Uncle

Dave went into several business ventures, not all of them successful. He owned a cinema and several other entertainment establishments in Teignmouth at one time, but his luck did not hold and he was forced into bankruptcy. Jack Lewis, Aunty Maud's brother, rescued him. Jack was quite a successful man in his way, though his fortunes see-

sawed. The pinnacle of his business achievements was ownership of the Leeds Palace of Varieties, later famous for the television show 'Old Time Music Hall'. It was just as well that he was in a position to help Uncle Dave and

Dave and Maud Lewis



Aunty Maud. Presumably Uncle Dave must have found work, or made money by some means after this, because he and Aunty Maud ended up living in a perfectly respectable semi-detached house at number 8 The Drive, Weston-super-Mare.

Two of Nana's sisters were still alive when I was a child. Leah was two years younger than Rach, and Annie several years younger than Leah, but they all seemed incredibly old to me, and I thought of the three of them as the witches in Macbeth. This was dreadfully unjust: they were all kindness itself to me, and Nana would never allow anyone to say a word against me or against any other relation. 'The world will hurt them soon enough' was one of her favourite sayings. Aunty Leah was small and wrinkled; Annie was bigger and much smoother. Both Annie and Leah lived in Victoria, Leah alone with her cats, and Annie with her bachelor son, John. Annie's husband was dead by this time, and her other son, David and daughter, Kath, were both married.

John was distinctly odd. He seemed to have trouble communicating, not because he was unable to, but because he was unwilling to. As a child I regarded John as a challenge, but never succeeded in making him smile or chat as most of my relations did. The poor chap never got to grips with life, and landed up as one of the homeless on the streets of Cardiff, despite everything the family could do to retrieve him. Dad was always worried that this cousin should be in such a situation, but

John was not willing to be helped. When John died in his fifties someone contacted the family and said that he had been cared for in his final illness by a Cardiff woman, and that was some comfort.

Annie's other son, David, was quite different. He seemed well adjusted, and after his marriage settled down near Abergavenny.

Kath was the only girl born to Annie. She married a lovely chap, Ron Davies, but poor Ron was captured in the second war and spent many years on the Burma Road. His health never recovered from this experience and he died of a heart attack in his very early fifties, leaving Kath with three children. The oldest of them, Elizabeth [Lib], is eight years younger than me, and remained an only child for ages. Suddenly Peter arrived in about 1963, and within a year another little girl, Gill, was born. These two little ones were not yet at school when Uncle Ron died, and Aunty Kath, who had been a cheery woman before this, was never the same. She turned in on herself and really struggled to bring up the family. They lived just outside Cwmbran in Croesyceliog. Kath was bridesmaid to my Mum in 1944, and Lib was my bridesmaid in 1965.

There is one other branch of the Lewis family. Mary Jane Lewis, Nana's eldest sister, married William James Johns. They may well have had several children, but I only know of one girl, Lizzie Ann Johns - my Dad's first cousin. Lizzie Ann was nearly twenty years

older than Dad and so it was her children who were Dad's contemporaries. Lizzie Ann's daughter, Joan, still lives in Brynmawr. Her husband, Les Morgan died only last year. Joan and Les are on many of our family videos, Joan sporting her wonderfully bandy legs, resulting from operations on troublesome knees. Joan has two daughters. Lynne is the same age as me. She is a big, plain woman with a real temper, but is good hearted, and married to a chap called Malcolm Muggeridge - no relation to the famous one.

Dad enjoyed family occasions and liked to keep in touch with all these relations, but was especially fond of his brother Les's children. Les Jones, six years Dad's senior, married Iris Jennings - much against the wishes of his mother. Iris and Nana disliked each other intensely, but Les was determined, and married his girl.



Nana Jones did not attend the wedding. I really don't know what caused the antagonism, but it is said that Nana was prejudiced against Iris on account of her having foreign blood in her veins. Iris' own family is still unclear about this exotic ancestry: some claim it to be Greek, others Spanish. Whatever the reason for the estrangement, relations were

never easy, so that we saw less of Les, Iris and the children, Angela and Hugh, than we would have liked. I was always very fond of them all, but I was aware that my parents and Aunty Iris were not best friends. Fortunately, we still stay in touch, and see them more now than we did when I was a child. Since Nana's death I suppose it has been easier.

7. Waunlwyd

I lived in Waunlwyd for my first three and a half years, and have retained some memories, which remain in my mind as snap shots.

The range in the back kitchen was the centre of life, providing heat, cooking facilities and hot water. This last was most often used to fill the tin bath, which would be taken down from its hook on the wall a couple of times a week, and placed in front of the range to receive its bather. How the adults coped with the lack of privacy I have no idea, since I was never around to witness this, but I remember feeling exposed myself, even as a tiny child, so it must have been hard for them.

The house was always full of relations who called regularly, and when they were not calling on us, we called on them. Nana and Grandpa Jones came to supper every Friday night. Nana announced that this would be the form as soon as Mum and Dad married, and it was so. However, it posed a difficulty for Mum. Rationing was still in force, and food was scarce. Mum wanted to do the right thing and create a good impression, and this enterprise was not helped by the fact that the Joneses ate very well at home. Bacon for breakfast, a cooked lunch and a fish supper were quite usual. Nana Jones ran a small shop in her front room, and sold everything, so food was never a problem to them. Poor Mum spent every Friday worrying about what

to give them for supper, which I suppose they ate in the little front parlour, which served us as a sitting room.

Nana Charles and Mum often discussed rationing, and how many coupons were left for this or for that. There were, of course, ways around the wartime and post war shortages. My grandfather knew everyone for miles and was able to obtain supplies 'on the black market' when necessary. It became necessary when my parents arranged their wedding in 1944: the reception was held in the schoolroom at Bethel, and the guests ate illicit ham with relish.

Dad had a more long-term solution to providing extra rations. He and his friend, Dai the Runner, kept a pig. Now this was definitely not allowed and had to be done surreptitiously. The pig was fed on the scraps of several families and kept up the mountain in an old shed. Dad or Dai would visit her daily to feed her and give her an airing. Eventually her time came and Dad and Dai both went up the peak with the poor old pig to slaughter her. Pigs make a dreadful screaming noise when killed, quite understandably, so it was sensible to get away from civilisation a bit. Having carried out the awful deed, they butchered her on the mountainside and carried the joints of pork down to the village in sacks to be distributed and salted. Dad always loved bacon, which he often cooked in the middle of the night when he was hungry, so I dare say this was the motivation for all the effort.

Dad worked as an expeditor at the steel works, which involved walking around with a clipboard, checking everyone else's work and making sure they had all the raw materials they needed to complete the job. It wasn't a bad job compared with many others, but the shifts were long and often the men did a 'doubler', which kept them on the job for sixteen hours. Added to this, Mum had been forced to give up teaching when I was born. They must



have felt the pinch, but I never remember them grumbling.

<p>First and only official portrait, aged 2</p>

Although I had plenty of cousins around to play with I had an imaginary friend: a girl, whom I named 'Gleen', whom I blamed for everything that went wrong.

And whom I think I really believed in. I would talk to her endlessly about this and that whilst mooching about in the garden or along the Back Road, and I still find it hard to convince myself that she wasn't real. The Back Road was really a lane, not made up by the council, on which everyone threw their ashes from the ranges, to control the mud. This was all very well until you fell over.

The ghastly bits of ash ground themselves into knees and elbows and had to be picked out one at a time. Grandpa was forever cleaning out wounds for me, and binding my skinny joints with long lengths of bandage. He would plaster a piece of lint with pink ointment, Germoline, I think, before he bandaged me up. It was such a relief when he had finished, but in the back of my mind I would already be dreading having the dressing changed. It invariably stuck to the wound and was agony to remove.

I always enjoyed visits to 27 Hillside to see Nana and Grandpa Jones. They took the attitude that I could do no wrong, and allowed me to do as I pleased, within reason. Mum and I would struggle up the path to the top terrace: it was frightfully steep and bordered on the left side by the garden fences of the lower terraces and on the right by open mountainside. The path itself was concrete and always scattered with the droppings of sheep and geese. The sheep were ubiquitous and harmless, their gentle bleating constant. The pollution rendered their fleeces a light brown colour and the high rainfall meant that their under-bellies dripped, but they were friendly and I loved them. It seemed quite right for them to have the freedom of the village, and when the weather was bad they would wait outside the front doors and attempt to effect an entry into the warmer houses.

The geese were a different proposition. They were noisy and vicious and roamed the streets terrorising everyone, like teenage gangs in later decades. One flock

inhabited the lower reaches of Hillside Terrace and would wait for innocent humans to emerge from the top of the lane. You would have to run like mad to make it to my grandparents' front steps ahead of the horrible birds.

Nana Jones scrubbed her outside front steps every morning, and then put down newspaper to protect them from the attentions of visitors. This was as far as her housewifely duties went. She never seemed to clean anything else. Inside Nana's front door was a heavy red velvet curtain, which was always pulled across to protect the inner sanctums from the eyes of customers to the shop. The kitchen was quite big and had a large table in the middle, which was kept constantly laid for a meal. The red velvety cloth was topped with a smaller white one, and both were covered in crumbs; the enamel sink was brown, rather than white, and draped with dish cloths, often slimy with age. It's a miracle they lived to such a wonderful age.

Nana Jones would give me anything to play with. My favourite indoor toy was a block of salt, which Nana would get from the shop, together with a sharp, highly dangerous knife. It was possible to carve all kinds of shapes with this wonderful stuff and then lick the salt from your fingers for hours. The finer dust stayed under fingernails for days. Ripe plums were another delight, and a quite different experience from salt. Then there was the money. I was encouraged to empty the till and count the copper into lovely towers of a shilling each. Silver made pound towers, but the thr'penny bits were best, with

their bronzy colour and straight edges. I used to build whole towns with the money, and I suspect that this childhood attitude to coins has carried over into later life, and accounts for my still casual approach to 'filthy lucre'.

The back garden of Hillside was on two levels. The lower yard was paved and had a green door into the outside and only toilet, but the real point of interest was the stream which ran right through the back yards of the terrace via a specially constructed concrete gully. This had endless possibilities: damming it was best, but caused trouble because of the resulting floods. The stream could also be used as a means of passing messages, but frustratingly, only in one direction. At the end of the yard was a flight of rickety, steep concrete steps up to the little top garden, where Grandpa grew his Dahlias. In earlier days the outhouse at the top had been the dairy, from which my grandfather and father delivered milk by horse and cart to the whole village. The back door of the garden opened straight on to the mountain, Mynydd Carn-y-Cefa.

Like most small children at that time, I spent most of my time pottering about with Mum.

When I was three some kind soul presented me with a toy



39 Cwm Rd, nearly 3

dustpan and brush, a much valued commodity in South Wales, since control of the coal dust was an on-going



challenge. I spent many hours industriously brushing down the back steps until one day I grazed my knuckles on the concrete. One of my earliest clear memories is the pain of this little episode. It was also on my third birthday that Dad and Grandpa Charles gave me my beloved dolls' house, which they had made between them. Dad had wired it and fitted tiny

electric torch bulbs, Mum had made minute curtains, but most fascinating of all was the bathroom. The porcelain lavatory, hand basin and bath were all in one room, upstairs. I had never seen a real bathroom and so was most interested in this unusual feature.

Every third week or so Dad was on the early shift, and he would arrive home in the middle of the day in time for his main meal, which I often helped him to eat, perched on his knee. After dinner Dad and I would walk up the mountain until we came to a bubbling stream, rushing down to the River Ebbw. Dad convinced me that it was

alive with tadpoles, sticklebacks and so on, which I now doubt, since the pollution from industry was so frightful. Nevertheless, we sat beside the stream with nets and make-shift fishing lines, catching nothing, but chatting and looking at our valley. The faint sounds of the machinery would always be heard, interspersed with goods trains chugging to and fro, laden with coal or molten iron ore. Every twenty minutes or so 'the ladle' would empty the ore down the side of one of the growing tips on the lower reaches of the Domen, a spectacular occurrence in daylight but quite breathtaking at night, when the whole valley glowed red, and gradually faded until the ladle tipped again.



Up the mountain with
Dad, watching the
ladle tipping.

8. Upheaval

I loved Waunlwyd and its people, but the plans of adults were about to take a hand. In 1949 Mum and Dad decided to take a train excursion to Weston-super-Mare. Weston was the nearest seaside resort in England and family had made this trip many times, either for the day or for a week's holiday. This time I stayed at home with Nana, and had no feeling of foreboding, but when Mum and Dad came back they announced that they had visited an estate agent's [which I had never heard of] and found a house in the village of Worle, just outside Weston. The house was called 'Windsor' and was big enough to accommodate Nana, Grandpa, Uncle Wyn, Dad, Mum and me. I was too young to have really noticed that Grandpa wasn't well. He had given up work and been told to take it easy, as he had an enlarged heart: for a strong man, who had loved sport all his life, this must have been miserable. Cricket was banned and he was suddenly at home all day with little to do. The air quality was poor in Waunlwyd, whereas Weston was renowned for being 'bracing', so after much discussion the family decided to move.

Weston became the only topic of conversation in a household that never stopped talking. Auntie Hilda, who lived three doors down, and was Nana Charles's younger sister, was dismayed. Nana, Mum and Auntie Hilda examined every aspect of the proposed upheaval, continually reassuring each other that visits would be

frequent, but they must have known it would never be the same again, after all, we popped in and out of each others' houses hourly, exchanging thoughts and gossip.

'May, I think Mrs. 'Endy's 'ad a parcel delivered'.

'Was it for 'er, or Mavis?'

'I don't know. It was awful small writing', or

'Is that Raye Elizabeth I could hear crying? Not ill is she? Give her to me, Betty.

I'll take 'er round for a bit'

Dad's Aunt Edie, who lived next door, was also upset. She and Uncle Bill spoke with feeling about this time for years after. In particular they said that I became really fed up with hearing about Weston and would go next door, to their house, to escape, complaining that

'Weston, Weston, Weston is all they talk about in there'.

Nana and Grandpa Jones felt it most. Uncle Les and Auntie Iris lived in the Midlands and rarely visited, so Nana relied on us. There's no doubt that a lot of people were hurt.

Another problem was work. Grandpa had semi-retired because of his health, but Dad, Wyn and Mum were all intending to look for jobs in Somerset. Wyn and Mum applied for teaching posts, but Dad was not trained for a particular job. In the army he had been communications chap in the Royal Signals, and was a whiz at Morse code, but his job at Richard Thomas and Baldwin was unskilled,

so he had to start again. It was a tremendous risk, but they took it.

In August, Dad, Wyn and Grandpa set off to Weston, taking the heavy furniture and leaving just our personal possessions for later. Grandpa insisted on removing all our coal supplies, so tons of the stuff had to be bagged up and loaded onto the lorry, much to the horror of the removal men. The men of the family were going to prepare the house for our arrival, arranging the furniture and laying the linoleum and carpets. Mum, Nana and I were to follow by train on September 1st, 1949. To a three-year-old child it was great and memorable event. I wore a red kilt, and found the train journey endless, though it could only have been an hour or so from Newport, through the Severn Tunnel, into England. We shared a compartment with a middle aged couple who chatted amiably to Mum and Nana, but I was bored and excited simultaneously and livened things up by standing on my head on the seat showing my knickers to all who cared to look. It was a corridor train, so anyone who passed by had a birds-eye view. I was severely reprimanded.

At long last we arrived at Weston station, and were met by a taxi. Mum, of course, had seen 'Windsor' before but Nana had not, and must have been even more curious than I was. It was jolly trusting of her to move without inspecting the house. I thought of Nana Charles as elderly at that time, but she was only in her early fifties. She was always waited on and treated like a

delicate flower to be preserved. I wish I could get my family to see me in that light.

When the taxi drew up outside the men rushed out to meet us. There was a front garden, tiny, but there.



Dear old
'Windsor'

Low, Somerset stone walls surrounded it and hydrangea bushes grew either side of the bay window. The outside door stood open to show a small square porch and a door with panes of coloured glass that led into the passage. So, this was Weston.

I stood stock-still; a small, dark haired girl with ringlets, trying to decide whether that glass door was friendly. All around me was the chaos of reunion. The grown-ups were thrilled to be together again, and I was left to try to make sense of it all. If we were here for good, where were Waunlwyd and Auntie Hilda and Aunt Edie and Nana and Grandpa Jones? If I closed my eyes, would this 'Windsor' turn back into Cwm Road? I tried it, but it didn't work. Weston was still there and I would

have to get used to the garden and the porch and the front door.

Then they decided to show me around and it was obvious that there was a great deal more to adjust to. It was huge and the passages were dark, and although I grew to love it, I felt very dubious on that first day. Downstairs there were two rooms plus a kitchen and scullery. Mum, Dad and I were to use the front room as a sitting room. Nan, Gramp and Wyn would have the middle room and everyone was to share the kitchen, scullery and outside toilet. The rooms were on a completely different scale from Cwm Road, with deep skirting boards, high ceilings, coving, ornate roses around the light fittings, pretentious fireplaces and tall sash windows in the bays, allowing the light to stream into the rooms.

There were three bedrooms on the first floor: Wyn's was the smallest and overlooked the back garden. Outside his window was a water tank mounted on top of the outside lavatory. The window ledge was low in his room and I loved to sit on it and watch small creatures scooting about on the surface of the dirty, brown water. Nana and Grandpa had the middle room, over their sitting room, and Mum, Dad and I all slept in the big front room. This was the best room in the house. It had two windows, an unheard of luxury, and looked out over Worle High Street. This street was wonderful. There were small local shops of all sorts, a war memorial, fields, farm houses, pubs, cottages, terraced villas [like Windsor], green buses every

ten minutes each way, and gas lights. It felt like Las Vegas, except that I had never heard of it.



High Street,
Worle as it
was in my
childhood

Windsor was a traditional, three-storey, terraced house. At the top of the first flight of stairs was a small half-landing. From here two stairs took you towards the back of the house to Wyn's room and an inside bathroom. At last my dolls' house was explained: bathrooms really existed. I was shocked and horrified to find that there was a toilet indoors. I mentally resolved always to use the outside lavatory, a resolution I soon broke. Back on the half landing, a small flight of five steps led to the bigger bedrooms and yet another flight of stairs. These twisted up to the left, halted for a moment at a landing with a skylight, and then continued up the final four to reveal a door on the right. The attic room was big and L-shaped; a small, square window overlooked first the roof, then the back garden, then the school yard with the biggest conker tree in the world, then the Somerset levels and finally the

Mendip Hills, with Crook Peak peering back interestedly. Along the wall opposite the window ran an old beam, which held up the ceiling, and was full of holes.

'Woodworm, Merv, woodworm', said Grandpa, accusingly. 'I told you I should've looked at the place first'.

It turned out that the previous family had enjoyed a game of darts.

The kitchen, which was communal, soon took over as headquarters again. Luckily, it was big. There was no range, but there was a larder, lined with shelves, a fireplace, a gas cooker and an enamel sink. The dining table was installed and used for most meals, as well as for preparing food, and a small settee and easy chairs provided comfort for those not engaged in household duties - the men. On Mondays this essentially dry room was transformed. Dirty linen from all parts of the house was assembled on the floor, the door to the scullery was made to stand open, and washing commenced. There was no washing machine, of course. I'm not entirely sure how the washing itself was done - I assume Mum and Nana washed by hand in the sink, but the drying was an art form. We possessed a huge, green mangle, and all the wet, newly clean items had to be forced through it. Massive bowls were strategically placed beneath it and sheets, towels, shirts and smalls, all steaming hot were fed to the monster. The wrung-out clothes became flat with well-defined creases, but still much too hot to touch without

pain. Invariably the water went everywhere: some, of course, landed in the bowls, but much of it swam merrily about on the floor, rushing to find the lowest point and form inviting puddles. Nana and Mum, in great aprons, would fight with this flood, sleeves pushed up above their elbows, reminiscing about the good old days, when Gramma Davies sent the washing out to be done. It was into this scene that Mrs. Priddey and Eric first arrived.

9. Eric and so Forth

The Priddeys played a major part in my early childhood. For a start they were large: both Eric and his mother were very overweight. Each section of their bodies seemed to be round, just as Mr. Gradgrind's was square. I was fascinated to notice that even Eric's fingers seemed to be circular and I suspected, with the prejudice of the young, that he would therefore be no use as a friend. Sue Priddey, his mother was equally round and this was reflected in the flat curls all over her head. She was a short, knowing woman with a very good opinion of herself, which my family all felt was unjustified. The Priddeys lived, it seemed, next door but one, and kept a small grocer's shop, where George Priddey, by contrast tall and slim, served ingratiatingly. Sue felt that shop work was way beneath her, and would sometimes stand in the shop regarding the lengthening queue with disdain, but never attempting to help out. Poor old George always spoke to her with reverence and there was never any doubt about who wore the trousers. Eric was three months older than I was and never allowed me to forget it. He had an older brother, Arthur, who was also quite big and lumbering: the family definitely lacked charm.

The arrival of Mrs. Priddey and Eric on washing day sent my mother and Nana into something of a spin. They would much have preferred to be warned and prepared, but as it was they had to make a good

impression on the neighbours through a fog of warm steam and with sleeves pushed up to the elbows 'just like washer women' said Nana Charles, failing to see the humour in this remark. Dad, Grandpa and Wyn had already made the acquaintance of the Priddeys and had told George that our household included a three-year-old girl, so Mrs. Priddey announced that she 'brought Eric round to play with the little girl'. The little girl was not pleased by this presumption and not at all sure how to behave towards this strange fat boy with the pale, flat hair and red legs that bulged out below tight grey trousers. As it turned out Eric was a great help. We were allowed to play together in each other's gardens to begin with, and very soon the back lane was absorbed into our orbit.



Auntie Hylda
pushing me on the
lethal swing, with
the Century Club
and roof of the
Infants' School in
the background

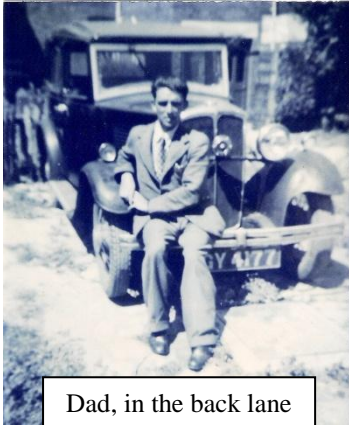
The gardens were, in fact, very small, but had some attractions. When I was quite young Dad erected a swing at the bottom of our little patch. It was a ghastly

thing, made of angle iron and was very rusty, and since it was embedded in solid concrete, very dangerous, but nobody bothered about such things in those days, and I'm sure children grew up with a better sense of self-preservation as a result. I showed off on the swing, and would swing much higher than was safe, glorying in Eric's inability to 'work himself up' effectively. The *double entendre* of this expression was lost on my innocent generation. The garden also had a small patch of grass and some flower borders, which Grampa was supposed to tend. I had my own little piece of earth and began to grow miniature varieties of flowers. I soon learned that Virginian Stock was the best bet. The soil was as bad as Waunlwyd, solid clay, and impossible to break up. It was either in huge, dry lumps or slimy and almost liquid: there were no half measures. Roses seemed to do quite well, however, and Grampa soon resorted to growing nothing else.

Eric's garden contained one wonder - a mature Sycamore tree. There was nothing else, but this tree was a godsend. Mr. Priddey, God bless him, built Eric a tree house, and even constructed some wooden steps to make it easier to climb up. Sadly, he overlooked Eric's size. Eric was the only child in the area who could not climb it. Everyone else could shin up with ease and Eric would be left standing at the base shrieking with frustration. Eventually a ladder was provided, and he could just about struggle up, but we hid the ladder regularly and I'm quite

certain that Eric wished the stupid house had never been built.

The back lane, which served our row of terraced villas, was not made up by the council. The surface was pitted and grass grew along the verge at the bottom of the grey stone walls. At the Greenwood Road end were two puddles, imaginatively named Big Puddle and Little



Dad, in the back lane

Puddle. They hardly ever dried up and the shape of them was so familiar that I can still see them in my mind's eye. 'Meet you at the 'Big Puddle' we would shout to each other daily. The lane ran from Greenwood Road, passed the five houses on our side and stopped at

the end of our garden. It was only wide enough to allow one car to drive down but this was not often a problem in the early years since only the Priddeys had a car. I must have been about six when Dad bought our Standard Ten - GY 4177. It was black, of course, and had a canvass roof, which leaked to begin with. This defect became much worse after a cat jumped onto the roof one night and fell straight through onto the back seat. Mum's rather limited skills as a seamstress were called into service to repair the damage.

Eric and I often played on our own together before we started school, but there were lots of other children around and we soon formed a formidable gang. Between our house and Eric's was a Chemist shop, 'Bessell and Raikes', but behind and above this establishment was living accommodation inhabited by the White family. Shockingly, Mrs. White had been married before. I was never sure what she did with her first husband: I expect the poor man died, but it was never alluded to in nice company. Anyway, there was a son of this first liaison, Ron White, who was three years older than Eric and me, and a little girl, Janet, who was the result of the second marriage. Janet, being younger, timid and unimaginative, was of no interest to us, but Ron was older and therefore, we assumed, knew things. In fact we discovered later on that he was very slow educationally and could hardly read. One day I was sitting outside with a book and he came over to talk.

'You can't read that', he said, aggressively.

'Course I can'

Eventually I was forced to read several pages to him to prove my ability. I was shocked to realise that this big lad couldn't read, and felt awkward with him for a while, as he did with me. Still he could climb right to the top of the conker tree, so was a local hero.

The Whites were always rowing and could be heard from time to time through the wall, so the grown ups claimed. Mr White had an older daughter, Mary, also from

a previous marriage and this complicated family was a source of interested observation over the years.

Next door to us on the other side lived Mrs. Wilmot, an elderly lady, whose family had grown up and gone, but they all visited regularly and I got to know her granddaughters, Val and Gill, quite well. The old lady had a yellow face, very wrinkled, but she was kindly and reminded me of Granny Williwums, whom I missed. The best thing about her was her smelly cabbages, grown in profusion and infested with green caterpillars. Although the smell was disgusting, I found it worthwhile to overcome my dislike of it in order to harvest the poor caterpillars long before they metamorphosised. Jam jars full of them, crawling frantically among the greenery provided, must have died prematurely thanks to my efforts.



Another boy in the lane was Tony Philips, who lived the other side of Eric's. He was a whole year older than I was and I thought he was God's gift, but he was never at all interested in me, worse luck. This photo is of Tony Phillips, Ron White and me inhabiting the garden wall. With so many boys around

I grew up to love climbing trees, digging holes, running wild, jumping over rhynes, sitting on roofs, fishing, building dams and anything else basically in the male preserve. The boys never left me out of anything and only rarely took advantage of my inferior strength. I tore my clothes, skinned my knees, fell in ditches and arrived home covered in mud, and often carrying my skirt, having ripped it clean off the bodice of my frock.

There were some girls who lived in Greenwood Road, but they seemed to have no fun. Jane Richards, Jenny Vaughan and Irene Kingsbury played dolls or school or mothers and fathers. Jane and Jenny both had plaits and were rather prim and proper. Jenny was bossy and liked to organise everyone's games: Jane was covetous and liable to tell enormous fibs and steal bits and pieces. Only Irene was OK. I spent a lot of time avoiding the girls, who would come to see if I could play. Eventually they backed off a bit and I was able to play with the boys without interruption. In fact, all the children in the road became a close knit group over the years and I still see many of them around the town. Eric ended up living at Oldmixon with fourteen cats.

10. School

Children in Worle in the early 1950s often started school well before they were five. The village schools were small by modern standards and pleased to take any local youngsters who could cope with the work. I liked the sound of school, whilst having no clear of idea of what it entailed, and when I said I wanted to go, Mum and Dad went round to the infants' school to enquire. From their point of view it solved a babysitting problem [childcare had not been invented!].

Normally Nana Charles looked after me in the day whilst Mum was at school. I thought it odd that Mum went to school, not fully realising that she had a teaching job at Hutton. She taught the children of Hutton village from the time they started school until they were seven or eight. Dad worked for the G.P.O. as a telephonist, often doing shifts, Uncle Wyn taught at Banwell village school, and Grandpa Charles was park keeper at Ashcombe Park - an idyllic spot, which was to play a large part in all our lives. Meanwhile I was very happy at home with Nana. Mum, however, felt anxious and guilty - not uncommon emotions for her. She worried about my happiness and suspected that Nana found the responsibility too much. School was to be the answer.

I waited with real anticipation for the first day. Eric was not going to start until the following year, which rather depressed me, but I pretended to be superior

about it. The Sunday, before I was to go round the corner the thirty yards to the school gates, seemed endless. It was punctuated only by Sunday school. I spent hours wandering aimlessly around the garden and up and down the back lane. Mr. Priddey was cleaning his car, and in answer to my repeated enquiry, 'Where's Eric, Mr. Priddey?' he must have told me twenty times, with great patience, that Eric was out with his mother.

School was not what I hoped. Nan anxiously dropped me at the gates that first day and I was ushered into the hall of the little board school in Mendip Avenue. The other children were all at least a foot taller than me and looked as if they knew what was what. I had no idea about anything. First we had to skip around the outside of the hall for ages. I dare say Miss Simcocks thought this would wear us out and keep us quiet. It made me very unhappy: I was sure I would wet my knickers if it went on for too long. After a while we were divided up into classes and sent to our rooms. I cried a great deal, not liking the formal atmosphere one little bit. I cried so much that the dreaded Miss Simcocks took me to her study to calm me down. She was very forbidding, and so I got worse, crying with more and more vigour. She gave up trying and simply left me in her study and locked the door.

'I'll open it and let you out when you can be quiet', she announced.

By lunchtime I was still crying, and when Nana came to take me home for dinner she was told that I must

stay for lunch, and she should pick me up at 3.30. By the time I escaped I was distraught, and had wet my knickers. Mum blamed Miss Simcocks for the whole sorry business and I didn't go back to school until Eric and the others started a year later.

The second attempt was more successful. This time I knew several other children, including Eric and Jane Richards, and by this time I could read and write, thanks to Mum. I found the work very easy as a result. I remember Miss Lewis, my first teacher, using flash cards with the letters of the alphabet and pictures of relevant objects. By the time we got to 'L for Lady' each day, I was bored. I learned to do simple sums quickly, too, so the first term was relaxing.

I went home at dinner time and ate with Nana and Grandpa, but after lunch all the first class had to have a REST! Coconut mats were put on the floor and we were expected to lie down on the prickly things and sleep. It was torture. I was pricked to death and hated every minute of it. Playtime was more fun, except that the boys would not play with me in school - too embarrassing - so I had to play girls' games. Mothers and



fathers, teachers, and a whole range of tedious pastimes were the order of the day.

Things went down hill further when Miss Rotten Simcocks decided to have a reshuffle. She put me and three boys straight up to the top class. Leeson Bradley, Michael Reynolds, Andy Shaw and I were moved at Easter, and suddenly I was the only five year old girl in a class full of giants. It was miserable. The work was all right, but the older children resented our presence. The three boys stuck together and survived quite well, and actually they were quite good to me, but I felt lonely and the friends I had left behind in the first class were as resentful as the older ones. I stayed in that top class with Miss Rotten Simcocks for three years. Each year I would just be making friends with people and they would be moved up to the junior school on the hill. I was too young to go, so I had to stay behind, do all the work again, and try to make new friends. Finally my own class caught up with me. By now I could do the work standing on my head, so I talked all day, distracted everyone else, became less and less popular with Madam Simcocks, and was actually given fifty lines to write 'I must not talk in class'. Mum was livid that a seven-year-old should have been given lines, and the teacher in her took over. She took Miss Simcocks to task, and my relationship with the head mistress never recovered from this.

I was thankful when I could go up to St. Martin's Junior School, which was at the top of Hill Road, next to

the Church. The building now houses an infants' school, and is called 'Hillside'. In 1953, when I went up, there were four classes in the school, one for each year, with about 35 children in each class, so there were only about 140 pupils altogether. We all lived close to each other and all knew each other's families. It was a lovely, cosy school and I adored it. Suddenly I was given new work to do which made me think again. Maths was lovely: knitting was a disaster.

There were two girls in my class who soon became close friends of mine. Kaye Lovell lived next door to the school. Her dad kept a market garden and was a real Somerset chap. Kaye had very dark hair and vivid blue eyes and wonderful sticky-out ears, which held her hair back from her face very efficiently. She was very bright, energetic and a pure tomboy - great. Mim [Marion] Williams lived in 'The Roses', a stone cottage in the High Street. Mim's round, red face was topped by very thin, mousy hair that was always full of dandruff. She was also a bright tomboy and talked like an express train, hardly opening her mouth. Some people never learned to understand her. The three of us loved each other's competition at school and worked ourselves silly to be top of the class in the termly examinations, each winning in turn. We were invariable the first three in the class.

Terry Jones came to the school when I had been there a year, and was installed as teacher of the second class - ours. I loved Terry. For a start he had a

Welsh accent which made me feel at home with him. I told him that my family were Welsh - I'm sure he could



tell anyway, since I still had an accent at this time - and he popped down to introduce himself to Mum and Dad. He and his wife soon became 'Uncle Terry and Auntie Kaye' and their son, another Terry, an adopted cousin. Young Terry was a couple of years younger than I was, but something of a bully. I

was glad I was older.

Terry taught my class for two happy years, and I think I learned 50% of everything I knew from that time. We worked like Trojans in the mornings and were encouraged to allow our imaginations to run wild after dinner, writing and performing plays, learning songs, creating nature books and reading to ourselves for hours. I loved it all.



Terry Jones Worle Recreation ground with l. to r. Nancy Cox, Sue Williams, Les Middleton, Mike Stanton, Eric Priddey, Roger Thorne and Brian Phillips.

11. Happy Days

My junior school days from seven to eleven were the happiest of my childhood. Everything was lovely. I was happy and successful at school, had loads of friends and everything was hunky-dory at home.

Just before my seventh birthday there was a family development. Uncle Wyn had always been a devil for the girls. Several long standing relationships had gone by the board and he had been engaged to a girl called Dot for some time. Suddenly the engagement was broken. Dot told Mum that she had seen Wyn around the town with 'a cow-eyed girl'. Added to this Mum had been expected, on one occasion, to hold the fort when Dot called at the front door, whilst Wyn escaped through the back lane. Nana Charles became fed up with his shenanigans and told him not to bring any more girls home until he was SERIOUS about them. Things went quiet for a while, and then at Christmas time in 1952 Wyn dropped a bombshell.

'Mam, can you stand a shock?' was his opener.

'Getting married, are you Wyn?' My unflappable Grandmother said.

What nobody was prepared for was the speed of the thing. Wyn brought his girl home. June Wetten was twenty-one, seven years younger than Wyn, and a typical English girl from Bath. She taught at the same school as him and lived in a flat in the Boulevard with some friends, a very modern arrangement in those days. June and Wyn

announced that they intended to wed in February. We had five week's notice. Mr and Mrs Wetten came over from Bath to meet my grandparents. All four of them were shocked by the speed of events, and Mr and Mrs Wetten suspected that June was pregnant. She wasn't. They were just eager.

The wedding took place in Bath, and I was chief bridesmaid. With immaculate timing my two front teeth dropped out the day before the wedding, but my red velvet dress was gorgeous and I loved the whole thing. Dad was best man, and charged with keeping control of Wyn. The business was nearly a complete failure.

First my mother left my dress behind and someone had to be dispatched back to Weston to retrieve it. When



we got to the Church there was no sign of Wyn and Dad, who should have arrived first. Nana and Grandpa were getting nervous: they thought Wyn

had backed out at the last minute. June and her father arrived. Still no groom. Off she went to drive around the block. Still no Wyn. I stood in the porch with Elizabeth

Crabbe, the other bridesmaid, and our mothers, watching the mounting panic with deep interest, and secretly hoping that Wyn had run off [I always loved a crisis]. After half an hour my mother really began to panic. After all her husband was missing as well, and Mrs Wetten was saying 'I told you so' to all her relations.

'Poor June', whispered the guests.

'I'll kill the little bugger', said Grandpa Charles.

'Oh, Betty!' said my Grandmother.

'What the hell is Merv doing?' said Mum.

Wyn and Dad hared in 45 minutes late. No one had sent a car for them, and they were forced to run across Bath in the Saturday traffic. Panic over.

The wedding changed our household, of course. I lost Wyn's day-to-day company, but gained June. They lived in a flat at Locking and I visited often, so it was fine. It also meant that we could reorganise the house. Wyn's bedroom was converted into a kitchen for Mum, Dad and me and the attic was made into a bedroom for me. Up until this time I slept in Mum and Dad's room.

My attic bedroom was a haven from the time I was seven until I married, with only one short break. The room began as an L shape, but Dad 'boxed off' the foot of the L - a manoeuvre much admired by Mum and Nana. In fact it was done with wooden frames and hardboard, and a door was inserted to allow access to the new Box Room.

The beam along the wall opposite the window became a long bookshelf and housed my complete sets of

'Famous Five', 'Chalet School', 'La Rochelle' and 'Bobsey Twins'. I had a double bed, with a feather mattress - a wonderful luxury - and my own bedroom suite with a little wardrobe, chest of drawers and dressing table. The lino was yellow and I chose wallpaper with a pale yellow background and pictures of the months of the year. I can still visualise some of the pictures. August was my favourite, showing a small girl and boy paddling at the edge of the sea. The only drawback of the room was my fear of the dark. Although I loved having my own staircase that no one else needed to use, it was rather isolated, and images of murderers, witches and the like dogged my nights, so that I would shout down for 'a glass of water' every so often, until Dad got cross and told me off.

I was happily settled into my new room in time for the big event of 1953, the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. There had been great sadness in the house the year before when *George IV* died. We had all held the King and Queen in great affection and taken an interest in the Royal Family's doings. The King's speech, broadcast on the radio on Christmas Day, was a focal point of the celebrations, and was always preceded by a toast to 'absent friends'. The last time we heard the King was in 1951. I remember Nana's anxiety because he sounded so ill. Two months later he died, and we had a new Queen.

By the middle of 1953 the country was recovering from its grief and people were looking forward to the new Elizabethan Age. For the first time the ceremony would

be shown live on television, and aware of this novelty, Nana Charles began a campaign to install a set in her sitting room.

'It would be lovely for your poor Grandfather to watch the cricket', she remarked regularly.

Her drip, drip tactics eventually wore Mum and Dad down and they agreed to pay for a set over which they would have little control. The twelve-inch box and grainy picture opened a window on a whole new world. At first I was not impressed, much preferring my comics, the radio and playing with friends, and I deeply resented Eric disappearing at 5 o'clock each day to 'watch the stars' which circled the aerial of Alexandra Palace and heralded Children's Hour each day. But soon I was sucked in, especially loving 'What's my Line', which the whole family watched at 7.30 on Sunday evenings. Mum used this magic programme as a threat to keep me in line.

One Sunday I started to sneeze madly half way through dinner, and was accused of having a cold. I indignantly denied it.

'It's not a cold, I've got a button up my nose', I announced.

This was true. My shoes were secured by small black and silver buttons, and during a boring lesson on Friday I had entertained myself by twiddling the button on my right shoe. Inevitably, it came off in my hand. I knew I would lose it unless I put it in safekeeping, and with the sublime logic of childhood decided that the safest

place was up my nose. Having put it safely away, I forgot about it -until the sneezing fit. Once Mum and Dad were convinced that I was telling the truth, they panicked. Dad grabbed me and threw me on the carpet; Mum approached me with a metal implement; I screamed the place down. I could not believe this over-reaction to a simple statement.

'IT 'LL COME DOWN ON IT'S OWN', I hollered.

Soon the whole family was in the room, interfering with my nose. The button was retrieved and I was in deep disgrace for the rest of the day. What an injustice. I was only trying not to lose the thing.

I was plunged into deeper trouble later, when I tipped a bowl of warm, soapy water all over the carpet in the front room. That evening 'What's my Line' was banned. I went to bed and could hear the music at the beginning of the programme, and the family chatting about Lady Isabel Barnett's dress. Half way through the programme Dad appeared at my bedroom door.

'Come on, kid. You'll be just in time for the celebrity spot'. And I was saved from misery.

As the Coronation approached everyone made plans. The streets were hung with bunting - red, white and blue, of course- and a huge party was planned to take place in Tripp's Field. A marquee was erected and swingboats and stalls sprung up. About a week before the big day the village had its annual Whitsun Monday Carnival. The whole theme was patriotic and everyone wore the national colours. Union Flags were everywhere. The carnival queen

was chosen and it was decided that a little girl, dressed in white, should sit on each corner of the float. I sat on the back left corner, Irene Kingsbury on the back right; Diane Jeeps and Janet Whitely were on the front corners. We thought we were princesses.



Mum and Dad decided to go to London with Lil and Jim Harris to watch the coronation procession. As usual I stayed home with Nana and Grandpa! In fact I had a good time. In the morning Nana's friends started to arrive and Nan was able to do her own queenly bit, since she had a TELEVISION. It poured with rain in London, and Mum and Dad were soaked, sleeping on the pavement - how daft! Nan, Gramp and I were warm and happy - and had a better view. When the impressive ceremony was over we all went to the fair in the field.

I went on the swing boats and wandered around the stalls with Nan, chatting to all and sundry and buying bits of red, white and blue. Finally, all the children were given tea in the huge tent, with relations standing behind them to keep them in order. A cheerful chap led the community singing, and local Somersetshire folk, who had never been near the Capital City in their lives, sang 'Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner'

That night, very late, Mum and Dad came back, bringing with them a lovely replica of the Coronation Coach, which I did not appreciate, and subsequently lost, and two soggy periscopes, which I loved and treasured for ages.

Two weeks later Dad took Nana and me to London to see the Coronation lights. We had a whale of a time, and the weather was glorious. I think that was the first time I saw our Capital City.

12. Out to Play

Life for a child in the village of Worle in the 1950s was exciting, parochial and safe. Our parents did not lose sleep over thoughts of us being molested. Every child in the vicinity knew that the only reputed *oddball* in the area was Wilf, and would taunt the poor little chap and run like mad, yelling loudly. One incident was reported in about 1960, but not confirmed. The Horticultural Society held a flower show every August and Wilf approached a little girl behind the beer tent. He offered her ten shillings to keep her mouth shut. The sensible lass took the money and ran straight round to the front to shout the information to the whole of Worle.

Children were more likely to be in danger from their own recklessness than anything else, and so our parents were able to allow us freedom to roam happily. Kaye, Mim and I had a wonderful time. As Kaye remarked, at my 50th birthday party, we laughed, ran, sang and climbed our way through childhood.

My first introduction to the wider world of play was through the boys and girls in the lane and in Greenwood Road. A crowd of about twelve of us set off each summer evening to Tripp's Field, which could be approached via a stile opposite the Golden Lion pub. The Tripp family owned the local farm and actually had four fields, each one separated from the others by a rhyne [the Somerset name for a drainage ditch] and joined by a

little stone-built, arched bridge. They kept dairy cows and sheep, and grew cider apples. The gang would stream over the stile into the first field, shouting to the cows by name as we passed, race across the first bridge and arrive at the first destination, the **hollow oak**. This was actually a beech tree, but we weren't bothered by such detail. There was a huge hole in the side of the old tree, and it was completely hollow with strategically placed knobs and dips all the way up the inside to aid the climbing process. We could all fit into its wide branches, and the only child for miles who could not climb it was ERIC, who would stand at the bottom, bleating. I feel really sorrow for him now, but I didn't then.

Two more bridges over two more rhynes took us into the old orchard. One of the biggest trees had fallen, but its roots were still in the ground, so that it didn't die. It was much more useful on its side and was wonderful to climb about on. It stayed there for four or five years. Poor Farmer Tripp tried to clear it several times, but we all pleaded and badgered him, and he kept giving in. Eventually, one summer evening, he sneaked out there late and sawed it up. The next day it was just a pile of logs and we were all heartbroken.

At the bottom of Greenwood Road was Our Rhyne, where we played for some part of most days. There was a goodly patch of waste ground adjacent to it and much fun to be had. The most favoured game was bridge building, and we became very proficient at it, constructing

effective roadways to the old orchard. Unfortunately the bridges also impeded the flow of the water and invariably flooded the nearest garden, belonging to Jenny Vaughan [now Gosden] and her increasingly bad-tempered father. Mr. Vaughan would call in the Council, who would excavate the Rhyne again, making the sides as sheer as possible. As soon as they departed we would rush back down, dig out steps and start again.

I walked to the Junior School through the Churchyard with Mim, and we knew every gravestone, especially those of the little children. Nan and Gramp Charles are buried there, now, at the top of the steps on the right. A white goat lived at the bottom of the Churchyard among the graves, and we always took paper and rubbish for her to eat, before running up for a quick game of Hide and Seek in the shrubs at the top. Mim had an older brother, Maurice Williams. A funny lad was Maurice. He wore thick glasses and had slicked back hair



and big feet, but was a really good egg for all that. Kaye, Mim, Maurice, Mike Lovell and I often went 'up the hill' after school. Worlebury Hill was not **all** golf course in those days, and the woods and open hillside were good play areas. We had dozens of dens, ropes swinging from the trees and even an old abandoned shed. Everyone for miles knew about these glories, but we thought they were just ours.

Along the hill towards Weston was The Cliff, which was just that, with old ivy growing up the side, several feet thick. It was great to climb - once you fought your way through the brambles at the bottom. Easier far to walk along to the top and climb down, but not half as satisfying.

Children of all generations have crazes. We went through marbles, skipping, conkers and so on, all in their seasons, but had other enthusiasms as well. Newts were a great favourite for a year or so, and easily come by in the rhynes. A tank in Eric's garage housed them, and the sticklebacks, which I preferred. We looked after them quite well, adding a quantity of fresh rhyne water, with its content of plankton each day.

Quite suddenly newts became old hat, and we moved on to horses. There was a riding school on the hill and the horses wandered pretty freely. It was easy to catch them and ride around bareback. We built low fences and jumped them, endangering life and limb. Much later we had some riding lessons, but long before this Mim and I

devised a game that satisfied our horse lust. We ran an imaginary riding stable, used old shoe boxes to create an enormous filing system in which we stored details of the imaginary horses and clients. Each night we would fill in the cards, and decide which horses still needed exercise. Then we set off around the village at a canter. Everyone was used to this odd behaviour and no one said anything. I wonder what happened to all those files and things. It was jolly good practice for Mim: she runs Uphill Riding Stables now.

Bicycles were important to our freedom. I had my one-and-only bike when I was nine. Dad bought it at Weaden's corner shop, second hand. I could already ride: Ron White and Roger Cumine taught me when I was about six. We often rode to Sandbay to play on the beach, or to Wick St. Lawrence, where there was a lovely little watermill by the river. It was quite usual for me to get home covered in mud, and once or twice I tore the skirt off my dress and had to carry it back. Mum was very good about these sorts of things.

13. Chapel

When we moved to Weston almost the first challenge for Mum and Nana was finding a suitable place to worship. Elementary research suggested that the only Non-Conformist Chapel in walking distance was the Methodist Chapel - Ebenezer - in Lawrence Road. This was by no means ideal, since Dad was Baptist and Mum, Nana and Grandpa were Congregationalist. Still, it was practical to attend locally, so Mum and Nana took me along to test the water.

They were shocked to find a small congregation, no choir, no youth club, no Sunday School and a general air of resignation. There was a lady's fellowship afternoon on Wednesdays and a Prayer Meeting on Thursday evenings, but apart from the Sunday Services, that was it. The family set about livening the place up. Nana attended everything suitable to a woman of her mature years [52] and Mum started a Sunday School [so that I could go] and a choir [so that she could sing]. Dad started a Youth Club so that he could play. Chapel was soon my second home. We went two or three times on Sundays, taking it in turns to stay home to cook lunch, and one or other of us was there almost every weekday. I enjoyed it all and made a completely different set of friends who attended regularly with me.

Diane Blizzard, Martin Dimond, Irene Kingsbury and I were stalwarts. We all sang in the choir and all ended up teaching Sunday School classes. I particularly

liked the predictability of the festivals and the joy of singing hymns. Harvest Festival was best of all: the Chapel was decked out on the Saturday, a process that took all day. Neathways - the local bakers - provided a huge loaf, Tripps gave a sheaf of corn, Mary Blake, a huge smelly woman, gave masses of flowers and her sister arranged them. There was fruit everywhere, and it smelled heavenly. The hymns were uplifting. I **'ploughed the fields and scattered'** with gusto.

On New Year's Eve there was Watch Night Service at midnight, preceded by a SOCIAL. Methodists are teetotal, so there was only soft drink, and the games were tame by modern standards, involving passing balloons between people in odd ways and so on, but it was great fun, and Dad was always the life and soul of the party, making Mum nervous lest he should say something risqué. One evening a game was played in which solutions had to be found to strange problems. Dad's problem was escaping from a mad charging elephant, angry because she thought her calf was threatened. His eyes twinkled.

'Call up the nearest bull elephant!' he shouted, laughing.

Mother all but died of embarrassment, but all the old spinsters loved him and were grateful for this glimpse of male naughtiness.

Chapel anniversaries and Sunday School anniversaries were great occasions. Everyone had to do their party piece and Mum always taught me a new song or

a poem to recite. I began quite tentatively as a youngster, but became blasé by the time I was in my teens. When I was fourteen, Dad organised a United Youth Service for the whole town, and informed me that I could do the sermon. He said this as if I ought to be pleased. It took me about two weeks to write the wretched thing, and only ten minutes to deliver it, but once my knees stopped knocking I quite enjoyed it. I still have the outline somewhere. After that I was caught for several more sermons over a couple of years.



Dad in the
pulpit at the
United Youth
Service

On these special occasions, as well as at Easter and Christmas, the choir sang a special hymn or an anthem, which Mum taught us. Audrey Milliner was the organist. She was a straight-haired, sour-faced spinster of about forty, but was interesting because she drank! - usually in the Lamb Inn, opposite her little house in Lawrence Road. She often turned up to play, tipsy. On one notable occasion she forgot Irene Kingsbury's wedding, and had to

be dragged out of the pub by Irene's brother, Michael. She was much the worse for wear and Irene's wedding was hugely enhanced by her imaginative renditions.

The chapel people were very *local*, especially in their speech. George Fry, who gave the notices each Sunday, was a particular joy. Not only did he speak very broad Somerset, but he stammered and dribbled. This was a riveting combination, which insured that everyone paid attention, however boring the content of his announcements. Lil and Jim Harris were also interesting. Lil was George Fry's sister, and her husband, Jim, was the most Somerset man I knew. Lil was desperate for a child, and would talk to Mum about this problem. In the end Mum and Dad took her to Bristol to see a specialist, and a little later she had a baby son, Martin, who unnerved her from the start. Poor Lil completely cracked up by the time he was about eight, and died very young. A few years later Jim was captured by Nancy Hancock, Mum's cleaning lady.

When we were about twelve, Diane, Martin, Irene and I had confirmation classes and became full members of the church. Diane remained very devout, and after a disastrous first marriage, wed an elderly lay preacher.

14. **Busy, Busy, Busy**

Apart from home, Chapel, school and play, Mum and Dad thought I had too much time on my hands, so a structured programme of activity was devised to ensure that I had little time for mischief. [I still managed to get up to plenty of wickedness] Welsh families are generally musical and ours was no exception. Grandpa Jones played his mandolin with fervour; Mum played the piano and sang; Dad lost his drums and bought a small electric organ to play instead of piano; Grandpa Charles had a superb tenor voice that made your spine go gooey. Obviously, Raye Elizabeth would have to learn to play *something*. Piano was decided upon. Accordingly I was dispatched to the home of Miss Pugsley in Church Road for lessons every Friday at a time when ALL my friends were watching 'The Lone Ranger' on television.

Miss Pugsley was about thirty, I suppose, but was a bad-tempered diabetic and seemed much older than my mother, who was her contemporary. Her old mother lived with her and greeted the pupils at the bungalow door. The piano was in the front room and I hated those lessons from the start. Firstly, she would not allow any levity or any chance to show off what I could already play. Uncle Wyn had shown me the basics in preparation for the first lesson and I was proud of my ability to play scales proficiently. Miss Pugsley was not impressed. She had set ideas about what she expected and stuck rigidly to them. Any flair I might have had was quickly killed off and I only

ever played mechanically, taking grades I and II of the practical examinations and I, II and III of the theory.

I had a record book in which my progress was recorded each week. Mum had to enter my practice times in the book for Miss Pugsley's approval. This led to battles every day over how long I had to do before I could go and play. An hour was expected, but forty minutes seemed to be the minimum I could get away with. Miss Pugsley would comment on my progress in the dreaded blue book, and write messages to Mum about what I needed to practice most during the week. After about four years of this regime I became reasonably proficient and could read music well enough. My party piece was *Allegro Vivace*, a fast moving, complicated thing that I enjoyed more than most of the dull stuff I had to master. Eric had lessons with a different teacher, and was held up by Mrs Priddey as a virtuoso. She was rather upset to discover that we were learning *Allegro Vivace* at the same time, thereby suggesting that I was as good as he was. So cross and disbelieving was she that she kidnapped me one morning while I was playing in the lane and made me go in to demonstrate the piece. I was furious and nervous, but felt I had to comply. Eric was gutted when I could play it. His lack of ability in other areas of life made his piano prowess important to him and his bedroom was hung with his piano certificates, framed. I was so livid about the *Allegro Vivace* thing that I climbed up his sycamore tree, over the kitchen roof and in through his bedroom window

whilst his family were all out one Sunday, and proceeded to turn all his certificates to the wall. That evening, when they returned, Mrs Priddey marched round to Mum and accused me of the evil dead. I was sleeping on the sitting room sofa [visitors in my bed as usual] and was to woken to defend myself. I denied it with vigour and never confessed.

On another occasion Eric was taunting me:

'Skinny Jones, skinny bones'

'I'd rather be skinny than fat, fat, fat'.

This exchange deteriorated into serious anger, until I announced that I would prove to him how fat he was by biting his stomach. I ran at him full tilt and sank my teeth into him with great success, leaving behind unmistakable tooth marks with a huge gap between the two front teeth. I was kept in for two weeks.

The best thing about piano lessons was Chris Shrapnell, a fair-haired, talented lad about a year older than I was. He had the lesson before me and was much the best of Miss Pugsley's pupils. He was also a darling, and I looked forward to hearing him from way down the road, making owl noises in the bushes in Miss Pugsley's front garden. Chris and I became great friends right through our teens, going dancing together, and attending Motor Club rallies and dances regularly. He played the guitar as well as the piano, and was a great companion.

Mum and Dad did not see piano lessons as adequate cultural activity and soon added ballroom dancing classes

on Saturday mornings to the itinerary. Annette Bond, a pleasant but ponderous girl in my class at school, was going to Trevor Schofield for lessons every week. Trevor Schofield was quietly famous at the time, appearing regularly as a judge on 'Come Dancing', the BBC's popular programme. Dad knew Annette's parents and arranged for me to go with her. I had lessons on and off for years and took some medals successfully. Everyone could waltz, foxtrot and quickstep then - it was a necessary social skill and I'm glad I learned. Latin-American was becoming popular, too, and we learned the new dances, as well as the good old Valetta and Gay Gordons.

Mum undertook my elocution lessons herself. Although she sounded quite Welsh, she could easily speak received English if she tried and was very good at pronunciation and expression.

The local Churches in Weston held an annual Eisteddfod and Mum liked me to show off my talents. I was always encouraged to believe I could do anything if I tried. One year there was to be a recitation item and a piano item at the Eisteddfod, and Mum wanted me to enter both. I agreed to the recitation but refused to enter the piano competition - I hated playing in public. The piece we all had to recite was the 23rd Psalm, so at least I didn't have to learn it. It was all too familiar. Mum spent ages coaching me and I won quite easily. Then the bombshell fell. There was only one entry for the piano class - Martin Dimond - and Mum in her wisdom volunteered me to play 'to

make a contest of it'. I was marched straight from my triumph in the recital to the piano and presented with a piece of music I hadn't practised. I struggled through it and was second! I never let Mum forget it.

As a girl Mum had always wanted to be Girl Guide, but there were no Guide Companies in Waunlwyd, so she was thwarted. Worle, however, had Brownies and Guides, so I was sent along to the former when I was seven and finally left the latter when I was sixteen. I hated it, but never thought to say so. 'Brown Owl' was Miss Nora Jeffreys, one of three sisters deeply immersed in the movement; 'Tawny Owl' was Kaye Smart, who later became my mother-in-law. I found Brownies overwhelming and silly. I did not believe in fairies, elves or pixies and I deeply resented being told that I was to be a gnome. The uniform was ghastly; we had to polish badges; berets were compulsory and worst of all we had to learn to do various tasks in order to earn badges. To cap it all we then had to sew the wretched badges onto our uniforms.

Some of the girls loved it, of course, and went on happily to be Daffodils, Snowdrops, Bluebells under the eye of Jill Blakeman, the local Guide Captain, but I hated it all and longed for it to be over, so that I could buy my thr'penny packet of chips at Boroughs' Fish and Chip Shop in Hill Road, and go home.

On top of attending Guides on Friday evenings, immediately after my piano lesson, I went on two Guide camps and was put off camping for life. I was twelve

when I went on my first camp, somewhere near Wellington, I think. Before this I had only been away from home without Mum and Dad to stay with family, so I was awfully homesick. It rained furiously all the time and we were all miserably soaked. The latrines [ghastly smelly things] flooded, and I started my first period. Mum had tried to explain this business to me, but I wasn't really interested, so took little notice. I suffered miserably for the last three days and shouted at poor Mum when I finally got home.



Me, on the far right, trying to look sultry. The two boys were from a scout group, camping nearby. The girls were all local guides. Taken in Margaret Humphries' home – Greenwood Cottages, where Somerfield now stands.

15. Holidays

If Mum and Dad liked us all to have a busy life, they were also keen that we should play hard, and happy holidays were at least annual events. We never went abroad: people rarely did when I was young, and Dad felt he had seen enough of other countries in the Second World War. But from the time we moved to Weston we had a summer holiday and 'went home' two or three times a year to stay with Nana and Grandpa Jones at Hillside Terrace.

I greatly enjoyed these visits to Waunlwyd. Once Dad took possession of the Standard 10 we were able to drive there, or most of the way. Before the first Severn Bridge was built there was something of a dilemma: to drive around Gloucester or to catch the ferry at Severn Beach. The great decision depended upon the tides. If the tides were wrong we would trundle right up around Gloucester to get to a place we could virtually see by standing on the sea front in Weston; if the tides were right we would head for Severn Beach and join the queue of cars waiting to drive on to one of the two ferry boats that plied their trade on a daily basis, weather permitting. The Standard 10 was not reliable. It was prone to overheating, and vast containers of water had to be taken on the journey to keep it going. Stopping and starting in the ferry queue was the worst situation for the car and we always broke down. People waiting behind would either sympathise with our plight or blow their horns crossly.

Dad would smile benignly, unmoved, and Mum and I [and sometimes Nana and Grandpa Charles] would cringe. The crossing, when we eventually pushed the car aboard, took about half an hour, and gave the car time to recover - this was Dad's theory, and did not always work.

Later Dad left his job, by this time with Blundells, a tally firm, which sold a variety of goods door-to-door and collected the money weekly. Dad had been good at this odd pastime and decided to leave in order to set up on his own - a long-held ambition. Mum backed him up, and supported us all while he built the business up. One result of this departure was the acquisition of Bedford Dormobile van. This allowed Dad to carry much more stock, and was more reliable than the Standard, so holiday travel became less painful.

One of the best times to go HOME to Waunlwyd was Whitsun. On Whit-Monday the whole town of Ebbw Vale, and all the surrounding villages turned out Chapel by Chapel for the March Out. Each Chapel [there was only one church in whole area, and four Chapels just in Waunlwyd] chose an appropriate hymn to sing on the march, and someone was elected to carry the Chapel banner at the head of the congregation. I marched up to Ebbw Vale with Bethal, and back down the valley with Caersalom, where the best tea was to be had afterwards. This was tactful, since I went part of the way with Mum's Chapel and part with Dad's.



Whitsun Monday March-out. Early 1950s. The congregation of Bethel Congregational Chapel, marching up Cwm Road towards Ebbw Vale. The houses in the background are the cellar side houses, now demolished. The gratings in the pavements provided light in the basement. Many of my family can be seen. I was marching with the children at the back. Tradition demanded that the men were in front, then the women, then the children

1. Anne Charles 2. Hilda Williams, nee Davies 3. Betty Jones, Nee Charles
4. May Charles, nee Davies, 5. Norman Charles, 6. Seaward Davies, 7. Les Williams

Aunty Hilda generally organised the singing for Bethal, and liked to use *Gaily We March Along* as the hymn. The entire congregation would turn out, almost all the Charles's and Davies's, and would sing in four part harmony for the whole three miles to Ebbw Vale. The men linked arms in the front lines of marchers to signify solidarity, and were followed by the women. Then the children brought up the

rear. The next Chapel would follow behind with their banner and a different hymn. Aunty Hilda would be at the front, behind our banner, toes turned out, baton in hand, as happy as a cricket, bellowing forth in her strong soprano. Never was the coming of the Holy Ghost celebrated with such vigour.

Grandpa Jones was Senior Deacon of Caersalom Chapel, and Superintendent of the Sunday School. On Sunday afternoons he would set off around the village, knocking on the doors of any absentees from classes, inquiring after their health and well-being. I would go with him when I was staying, and he would introduce me proudly, and point out that I went to Sunday School, even though I was on holiday. Actually, I wasn't given a choice.



Jill Rendall and me in HillsideTerrace

I felt just as at home in Waunlwyd as in Worle. [Have you noticed that really good places always start with a W?] Plenty of my cousins still lived there, and I had several friends as well. Robert Charles was my second cousin and David Harris was my third cousin, but we valued the relationship, however distant. Both of these boys were a year older than I was, and, when I was in Waunlwyd, replaced Eric, Tony and Co. They were, if anything, naughtier than the Worle boys were. Robert, in particular, was wicked, and led me into scrapes regularly. We nearly killed ourselves once or twice playing up by the tip behind Nana Jones's. Sometimes we took Jill Rendall with us. Jill lived in Hillside Terrace, and was my best girl friend in Waunlwyd. She was not so adventurous as I was, but could be persuaded if we tried hard enough. She always had a sense of responsibility and grew up to be a district nurse.

My bedroom in Nana's had been my Dad's room when he was small, and had the same wallpaper still hanging on by a thread. I helped it off by picking the edges as I lay in the little single bed, watching the ladle tipping on the Domes opposite.

Much of our time on these holidays was spent visiting relations. Aunty Edie and Uncle Bill had moved to a house backing onto the canal in Govilon. The Jennings [Iris Jones's parents] lived next door to them, and often when we visited Govilon, Uncle Les, Aunty Iris, Hugh and Angela would be there as well. Occasionally they would

come to Nana and Grandpa Jones's for tea. Angela attended a boarding school, but Hugh had refused to go, so he was with them much more often and I knew him better.

There was no better feeling in the world than running around Waunlwyd, knowing who lived in almost every house, and being related to most of them. The freedom was amazing, although in reality, everyone knew just what you were up to, and with whom, so you were quite safe. I could never make up my mind what I liked more - going 'home' to Waunlwyd, or going 'home' to Worle.



This picture was taken on the day that Waunlwyd came to Worle by coach to see where we had all landed and to inspect the accommodation before coming to stay for weeks on end every year.

Seaside holidays were a major feature of life and this affected us in two ways. Firstly our Welsh relations used our house in Weston as a holiday base. Auntie Hilda and Uncle Les stayed twice a year, as did Nana and Grandpa Jones. Other relations attended irregularly. My bed was in great demand. Mum and Dad cooked, cleaned and carted them all about in the car with a good grace, and I expect at considerable expense. At Christmas everyone came and goodness knows where they slept, but I received loads of presents, being the only child, and loved it.

Our own seaside holidays started at home. Every evening in Summer we would go to the beach, and, tides permitting, Dad and I would play in the sea for hours,



while Mum, who hated the water, sat in the car knitting and reading. We would stay in the water until I was blue with cold and could stand no more. Neither of us was a good swimmer, but we were good players and would dive through the waves enthusiastically. Dad was also brilliant at sand sculpture. His *piece de resistance* was a bear with huge paws and claws. This massive undertaking was big enough for six children to sit on and always attracted

children from all around. It was much better than the castles other people made. Good old Dad.

Other holidays were spent in Bournemouth, Teignmouth, Weymouth, Exmouth - every *mouth* imaginable. We must have been very estuarial. The best place of all, though, was St. Ives. Caravan holidays at Ayres Caravan Park above Porthmeor Beach were idyllic. The surf and sand were gorgeous, and Dad and I got in and out of the water all day, while Mum sat in the sun chatting to friends and, inevitably, knitting. We often went on



Outside the beach tent in St. Ives

holiday in company with friends, and always had a wonderful time. What a good thing it was that thin ozone layers were unheard of - Dad and I were madly tanned, always.

The journey to St. Ives was treated as part of the holiday, which was just as well, since it sometimes took as much as ten hours to get there before the motorways were built.

'Off to go then, kid', Dad would grin.

'Merv, Merv, there's the sea'

No one listening would have guessed that we lived by it.

16. Can You Keep a Secret?

Nothing stays the same forever, and by 1957 the adults, again unbeknown to me, were plotting.

Some changes were inevitable, and all my school friends, especially Mim, Kaye and I, were only too well aware of the impending move to another school. In February, after four years of being top of the class in turn, the three of us, together with the rest of the class, faced our Scholarship Examinations. We didn't mind the actual examination: it was the change of school that was the trouble. By this time our gang were kings and queens of the roost at school. Roger Thorn [whom I secretly liked], Mike Stanton [Kaye's heartthrob], Brian Philips, Mim, Kaye and I did not want to be split up, but the only way to stay together was unthinkable: fail the Eleven Plus.

The headmaster, Les Bull, taught us. He loved Kaye, but did not like me. This stemmed from the fact that Mum fought my corner too effectively in the early days at the school, when Miss Fountain recorded my reading mark incorrectly, and when this was put right I was promoted to top of the class, displacing Kaye. The other thing was that I tended to win most things: I was chosen to read the lesson at the United Schools' Service in the church of St. John the Baptist; I won the hat competition at the Christmas party, thanks to Dad's magnificent cracker hat; I was Cinderella in the school pantomime as a result of winning when Terry Jones drew

lots for the parts. I could also play the piano passably for assembly and I once beat Mr. Bull in a game of chess he challenged me to. Despite his resentment I did have a good time in the top class, as I had in the second and third years with Terry Jones.

I was very well prepared for the exams. Mum had always worked with me at home, and I had done millions of practices at the 'Intelligence Test' because of my involvement with the National Survey of Health and Development. This survey started in the first week of March, 1946. Five thousand babies born that week were used as guinea pigs and over the years we all had health checks, psychological tests and intelligence tests every six months, so it was all second nature.

The day of the examinations was fine and very cold. Mum made me a huge tin of fairy cakes to take for the whole class, and the day was quite fun. Two classrooms, normally separated, miraculously became one, and the 35 of us taking the Scholarship were given our places in alphabetical order. We all knew who would pass for the grammar school and who would go to the secondary modern school in Spring Hill, and we were more or less right. Four girls [Sue Harvey scraped in after THREE interviews] and three boys passed. Mim, Kaye and I had short interviews - usual for the people with the highest marks, most of the boys had long interviews - mediocre- and Sue's interviews were interminable- very borderline. Eric panicked on the day of the results, or at least his

mother did. The girl's results arrived by first post, so we knew at the crack of dawn, but the boys had not heard. Only successful candidates received a letter, so Mrs. Priddey thought Eric had failed. But he had passed: his letter came by second post, and Mrs. Priddey was on the doorstep when we got home for lunch, shouting:

'It's all right, you passed!' - Just in case someone was listening.

The rest of that school year passed in a fog. Serious work slowed down after the Eleven Plus results. There were the interviews, of course, but they weren't too bad. Mim, Kaye and I went on the same afternoon. The other two looked much as usual, but Mum decided to dress me up for the thing, and I felt a bit of a clot with my hair in ringlets and my Sunday dress on. The headmistress of the Grammar School for Girls, Miss Evans, and two men interviewed us. We were given a passage to read before we went in and had to answer questions about it, though they didn't mention the questions, just told us to read the passage. I remember it still. It was about a hill farmer going out in mid-winter to rescue beleaguered sheep - good stuff for a Welsh girl to remember. Next there was mental arithmetic, also straightforward. Then they asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. I didn't know really, but thought I should say something academic, so I said a Maths teacher. [I loved Maths, especially problem solving] A few more short questions and I was released.

Back at school we spent hours making books on topics of our choice, which was fine, but then we had to decorate the covers with potato cuts. Mine was dreadful. Dad made me a potato cut in the end, but Mr. Bull said it was not up to standard. None of us are very artistic.

I don't remember the last day at Junior School, but by then another bombshell had been dropped.

'Can you keep a secret?' Mum asked me one evening, while she folded the ironing.

'Spect so. What is it?'

'I'm going to have a baby!' Well, well, well. What is the matter with her?

'Mum, whatever for?'

'We thought it would be nice for you to have a brother or sister', she said.

'You should have asked. I don't want one really'.

I really thought they were mad. Life was going along in a cosy pattern, and I had never wondered why other people had brothers and sisters and I didn't. I was perfectly happy as I was. When I thought about it a bit more the idea of a little sister seemed quite attractive. The possibility of a boy did not occur to me.

Mum began to be ill right away, and Dad danced attendance from the beginning. He had been away when she was expecting me and wasn't going to miss anything this time. The only thing that stopped her being sick was Quality Street chocolates, and we had to buy tons,

because only particular types worked. Good job Dad's business was doing well!

We went to Weymouth that Summer, and Mum was constantly sick, or sleeping because of the drugs. Our normal, happy, relaxed holiday didn't happen.

In the September I started at the Grammar School - and hated it. It was not at all cosy like Worle Junior School; teachers did not like pupils to speak to them uninvited; Kaye was put in a different form and there were six hundred girls in the female half of the establishment. The Boys' School, next door, started ten minutes earlier than we did each morning and finished ten minutes earlier in the afternoon. The idea was that the sexes should be segregated. Most of the classes were all right, but we had to do Domestic Science [cookery], which was dreadful, and Needlework, just as bad. I could cook and sew reasonably well, thanks to Nana Charles and Auntie June respectively, but I did not use the rigid methods expected by the teachers at school. Sunday evenings from then on were spent dreading **double** Domestic Science on Monday morning. We could never find the correct ingredients for me to take - Mum didn't make Junket!

Mum became steadily more ill with the pregnancy and just after Christmas they took her into Southmead Hospital in Bristol for observation. She had to stay there until the baby was born. Every night, after tea, Dad and I drove to Bristol through the worst weather for years.

Snow and wind howled around the Dormobile every evening. One of the doors was faulty and wouldn't close properly, so we froze. Nana Charles sometimes came with us. Nan's health was quite good at this time. Some years before she had had a series of 'turns'. She would faint and not come round for up to an hour. Hardening of the arteries was eventually diagnosed, but not before she blacked out one day when I was on my own with her. I was only about six years old, so it was a bit unnerving. I ran round and fetched Mr. Priddey, who fetched Mrs. Wainwrite from across the road, and between them they looked after her. I was a heroine.

It was February before Southmead Hospital decided to do something about Mum. She had been on medication all this time for Toxaemia and was sick of being stuck in bed. I was in the middle of my first exams at school when they induced her labour. Dad took me up with him to see her that night. Mum was having pains and was very cross with Dad for taking me: I was offended. Poor old Dad was like a cat on a hot tin roof all night, and the next day could not wait to get to a phone box. We drove up to the junction of Milton Road, Locking Road and High Street [always called the 'keep left sign' in the family] to telephone from the box. Dad came out, rubbing his hands together with glee.

'It's a BOY, Kid. Eight pounds two ounces.' He was thrilled to death.



I was rather shocked. A boy. Whatever would we do with a boy?

Mum insisted on coming home the next day, despite the fact that neither she nor Andrew Mervyn Jones, my little brother, were very well. Dad had to hire an ambulance at the then

enormous cost of £40 to get them home. I couldn't wait for them to arrive, and donned all my best clothes to greet them. Mum was installed in bed and I was allowed in.

'You've got a tide-mark on your neck', she said.

17. Andy

Suddenly having a younger child in the house was an interesting experience. I had always seen myself as bottom of the pecking order, apart from a succession of pets, and now I saw my new baby brother as someone of whom I should be boss. Nobody else saw it this way, of course. Two of my new friends at the Grammar School, Sue Hockey and Sue Sprackman had been only children for twelve years, and their mothers had both produced after-thoughts as well. We compared notes all the time. Their babies [Paul Sprackman and Bridget Hockey] appeared to sleep at night and take their milk happily. Andy did not. Mum and Dad said it was because of the drugs Mum had to take before he was born, and I'm sure it didn't help the poor little chap.

For the first six weeks of his life Andy didn't gain one ounce of weight, he cried all the time and hardly slept. We were all frantic and Mum and Dad were exhausted. Conversations changed from fascinating political discussions to talk of the relative merits of baby milks. Cow and Gate was on everyone's lips, except Andy's: he really wasn't interested. I try to remember how Nana and Grandpa Charles reacted to all this, but I really can't. Nana was chuffed at first, certainly, often saying

'Lovely to have the pigeon pair'

All the grandparents were disconcerted by the name. Dad and I chose it, since Mum was beyond caring. I

thought through the names of the boys at school and decided that Andy Shaw was a good chap, so suggested Andrew. Dad was quite happy with that, and added the Mervyn to perpetuate his own name. It didn't occur to either of us that Andrew was Scottish and thus inappropriate. There was a further disadvantage arising out of long memories of an undesirable man [called Andrew] from Waunlwyd who was either a small time criminal or had a cog missing.



'What a name to choose, Betty', said the Aunts.

Andy did eventually begin to gain ground, but it was slow progress, only achieved by constant attention and spoiling him rotten. Hours were spent preparing tempting dishes and he was weighed several times a week. Every night someone sang him to sleep - I had always loved this when I was tiny - and I took my turn, reviving songs learned

at Brownies and Guides. Among our favourites were 'Blue Lake and Rocky Shore', 'Peace', 'There was a man from China Town' and 'We are the red men, tall and straight'.



Mum, me holding Andy, and Jill Rendell - on Babbacombe beach.

Top of our personal pops was 'Teddy Bears' Picnic' which we sung before bed each night and for hours and hours while I pushed Andy on the good old swing. It was all very good practice for a succession of children who were to fill my life from that time onwards.

Andy gave me the chance to revert to childhood, and on Saturday mornings we would build tents in the sitting room and sit in them singing silly songs. He was a meticulous little boy, my brother, and the tents had to be just-so, a sentiment he carried over into everything. He hated dirt and would not pick up a bit of fluff from the carpet.

'You'll never get him to wipe his own bottom, Betty', said Aunty Lil.

Just before Andy was born the clans began to gather in Weston. Aunty Edie and Uncle Bill tired of Govilon and bought No. 16 Hopkins Street in town. This was good news for me. I was pleased to see anyone who called me 'little shiny eyes'. Nana Charles was pleased, too.

It gave her someone from home to chat to. Nana and Auntie Edie were only related by my parents' marriage and in the fashion of their time called each other Mrs Smith and Mrs Charles. Another friend of Nana's lived in Weston. Gladys King was at school with Nana, so they had known each other for over fifty years. Gladys came to tea with Nana every week and Nan would get in a fearful stew over it. She was useless at putting meals for people and Mum ended up doing most of it each week. Even fifty years of friendship did not justify Christian name terms, and Gladys remained Mrs King until she died.

Shortly after Edie and Bill came to Weston, Nana and Grandpa Jones, not to be outdone, moved in next door to us, in the flat above the Chemist's shop. Auntie Hilda also ran a long campaign to join us all, but Uncle Les flatly refused to be shifted, and they stayed in Waunlwyd for the rest of their days.



Andy and Mum, with Nana and Grandpa Jones, on Weston beach at last.

Dad's business was doing well: he could sell anything, and did. He told his customers the most awful yarns: he had been a trapeze artist in the circus and lost his leg in a fall. This story meant he had to get in and out of the van with a stiff leg for years. He had married a much older woman and had seven children. [This one got Mum some funny looks when they were out together] His name was Ezekiel; he was a Jewish refugee. People would call at the house and ask for 'Zeek', which confused my poor mother at first. The house was used as a kind of warehouse for Dad's stock. Vans arrived regularly at the door and salesmen from wholesale companies called to ply their trade. Every Wednesday Dad, and often Mum, would go to Bristol to 'Bell and Nicholsons' or 'Baker Bakers' and come back with the van loaded to the roof with stuff. Carpets were piled up in the hall, great bags of sheets and pillowcases were on every chair, clothes hung on rails in the bedrooms. Women would come to the house for Dad to measure them for corsets, men came to be measured for suits: Dad had no experience and even less shame. Mum had to leave the room to cover her embarrassment when he embarked on a hard sell.

Of course the money had to be collected, and the Bournville Council Estate was a challenge. Dad did the estates on Fridays [pay-day] and Tuesdays [family allowance day], but still it was like getting blood from a stone. He used me for the really hard cases.

'Nip in there, kid', he would say, 'if they get funny, tell them your father will be mad with you if they don't pay. They'll never resist that'. He was right. They nearly always paid.

Christmas was the best time: the stock was all over the place. Mum, Nan and I would pore over it happily, pricing it and deciding what we could use as presents for relations. Dad's method of marking up stock was casual.

'Put what you think you can get, kid, as long as it's over 50%' he would grin.

The Christmas before Andy was born Dad bought me a record player and four records. We had a ball, dancing to *Snowcoach* by Russ Conway, *High Hopes* by Frank Sinatra and a couple of others that have slipped into oblivion. Andy grew to adore my record player and used it more than I did. I became quite mad about the injustice of this and took to locking up the record case before I went to school, a meanness which did not endear me to Mum, who would do anything to keep Andy happy.



Short as my name was, Andy managed to shorten it to **Ra** and Dad soon joined in. In all my life I don't believe Andy has ever called me Raye, and I love to hear him using the childhood nickname. His son, Alexander, calls me Aunty Ra, much to my delight.

As Andy began to talk another miracle occurred - his hair grew. He had been bald for so long that we had all lost interest, but this was soon revived when it started to sprout. It was RED. No wonder he had that temper. Once his hair put in an appearance Andy's looks improved out of all recognition, but he remained an enigmatic character, preferring his own company whenever it could be managed. Dinky and Matchbox cars and toy soldiers were his favourite toys. He treated them in the same way, looking after them carefully and lining them up in long crocodiles around the sitting room every day. Friends who came to call for him were often sent away much to the horror of the rest of the family, who were all sociable.

He carried this unsociability over to the extended family. Whilst I had welcomed Aunts and Uncles, Grandparents, friends and so on to the house, Andy grumbled about them. Even at Christmas he preferred a quiet life. Traditionally Nana and Grandpa Jones, Auntie Hilda and Uncle Les, Kaye and Terry Jones, Margaret and Val Gibbins and sometimes the Priddeys joined us for Christmas. With Mum, Dad, Me, Andy, Nana, Grandpa, Wyn and June taken for granted this made for a fair sized gathering: certainly too many for Andy who became 'cracksy' in the face of these numbers. I revelled in the mounds of presents, carol singing, turkey dinners, table tennis and games of Monopoly.

Early in 1960 the family grew again. Not the immediate family this time, but Wyn and June, who had

been married for ages, suddenly produced a little boy. Richard Tudor Charles was a massive, fit chap, and a playmate for Andy. I felt out-numbered. Where were all these boys coming from?

When Rich was a toddler Wyn decided to give up his job as headmaster of the junior school in Burnham-on-Sea in order to become a writer! An interesting indication of his level of self-confidence. Accordingly, he resigned and sold the bungalow, named 'Blue Haze', on Bleadon Hill. The obvious thing to do was for the three of them to move back to Windsor, so Mum and Dad vacated their bedroom and Wyn, June and Rich took it over. Mum and Dad must have slept in with Andy.

The Charles family stayed for months, and it was eventful. Andy and Rich became good pals and generally things were pretty amicable, but there was one very bad day. Rich was left unattended for a split second and pulled a teapot of scalding tea from the table. It burnt the whole of the front of his body, and it was weeks before the poor baby recovered. Almost as soon as this crisis passed June found that she was expecting again, and as a result they decided to move back into their own place. June's Aunt owned properties in Bath, and they lived in one of these for a couple of years. Wyn was forced reluctantly back into teaching. But we had our house back to normal!

18. All Change

Although my life was very full out of school, Weston-super-Mare Grammar School for Girls demanded a great deal of its pupils and it really did dominate life for many a long year. The curriculum was much as any other academic school in the fifties. The usual subjects, like English Language and Literature, Mathematics, Sciences and French everyone studied, but Maths was divided into Arithmetic [O.K.], Algebra [awful] and Geometry [wonderful], Science became Biology, Chemistry and Physics and modern and classical languages were added, so that I ended up studying German and Latin as well as French. Scripture was a doddle. I had been to Sunday School and read the Bible since I was tiny and knew it nearly as well as the teachers.

Much the greatest problems to me were Domestic Science, Needlework and Art. I honestly don't know which was worst, but I suppose Art would get the wooden spoon. We were examined in all subjects twice a year and one Art exam stands out in my memory. From a choice of titles I chose 'On the Ice' and attempted to paint the Titanic stuck in an iceberg. The ghastly powder paint stunk and the grey cartridge paper begged to be covered. For a miserable two hours I plastered the paper with layer after layer of dark blue paint, across the bottom I placed a streak of white - the ice - and in the sky above I artistically arranged forty-seven stars and one moon.

There was also an unrecognisable ship at a rakish angle. For this effort I was given forty-eight percent - one mark for each star and one for the moon, I expect. When the work was handed back to us I attempted to fold mine in half, but the thick paint cracked and peeled. Another masterpiece lost to humanity.

Needlework was most odd. First we had to make a thing called a 'pochette'. This was designed to hold needles, cotton, tape measures, thimbles and so on. Next we made a 'wrapper'. This was designed to hold the pochette! I thought the process was going to be endless, but the third article required turned out to be a petticoat. We were told what material to buy and Mum and I sallied forth to town to make the purchase. We were not filled with enthusiasm or knowledge and, after a harrowing time in Walker and Lings, landed up with some pretty pale blue slippery stuff with little flowers on it. Miss Snellgrove, our teacher, explained that it would be too difficult to work with, so that was scrapped and we set off again. This time we bought white cotton: boring, but easy. We learned to thread a machine, do tacking stitches five-eighths of an inch long, make darts, sew six different types of seams and a host of other skills. I actually made a green dress, covered in little white umbrellas, which was quite a success, but I much preferred making things on my own at home and gave up Needlework as soon as I was allowed to. Along with the Needlework, I jettisoned Art and Domestic Science with great relief. Any domestic,

culinary and artistic skills I have arrived late after a great deal of practice. Oddly, I love cooking now and very much enjoy painting and drawing.

Homework was a trial. There were at least three subjects each evening and four at weekends and, although I always enjoyed academic work, it this became a drudge and interfered with all my other activities. Those of us who travelled to school on the number 40 bus started a homework consortium, which helped to sort out the problem. We each undertook to do everyone's homework in our own strongest subjects. Consequently, I did reams of Maths and English and quite a bit of Latin, but no Sciences. Our consortium consisted of Sue Sprackman, Sue Hockey, Ian Hoddinott, Lynne Coles, Roger Thorn and me. Mim and Kaye helped out under duress when needed. My friendship with Mum and Kaye slackened off at the Grammar School. We were all in different classes most of the time, and their interest in horses outlasted mine. I think I grew up faster, and developed more interest in clothes, makeup, dancing and boys than they did. Mim, in any case, was very self conscious and her family were not well off. She rarely had fashionable clothes and I suspect that she made a subconscious decision to distance herself from the ever strengthening youth culture. Kaye remained a happy tomboy until she was at least fifteen. So, although we remained on very friendly terms, we all made new connections.

The two Sues [Hockey and Sprackman], Virginia Wilson [Vig] and I made up a group, and went shopping on Saturdays, dancing regularly and sat in coffee bars whenever we could. The Four Rose [no 's' on the end] was our favourite haunt. It was situated opposite the Grand Pier in a basement under the Sandringham Hotel, and seemed daring and romantic, especially since it was run by

a Greek family and inhabited by lads from the RAF camp. We drank Coke and listened to strange Greek music for hours, discussing boys, boys and boys. In truth we did more talking than doing. There were one or two boys who took an interest in one or other of us, but usually we were happy in each other's company.



Now and again Chris Shrapnell and I

would go dancing, then Sue Sprackman took up with an undesirable older boy, and made herself some 'sexy' gear. Vig met an RAF chap called Johnny, whom she fell for, but it ended in tears. Round and round we all went on the

learning cycle of life, and school interrupted the process daily, hourly, minute by minute.

Compulsory sport was a bugbear. Mum had always been brilliant at Hockey, and assumed I would be the same. I was like Dad - I hated team games, and Hockey was the worst. The sticks were viscous and I no interest in the destination of the ball. After several seasons of misery, Sue Hockey and I decided to take drastic action. Sue's Dad was something to do with horticulture and she managed to procure two-thousand Hollyhock seeds. One lunch time we went out onto the hockey pitch and planted a thousand at each end in the goal mouths. They did remarkably well, and hockey was abandoned for a season. It was ironic that a girl with such an appropriate surname should be the source of this magnificent success.

Politics was a great interest of ours and I decided from a very young age that I was a Liberal. I don't know where this belief came from, but being a non-conformist I suppose it was logical. I worked hard for the Liberal Party and attended meetings at every opportunity, so when the General Election came round, and the school held a mock election, I naturally supported the Liberal candidate. It was a lost cause. The school was true-blue. The Conservative and Unionist candidate romped home, we were a poor second and Labour was wiped out. From that day I have never voted for a winning candidate in any election, national, borough, council or anything else.

It was rare for the school to deviate from its path of learning and apart from the election the only other high spot I recall is the total eclipse of the sun. This was deemed to be scientific, and therefore admissible. The Sixth form made smoked glass viewers for the whole school and we were marched outside to watch the phenomenon, with strict instruction not to look directly at the sun without the glasses. Everyone tried a glimpse and suffered from spots in front of the eyes for the rest of the day.

The Sixth and the Prefects sat on the stage each morning at assembly looking down upon the rest of us with disdain. They were more intimidating than the teachers at first, but we soon got their measure, and by the time we were in the third year they had lost their mystique. Annemarie Medland [now Austin] was my form prefect and allowed us a certain amount of rope with which to hang ourselves, so often we were able to stay indoors after lunch - strictly forbidden - and this saved us from terminal pneumonia. The wind and rain of Winter were not considered a good enough reason to pamper us.

Hundreds of hours of study and struggle, thousands of Latin, French and German verbs later we chose our subjects for O levels, and the real hard graft began. We were fifteen. Our bodies had done their stuff [at least everyone else's had - I still didn't really **need** a bra] and we thought we knew it all, especially Pythagoras' Theorem. The world was our oyster and as long as we

could get the statutory number of passes, merits and distinctions, we were made. There was no unemployment to speak of, and if you had been lucky enough to go to a Grammar School you could choose what you wanted to do and simply do it. Now all I had to do was to keep my mind on the job, and study.



Joan Lightfoot,
me and Wendy
Davies returning
from a school
trip to
Switzerland in
1962

Childhood was drawing to a close. Instead of trees and rhynes there were records and dancing. Tripps field was still there, but neglected by my generation and inhabited by younger ones. We had moved on to the Winter Gardens in town. Wednesday nights found hundreds of us at the Teen and Twenty dance, dressed to the nines and mastering our Jives with each other before daring to dance with the boys. We were full of optimism.

'England Swings' was a year or two away but The Beatles came to the town and I was in the fourth row. All the top bands and artists appeared at the Winter Gardens or the Knightstone Theatre.

I don't suppose we realised how lucky we were, what great childhoods we had enjoyed, how exciting and self-indulgent the 60s were. There is no doubt that the post war freedoms, youth culture, the welfare state and general optimism gave the baby boomers a heck of a start in life, and memories to treasure for ever.