

In September 1939 I was 6, almost 7 years old. The whole school was evacuated to, of all places, Brighton in Sussex by train from, I would think, Victoria Station.. I don't remember my Mum on this day, but it was in August 1939 when the whole school set off for the station. The next thing I remember is being in a railway carriage covered with coloured sheets of paper, pink, green and blue, memory says. My Dad worked 'in the print' at that time and had packed the straw bag I carried with comics - only in black and white, no coloured pictures then.

When we arrived at Brighton we were in a 'crocodile' moving towards where we would be billeted. I had got, sort of attached to two other girls from school and their mother who was coming with us as a 'helper'. We needed enough room for three children with an adult as well.

We all ended up in an antique shop's accommodation. The middle-aged lady who owned the china and glass must have had kittens when London children turned up! We children were shown where to hang our coats - in an alcove behind a curtain which had been prepared for us. We saw the rest of the house and found that we had to go down one or two polished wooden stairs to be in the diningroom/everything room; the kitchen led off this room. Later we were shown upstairs and where we would sleep. I was to share a room with the elder of the two girls, she was already 7, I think, while the younger girl slept with her Mum in another room. I liked waking up in the morning because I could see the sea on the 'same level' as I was. That was how I saw it at the time. These two rooms were on the top floor and one floor down was where the old bedridden mother of 'Auntie Mabel', as we were told we could call her, lived all the time we were there. We children shared the job of taking up her dry biscuit for breakfast but I don't remember taking liquid. One novelty for me was the fact that there was a bathroom in the house. I can't remember whether we were ever bathed in it. Outside the house at the back of the property was a small garden and underneath it, on the same level as the garden itself was a space which was intended to be the air raid shelter. At the time we arrived it was a store for the dozens of jars of marmalade and jam which had been made for us to last the whole war through.

We went to a local school and during the 1939-1940 hard winter the milk, which had frozen so that the milk was protruding from the top of the bottle, was put on the radiators to thaw. Ugh! warm milk - I've never drunk milk since... Sometimes we practised sitting in class with our gas masks on and perhaps writing something, too. I can remember spelling 'chrysanthemum' at one of these sessions... We were also encouraged to knit for the soldiers, white garter stitch squares, I have no idea what they were meant for but it annoyed me (at 7) to be told to show the teacher every row I finished so that it could be checked for dropped stitches etc. I think the school air raid shelter was beneath the theatre somewhere nearby, but this is a muddled memory. We went through the dressing rooms (very Victorian, I would say now) and talked to the dancers? as we went through. I saw a wedding during that winter because I wrote about it in one of my weekly letters home. It was freezing cold but I had written that the bride was carrying daffodils. I don't think so! We wrote home every week and Mum kept my letters which she dated. It told of our activities, such as joining Brownies; please could I have a uniform? Did I get one, I can't remember. The helper Mother added her own paragraph to the bottom of my letter but Mum had scored through these very decidedly!

'Auntie Mabel' was probably in her 50's at that time and as she looked after her aged mother so did 'Uncle George' look after his elderly mother. At that time people, however old, didn't abandon their parents to get married and so they waited until the parents had died. Time had been ticking on and they had just a few years of married life before they died, one after the other.

I remember going to a house somewhere during a winter where the children of the house had a playhouse in the garden. We were allowed to use it that afternoon when we visited but I have no clear recollection of the visit or who the adults were. Another time, in spring, we went out in Uncle George's car to the Downs somewhere near Brighton. Perhaps it was Devil's Dyke. I ran down the steep slope until I fell because my body was going faster than my legs could manage. I picked some primroses that day, which is how I can date it to spring, and these were packed into a Liquorice Allsorts box and sent home to London. Then back to the antiques shop in the car. I don't know what Uncle George's job was to be able to afford a car, unusual in those days. I learned how to float in a swimming pool, name unknown now; we travelled on the little train which ran along the front, another way of amusing the evacuees. Mum and Dad (and Granny) had moved house from Westminster while I was away and gone into the country - Upper Norwood, about 6 miles out of London - and had a rented house. Plenty more memories of later in the

war, such as watching the planes in the Battle of Britain and the contrails etched all over the bright blue sky. Then collecting shrapnel and cartridge cases after the All Clear had gone.

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