

My Mother's Memories of her Childhood

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(My mother was born in 1911, She wrote this shortly after she turned 80. She died 9 years later ~ Marian)

I have just had my 80th birthday and it seems like a good time to reminisce a little. I though I would like to write down what I remember of being a child more than 70 years ago and of what the outside world was like, in many ways so different from the present, in the hope that my grandchildren will find it interesting reading one day – living history in a way.

My life has been a happy one in that I have always felt secure in being loved – first by my parents and a large extended family and later in a loving marriage and now by my grown up children and my grandchildren. There have been sad patches which have to come in everyone's life but I know I have had fewer of these than many people have.

Since my early times I have had excellent health and still have. Before that I think I was regarded a somewhat 'delicate' child which probably just meant that I picked up readily every infection that was going round – ears, throat and the childish complaints like measles and whooping cough and, in those days before inoculations and antibiotics, such things lasted longer and usually meant time spent in bed. I had scarlet fever twice – once when I was about 6 and again round about 12 – and that was most unusual, and I even managed to get chicken pox while I was still isolated the first time. Scarlet fever in those days meant 6 weeks in the 'fever' hospital until one had finished 'peeling'. The outside skin peeled off in fine particles or larger patches all of which were 'infectious'. My parents chose to keep me at home because they were afraid that in hospital I should catch diphtheria which many did and which was quite serious. Keeping me at home meant that I had to be isolated for 6 weeks in my bedroom with a sheet soaked in disinfectant hung over the doorway and everything I used, crockery, etc., had to be washed in a bath of disinfectant. Afterwards the room had to be fumigated. My mother kept a big cover-up overall hanging inside the door which she donned when she was in the room with me and of course no one could come to see me – except the doctor. I am not sure what he did about disinfecting! My father was not allowed to go to work from home so on the first occasion he slept at a friend's house and on the second occasion he stayed at home from work. I don't know how they managed because he would certainly not have been paid his wages – they did not ever have a paid holiday at that time – and they never had much money – and I managed to do that to them twice over, so maybe I was 'delicate'. Delicate or not I have many cosy memories of being tucked up on the sofa in the kitchen with my mother around talking to me and singing as she often did while she got on with the daily jobs. I learnt all the songs from an earlier era in that way – Lily of Laguna, Sweetheart May, I Don't Want to Play in Your Yard, Two Little, Girls in Blue and many more. I still remember most of the words and the tunes.

My mother did a lot of sewing. She was a trained dressmaker and she made her own clothes and mine, things like shirts and pyjamas for my father and also dresses for my grandmother and aunts and their children. I have often wondered since how she found time to do it all because there were none of what we should call labour-saving devices around the house and the house was always bright and sparkling clean and she cooked and baked and made jams and marmalade and pickles as the seasons came round. She was a very calm and serene person and never seemed to be 'in a flat' as we should say. I do not remember her in a temper or even scolding me, though I am sure there must have been times when I displeased her and she did get very cross with me and show it.

My father was a good man. Looking back I would almost say 'saintly'. My parents sometimes disagreed I am sure – they must have done – but there were no such things as quarrels in our house. He worked in the Dockyard all his working life till he was sixty. It was not a very well-paid job – he was a woodworking machinist and worked with things like huge circular saws. He started work at 7am and worked till 5pm. He had to leave home just after 6am each morning as he cycled to work and it was quite a long way. We always went to bed by 10 o'clock. Dad would stand up, wind up the clock and announce that as he had to get up at 5am it was time for bed. Sometimes when I was in High School later on, and had a lot of homework to do, I would stay up, but more often I would get up at 6am or so and finish it then.

We lived always in the same house and that was my 'home' until I got married in 1935. It was a terrace house and it had a tiny front garden, just room for a few shrubs against the front wall which had a little spiky railing on the top of it. I can remember jumping off the wall once and catching my dress on the spikes and falling with cuts and bruises. The railing was taken away in 1940 when England needed scrap iron to make munitions and all such things were collected.

My grandparents lived next door and I think I spent just as much time in that house as in our own. Both houses were covered with Virginian creeper which turned a lovely red in the autumn and also harboured spiders as I remember. Then the leaves fell of course and had to be swept up constantly for the next few weeks. Between the two houses was what we called the 'side passage' which ran from the front to the back and ended in doors to both back gardens. I can see that very clearly in my mind. There was a door with glass panels in it at the front end and halfway up a little window on each side covered with fly wire which provided ventilation for the pantry or 'larder' as we called it, in each house. There was also a clothes line with a pulley at each end where the washing used to be hung up to dry on wet days. I can remember how the passage echoed if you called as you went along it. That was our usual way of coming in – not by the front door which had a Yale lock on it and needed a key to get in. The front door had a brass step which had to be cleaned with brass polish and a brass letter box. In England the mail is always put through a letter box in the front door straight into the hallway – not only then but it is still the same. We had made a cardboard frame to put over the letter box when we cleaned it to avoid getting brass polish on the paint of the front door. There was also a brass bell pull. Cleaning the brass was a chore which I often did as I got older – not always too willingly I am sure – as in the somewhat damp climate it had to be done quite frequently.

Inside the front door was a hallway with big black and white linoleum tiles on the floor which were kept polished and shiny. There were the stairs right opposite the front door, on the left a door to the 'front room' as we called in (only used on special occasions really) and a door to the kitchen past the stairs. In the hall was a coat rail for our outdoor clothes and those of our visitors and a cupboard under the stairs where the gas meter was, so we called it the meter cupboard. The kitchen as we always called it was our living room and quite a big room. A big table stood in the middle, always covered with a cloth. (It was the same cloth always I think because I can see it so clearly – a dusty-pink brocade affair. At meal times of course it was replaced by a larger white damask tablecloth.) There was a kitchen range in one wall of the kitchen but the doors covering the front of the fire had been removed so that we could use it as an open coal fire. There was the usual oven to the side but it did not get very hot as the fire had been opened up, so we did not use it for cooking except perhaps for a milk pudding or something that could be left to cook for a long time. We had a big black iron kettle which would be put on the top of the fire on a sort of trivet to boil, and then moved to one side, so that we had hot water for washing dishes, etc., as of course we had no hot water system. A 'fender' stood across in front of the fire to keep hot sparks and embers from dropping out on to the hearth rug. It was a black one – not like the brass one complete with fire irons which was in front of the open fireplace in the front room and which had to be cleaned with 'Brasso' from time to time though not too frequently as the fire was seldom used there. (Most of the time that fireplace was just decorative and it had a glass fire-screen with flowers painted on the glass, in front of it.)

In the kitchen there was a rocking chair which clicked reassuringly as you rocked it back and forth while sitting in it. There was a comfortable sofa against another wall and a big built-in kitchen dresser against the other, where my mother displayed here best dinner-set and her silver tea-pot and other prized bits and pieces. Her big treadle sewing machine stood in the window with a small table in the alcove beside it. I learnt to work that treadle at a very early age.

In the wall backing on to the 'side passage' was a built in cupboard for brooms and brushes and general storage and quite a big 'larder'. We kept perishable foods on the airy shelf in front of the window, mentioned earlier, as of course we had no fridge. The top shelves were stacked with the jams etc. that my mother had made and cake tins, dry goods storage and such like. A big earthenware bread-crock stood on the floor and bottles of home-made wine and a small barrel of beer. The barrel was supported on its side with a tape in the end. There was a little tapered stick in a hole in the top, called a 'spile' which had to be manipulated to let the air in so that the tap would let the beer out when you turned it. I cannot find 'spile' in the dictionary so perhaps it was a colloquial word.

The front room had a carpet but the kitchen floor was covered with lino and rugs so it was quite warm and comfortable. There was wallpaper on the walls and periodically my mother and father would redecorate. By the time I was a teenager my mother and I would do the redecorating together as my father did not really have much spare time at home. I became quite good at wallpapering and painting and probably helped with every room in the house at sometime. I even papered the kitchen ceiling without any trestles – just standing on the table and balancing the sticky sheets of paper on my head. It must have been quite a job and that is probably why I remember it.

Beyond the kitchen there was the 'scullery'. That had flag-stones on the floor and a table in front of the window with the gas stove next to it. There was just one cold water tap low down on the wall with no sink as we understand it, just a cement sort of trough on the floor with the drain out of it through the wall. All the washing up had to be done in a bowl on the table with a large tray beside it on which to drain the dishes. I do not think I regarded all that as other than normal. In the corner by the tap was a huge iron mangle with big wooden rollers and a big clanking handle to turn. There was a big screw on the top which pressed the rollers more closely together when you were using it. In an alcove was a brick built-in copper which had a deep copper bowl built in with bricks and a fire-grate underneath. On washing day – every Monday – the copper had to be filled with water and a fire lit underneath with sticks and coal. All the washing except delicate things went into the water to be boiled – 'whites' first then 'coloureds'. All bed linen was white in those days there were not coloured sheets, etc., not in my experience anyway.

Meanwhile my mother would have put two big tubs on the table, filled them with rinsing water – one with 'blue' in it to keep the 'whites' white, and mixed the starch which she would need to stiffen collars, etc., and also for pillow cases and handkerchiefs after it had been diluted a little. She would also put a smaller empty tub under the mangle. Then when the clothes had been boiled (she would have put in ordinary soap, no detergents in those days) she would lift them up on a wooden 'copper stick' into a pail and then put them through the mangle to squeeze out all the soapy water. Then it was into the rinsing waters and into the mangle again to squeeze out all that water. Then into a big wicker clothes basket and out into the garden to be pegged up on the line to dry.

Looking back from our days with automatic washers and driers I think it all sounds like very hard work. In our city every garden had a 'high' clothes line. There would be two high poles, like scaffold poles or flag poles, one at each end. On each pole there would be a pulley and through the pulley a long loop of rope with a toggle on it. The clothes line would be looped over the toggles on washing day and lowered for the clothes to be pegged on, then raised with the pulleys so that the sheets and towels would be flapping the wind way up over everyone's head. You just pulled up the line and fastened the rope to a 'cleat' on the posts. It was a good system really because the washing dried well that way. Such high lines were only common in Naval ports like Plymouth and Portsmouth – maybe because sailors are accustomed to pulling things up the masts of ships with ropes and pulleys. Many years later when I married and went to live in Leicester in a newly built house, I had a high line put up in the same way, but my neighbours objected. It offended them to see our washing flapping about above their skyline!

When the clothes were dry, or almost dry in the case of many that had to be ironed, they were brought in, folded and put through the mangle again, this time to take some of the creases out. There were no synthetic materials in those days, just cotton, linen, wool and silk.

After the washing etc. was finished there was all the cleaning up to do. The copper had to be emptied and the fire cleaned out, the tubs had to be emptied and the flag stones on the floor had to be washed clean and mopped up. Some weeks my mother

would use the hot soapy water from the copper to scrub all the burners from the gas stove because they were all iron bars not like the splash-free things these days. There would still be a basket full of ironing to be done but most likely that would be 'damped-down' and left till next morning to be done. Does washing day sound like a hard day's work to you? That happened every Monday and I can still recall the steamy, soapy smell that greeted me when I came back from school for lunch. By the end of afternoon school it would all be cleared up and tidy. If it was not at school I would turn the handle of the mangle and help with pegging the clothes out and then with taking them in and folding them. In later years my mother replaced the old copper with a gas one which had a tap and was less work.

I would have been 11 or 12 or older before we had electricity in the house. Before that we had gas lighting. The gas lights were hinged to the wall over the fireplace and they were what were called incandescent burners. Where the gas had to be lighted there was a little dome-shaped thing called a mantle. This little mantle was made of a sort of cotton net which had been treated in some special way. It was fixed to a tiny ceramic stand. (We used to take these little stands when the mantles had been broken and make them into little fancy pin cushions with scraps of satin and lace.) These mantles were very fragile – not so fragile until after they had been fitted and lighted. You first lit them when they were new and let them flare up to prime them before you turned on the gas. If you touched them they would break up and you could crush them to a fine white powder – which people said was good for cleaning silver! Over the mantle would be fitted a large glass globe. The gas lights were quite bright, not much inferior to electric lighting. One of my very early memories is of the gas globe in my bedroom which had a sort of frosted glass pattern on it. For some reason it frightened me. I saw pictures in the pattern – of what monsters I no longer know – but it made me unhappy and I think my mother replaced it with a different one. I must have been quite young but it is a genuine memory because I can see that globe quite clearly in my mind. There were gas lights in each room but as we went from room to room we carried a lighted candle in a candlestick. I can remember going up the stairs carrying a candle and running when I reached the landing because it was dark there and the shadows made by the candlelight were a little frightening.

There were three bedrooms upstairs – one we kept as a spare room. One of my cousins often slept there when they came to stay with my grandparents next door. We had no bathroom. Bath night was only once a week and every day we had to have our wash either in our bedrooms using a large jug and basin such as you see in antique shops, which rested on the marble topped wash-stand, or downstairs in the scullery if we were in a hurry, with a bowl resting on the table. On bath night, usually Friday or Saturday, a long metal bath was brought in from outside the back door where it hung on the wall. Big iron saucepans and kettles were filled and boiled on the gas stove. Later, when we had the gas copper we used that instead and it was far more convenient. The bath was put on the scullery floor and sometimes in the winter I was allowed to have my bath in one of the big washing tubs put in front of the kitchen fire. Our toilet was outside the back door right next to the scullery but we did not have to go out in the rain as the doors formed a square with the coal-house and there was a little roof over it. We had to take a candlestick with us to the toilet - I can remember sitting there and playing with the dead matches in the candle flame. It was a normal WC, not something more primitive as it might have been had we lived in the country instead of a big town.

The back garden was not very big and my mother grew flowers and a few things like tomatoes. We had a big bed of lily-of-the-valley and a large jasmine, both very fragrant.

My grandparents' house, next door, was a mirror image of ours downstairs, though upstairs the bedroom arrangement was slightly different as they had an extra bedroom because their house had the extra space over the side passage; which also meant that they had a long dark cupboard running from the front bedroom to the back one – which was a lovely hidey-hole! One of the bedrooms was kept as a 'lumber room' where they kept trunks and boxes filled with all manner of things. We children were allowed to play there and it was fun. Some of the boxes were piled on top of one another and we made castles and such like and some of them we could turn out and find old clothes and hats to dress up in.

I always had playmates although I was an only child because there were all my cousins. My mother had two brothers and two sisters and they each had two or three children not much older or younger than me. One of my aunts lived directly opposite us with her family. Mother's other sister was married to a man in the Army and he was away in France during the Great War, as we called it, and my aunt and cousins lived meanwhile with my grandparents. My other cousins lived not far away with their parents and they were all frequent visitors, so all the cousins grew up together and we all became a very close-knit family.

We also played in the street with all the other children. I think there must have been much more of the 'community feeling' in those days – more like a village – because I knew who lived in every house in that street. There would have been nearly fifty houses and I could name every family. I still remember many of the names and I know just which house they lived in. I suppose that is because the pace of living was so much slower in those days. There were cars, I know, but not many people owned them – probably only doctors or clergy or people like that whose profession depended upon moving round the community. There were taxis, too, though I can remember when 'calling a cab' meant a horse drawn vehicle and when weddings and funerals used that sort of transport also. None of my family or friends owned a car, in my early childhood at least. Traffic was not a problem and playing in the street was quite safe. There was no through traffic in our street. The only vehicles were tradesmen's horse drawn ones – the baker, the milkman (with big churns from which he filled our jugs), the fish man, the vegetable man and the laundry van, for instance. We lived nearly at the top of the street and beyond the road were the 'woods'. That is what we called a wild, overgrown area with big trees and bushes and grassy patches and a big grassy mound known to us as 'the Heap'. I should think that at one time it had all been part of the estate of a big house, because it had several crumbling statues and some broken down walls on the edge of the area. It was a wonderful place to play. It even had a little stream where watercress grew, and the old statues and walls could be climbed on and used for all sorts of games. Later on, I suppose when I was in my 'teens', the road was extended right through and the 'woods' at the sides of the road were made into a park (as it is till this day). I can remember being very sad when they cut down some of those lovely big trees.

Earlier I mentioned the tradesmen that came around to the houses. I can remember some of them very clearly. There was the baker with a big horse drawn van who would bring over the bread in big wicker baskets to the front door and ring the bell. The milkman would also come to the front door but the fish man and vegetable man would just come up the street calling loudly to announce their arrival – “Fish, lovely harbour mackerel!” etc., for example. There was one vegetable man we always called ‘Lame Jim’ – he walked with a crutch. Mother always went out to him and he would sell her big baskets of fruit in season at a special price for her jam-making. I can also remember two men who used to come regularly pushing hand-barrows – one of them sold salt and I can still hear his cry – “D’you want any s-a-a-l-t?” with a broad local accent, and the other who sold saucepan covers, calling “saucepan covers” in a loud voice. It seems very strange now but I suppose everyone had the big iron saucepans as my mother had and tin covers that fitted them but they were not very strong as the handles would break off.

I have so many memories of my childhood and they are all happy ones. We did not have much money but enough to buy good food. My mother baked cakes and pies and pasties and sometimes bread and we always had fruit. Sometimes I would run down to the dairy round the corner at the bottom of our street with a dish to buy a quarter pound of lovely Devonshire clotted cream to eat with stewed apple or something like that. Our garden was not big enough to grow vegetables but my father had an ‘allotment’ not far away – that is a rented portion of an area that had been divided up for that purpose that I think probably started during the time of the first world war. My grandfather also had one so we always had plenty of fresh vegetables. Because my mother did dress-making so well I always had good clothes and for heavier things, like winter coats and shoes, she waited for the shop sales. My aunt, across the street, had been a milliner and made beautiful hats – we always wore them in those days – and I can remember some beautiful creations with silk or lace or straw and ribbon streamers down the back!

Most of our social life revolved round our church and the things that were taking place there. There were dances and plays and bazaars and garden fetes and such things that I always took part in right up through my teen-age years and where I had many good friends. Perhaps it does not sound very exciting now but remember there was not nearly as much ready-made entertainment in those days. Sometimes with my cousins or my friends I went to the cinema on a Saturday afternoon – black and white and silent in those days with someone playing the piano for background music or effects – and when I was older I would go to the theatre with my friends when we would queue for ages for a seat in the gallery, right up under the roof, for which I think we paid sixpence. I saw all the old musicals like that – ‘Lilac Time’, ‘White Horse Inn’, ‘Desert Song’, etc. There was, of course, no television and even no radio as we understand it now. I can remember that when I was, I suppose, about 9 or 10 years old, I used to go across to my aunt’s house where my uncle used to make crystal sets. He would put on a pair of headphones and fiddle around with the ‘cat’s whisker’ on the crystal. He would turn one ear-piece around and let me put my ear against it. I can remember being very excited because we could hear the town clock ticking in Madrid – all those miles away! You had to put up a long aerial outside stretching from a post at the end of the garden to the roof before you could get any signals. I must have been fourteen or fifteen before I had any access to a more complicated radio set and that was when my aunt and uncle came to spend Christmas with my

grandmother next door and brought a portable set which I remember as a sort of small suit-case filled with valves and wires.

I had piano lessons as a child. A man who lived nearby was a music teacher and also his daughter and I learnt from them. My parents saved the money to buy me a piano. It was second hand but a lovely one that had been well looked after. It had a walnut case with a design of flowers inlaid in the middle at the front and little brass candlesticks hinged on at each side of the front. It was very heavy with an iron frame and it had a lovely tone. I remember the piano-tuner saying what a nice instrument it was. I think I remember that they paid 10, or maybe 12 pounds for it!

I started school when I was five years old. It would have been 1916 and in the middle of the war. The large local school had been taken over and made into a hospital for all the wounded soldiers that were brought back from the trenches in France, so I went along to a local hall which was being used as a school for beginners. There were two teachers there – one was called Miss Gardiner and the other Miss Howe. I remember them very clearly. I liked them and I was quite happy. After that I would have had to go much farther afield but my mother was not very pleased about that so she sent me to a little private school not too far away which was run by a lady called Miss Frost, in her own house. I hated it. I have a picture in my mind of her front room crowded with very uncomfortable desks. I can remember having to stand up in front of the class and read aloud because I could read well, as an example for all the ‘lazy’ members of the class that could not – not likely to make me popular. There was a girl called Henrietta Craig that I particularly disliked. I can also remember that Scripture lessons (compulsory daily in English schools) consisted of anyone who could think of a text from the Bible standing up and reciting it! Another memory is of being given a slate or some sort of chalk board and having to copy an outline map of Great Britain. There are so many squiggles down the coast of Scotland that caused so much rubbing out on my part that I do not think I ever completed it. I probably learnt nothing during my time there which fortunately was not long.

What else is there to recall about my childhood? Holidays perhaps. There were no paid holidays from work for my father, or grandfather, so most years my mother and grandmother and I would go off for a week or two to relatives who had farms in the Axminster area of Devon, and to my grandmother’s sisters in South Petherton in Somerset. I always enjoyed those times. There were other children around that I met up with each time we went. The farmers would be haymaking or reaping the corn if it was a bit later so we could take part in all that. Then there was milking to be watched and the handles to be turned of the separator to take cream off the milk to make butter and the big churns like barrels to make the butter. Pictures of those places are very vivid in my mind and only 4 years ago, when I was in UK, we drove around that area and I immediately recognised one of the farmhouses where we used to stay before we could find the name. I remember that when they were reaping the corn they would take the machine round and round the field from the outside, in. The poor little rabbits would run farther and farther into the centre until at last all that could not escape got shot for someone’s dinner. I can remember feeling sad for them. Once somebody rescued one that had been injured by the reaping machine and gave it to me to hold. I can see clearly in my mind the dress that I was wearing and the blood stain on the front from its poor little bleeding leg. I suppose I was about 8 years old then. It is odd how memory selects particular occasions and holds them for so many years.

My grandfather's brother were farmers and lived in a lovely old house that once had belonged to an infamous man named Judge Jeffreys in the 17th century. My encyclopaedia gives this account:

“Notorious for harshness at ‘Bloody Assizes’ after Monmouth’s rebellion (1685) hanging about 200 and flogging or transporting many more. Lord Chandler under James II”

We used to stay at that house and my great-uncle Tom, as he was, showed me the seat carved in the wall of the drawing room where the judge would sit in judgment and the rings on the walls in the stables which had been prison cells and which had openings in the walls narrowing towards the inside where food was passed in for the captives. Uncle Tom used to regard himself as a bit of a poet, I think, and I can remember him teaching me this verse as we walked around the farm. I set it down here not because it is good poetry but just for posterity!

When Jeffreys judged in this old Hall
All wicked men to warn.
He strung them up like ropes of onions
Every Monday morn.
Now those “good old days” are fled
A fact we don’t regret at all.
Now jury-men hang back from hanging
Murderers at all.

I do not know why that has stayed in my memory through all the years – perhaps because I have always had the sneaking suspicion that Uncle Tom really thought that murderers should be hanged!

Uncle Tom’s great grandson still lives there. So it looks like that house and farm will stay in the family into the future.

In that area we also used to call and see my grandfather’s sister. She lived in a tiny round house that once had been a toll-house collecting a charge from travellers who, in bygone years, used the road that was called a turnpike road. (The dictionary defines turnpike as a barrier or gate across a road for toll-collecting – originally a revolving spiked bag.) There was a modern road in its place by the times I was there and no toll, but the little house was old and interesting.

My grandmother’s sisters still lived at that time in their little home town in Somerset. Their house was a little 3-storey one with just a front parlour and a living room on the ground floor and 2 bedrooms on each floor above. There was a kitchen range in the living room with an oven they used for cooking. Behind the house was a large flagstone yard which was shared with the house next door. Across the yard was a little lean-to shed where my great aunts boiled water on oil stoves and washed the dishes and their clothes, etc. The water came from a big iron pump in the yard. It was fun to work that handle instead of turning a tap as I did at home. The WC was also across the yard and there were two toilets side by side, a large one and a small one!! The house next door belonged to a man who had a tiny shop in the front. I

know he sold sweets – but I do not remember what else – groceries I suppose. They had a daughter called Edna who was about my age and we used to play together. My great aunts' house was really Victorian in furnishing with oil lamps which they used for lighting and ornaments – like flowers under glass domes – such as now one can find in antique shops. On Sundays they would prepare a roast dinner in a large pan with potatoes around the meat and take it down the road to the bakery. It would be put into the big baker's oven, with other dinners like it, and we would collect it covered over with cloths to keep it warm when dinnertime came round. Quite often I was given money to go to that bakery during the week and buy those long buns with icing on the top, or Eccles cakes with currants. It is a nice little town, just one main street with a few houses round the back. It is a bit bigger now but much the same. I visited it not long ago. The footpath outside my aunts' house was raised and I used to jump off it, feeling quite brave. I was surprised when I went back to find it is not really much of a step-up at all so it must have been that my legs were so much shorter at the time when I remember it!

We used to go to all these places by train and whoever we were going to stay with would meet us at the station with a pony and trap. I do not remember ever going in a taxi there.

When I was six I went with my mother for a few weeks to Edinburgh in Scotland. My mother's brother was working there and his wife went into hospital because of some complication before her baby was to be born. We were there at the time my cousin was born. I have memories of Edinburgh which has a lovely main street running through it called Princes Street with gardens all along one side. I remember the floral clock which fascinated me. We travelled to the hospital, visiting, in a cable tram. It went clanking along, 'picking' up the cable in the centre of the road – much like the ones in San Francisco. I was taken to see Holyrood House, an historic mansion where the Queen stays when she goes to Edinburgh. I remember a fountain dedicated to a dog with a little statue of him and the sad little tale of how his master died and he visited the grave constantly. Just the sort of sad little story that would fix itself into a child's memory.

In the summer we would go on family picnics – my aunts and uncles and all the cousins. Plymouth is very well placed for day trips like that because we could choose between the seaside (and there were lovely little sandy beaches within reach) or the country lanes picking primroses or bluebells or blackberries according to the time of year, or to the moors for walks, etc. Those trips were really quite expeditions – the whole crowd of us carrying our picnic foods and drinks and outdoor clothes according to the weather and where we were going. We went on trains or buses or ferries or motor boats and trams, with all the walking from one to the other! A favourite seaside spot was Tregantle which is just a little way into Cornwall. Getting there meant catching a tram from home to Devonport – walking then some way to the big chain ferry that crossed the river Tamar, walking to the bus when we reached the other side and, after the bus trip, a long walk down the steep cliffs. Then we had a lovely sandy beach with rock pools and the sea to play in. My aunt always carried some of her home made blackberry wine to warm us up when we came out of the sea – the sea is always cold in England! We always started off early because the going and coming took so long. It was fun.

