

My Life, Mum's Story

I remember from quite a little girl living in Lorne Road and my Gran lived on the other side of the road. Every So often my dad would appear he was an engineer on a fishing boat and sailed around from port to port for the herring fishing. I had noticed my Mum did odd things from time to time but I was too young to understand what was wrong. For some reason my Mum and Gran did not speak to each other or visit. Then out of the blue Mum started to follow my Dad from port to port and we just took off at a moments notice not telling anyone where we were off too. I remember especially one instance, I was seven at the time, we went to Milford Haven to see Dad for a few days and whilst he was at sea Mum suddenly without telling him decided to return home, I remember getting off the train at Lowestoft and it was very dark and late, Mum and me arrived by taxi at Gran's, we had to knock as it was so late. Gran took us in and we went to bed in a big bed together. Early the next morning Mum woke me shouting for me to get Gran as there was blood in the bed. I was too young to understand it was a miscarriage, one of many.

You see I was the only surviving child of seven. Born in the middle of two sets of twins who died, and because of this Mum was having a breakdown which had been coming on for some time. After she recovered we left our little house and Mum found rooms but she never stayed long in one place so I moved around with her from school to school and half the time Gran and Dad did not know where we were. The last place we lived was in a very large house made into flats and we lived at the very top, more like an attic. I used to go into the ladies flat below us as she played the piano and I loved going for a sing song with her, she was lovely with me as she never had any children and lived alone. Mum was always going missing and I remember one night I had been alone all day and somebody sent for Gran who took me to her house. Everyone was out looking for Mum and she was found wandering miles away from home and did not know who she was.

We stayed at Gran's but Mum was getting a handful because of her illness and we never knew what she would do next, she was very possessive of me and many times she kept me in our bedroom and would not let me out because she was afraid I would be taken away from her as she had lost all her other children. When she was well she was a lovely Mum and always looked after me well. I never wanted for anything as regards food and clothes I always had the best of everything and she truly loved me and I loved her back.

One day it seems all the family had a get together with Gran and Granddad and all my uncles as the doctor had said Mum had to be put into a mental hospital for her own good, so it was decided to give it a try. I'll always remember the day she went, I had been sent out to the pictures with friends to get me out of the way when they came for her. I always remember getting back and Mum was gone and Gran said I was going to stay with her and Granddad for a while to see how things went. After a few weeks Dad came and took me to this place to see Mum, it was awful because in those days they were locked in all the time. I was scared stiff as there were grown women playing with dolls and doing all sorts of silly things, but the sad thing was Mum did not know who Dad and I were. One day the police arrived at Gran's to say Mum had got out and run away. I don't know how as the place was surrounded with high walls, but somehow she had managed to climb over, she was found the following day stealing milk off a step of a house for a drink. After that and many tests including electric shock treatment the family was told she would never recover. Once more the family got together, Dad and the family found out if they could pay she could be moved to a new hospital. It was in a big house in lovely grounds with plenty of care and attention, which in those days was rare, so everybody got together and it was arranged. Mum would go to the hospital and Dad would carry on going to sea. I was to be looked after by Gran and Granddad and all my wonderful uncles and aunts and believe me they spoiled me rotten. I think they were trying to make up for all that had happened and at seven years old it was quite something.

Life goes on no matter what, Mum stayed in the hospital and we used to go and see her as often as we could. It was a train journey away as there were no cars much in those days but we managed somehow. She was well looked after and always looked very clean and well dressed as we kept her

supplied with clothes. She never hardly knew us except for perhaps a minute or two and then it had gone, but she was so tiny and pretty with not a line or a wrinkle, just living in a little world of her own. We all learned to accept fate and as long as she was cared for that is all we could hope. Dad came to stay at Gran's, often when his ship was in Lowestoft he would take me on board. I saw the engine room where he worked whilst at sea and his little bunk where he slept. There was a swing bridge at Lowestoft that used to open to let the boat go from one dock to the other and I used to go on board with Dad and stand on deck with some of the crew and sail through and wave to the visitors watching. The crew on the boat were wonderful to me and always made a fuss giving me all sorts of little gifts. It was a lonely life for my Dad but he always made time for me. Sadly two of my uncles Robert and Leonard were drowned at sea and my Gran took my cousin Bobby to bring up with me as his Mum already had three other children and was finding it hard to manage. Later his Mum remarried but he still stayed and lived with Gran and Granddad and me. I had a good childhood after that except sometimes I envied other kids having their Mums and Dads.

My uncle Tom and his wife and children lived in Beccles not many miles from us and had a fish and chip shop. They had three girls so sometimes in the school holidays I stayed with them. I remember standing on a box in the shop, I was too small to reach the counter and I used to put the potatoes in the chopper to cut into chips. I loved it seeing all the customers who always had a cheery word for me. After the shop closed, my uncle had a speed boat, nothing fantastic but a boat for all that and we used to pile in and take a picnic and sail on the Norfolk broads into Oulton broad, where we used to tie up and have a wonderful time messing about on the other boats belonging to friends and playing cricket then off on the boat again back home.

My uncle also had a pony and trap and we used to go out round the country lanes in it, I used to hold the reins and gee up the pony (oh happy days). Sadly my uncle Tom's family broke up and he also came to live with Gran until he remarried. He had a heart condition that he never told anyone about and he used to belong to the Territorial Army and went camping every year with them and one day when they were unloading the lorry on returning he jumped off the back and collapsed and died on the spot. He had a full military funeral and his coffin was draped with the Union Jack and all the territorials marched behind with an army band. He was a lovely man and kind.

My uncle Billy and aunt Beatty were always at Gran's. They sadly never had children and would spoil me, if ever we were in trouble we went to uncle Billy's. I remember he used to cut my hair I used to cry because he always cut it like a boys. He used to play football and auntie Beatty used to take me to watch him play, we used to shout out "come on Peekie", of course his name was Peek. I used to jump up and down especially if he scored. I spent lots of time at their house. We used to go down to the docks at night when the herring fishing was on, it was all floodlit, and we would watch the scotch girls gutting the herring and put it in barrels at the dock side. They were so fast, when ever you saw them in town they were knitting as they were walking along, lovely fair-isle jumpers. It was amazing how they did it. Sometimes some of my friends and I used to sneak down when they were gutting fish and give them cheek. They used to throw herring at us, it was a dupe really because we used to gather them up and off home. Many a household had a good old fish dinner when the kids had been out. Wonderful memories. One day my uncle Bill was sitting in his garden on an old seat, his favourite spot, and aunt Beatty called him for his dinner, but he had died just sitting there. Aunt Beatty never really got over it and died a few years later. They were wonderful people. I almost forgot my uncle Bill worked on the broads in his spare time with the outboard motors. He never wore a shirt and I remember everyone would not believe he was white he was so tanned, but Gran, aunt Beatty, Bobby, and I were so proud of this fellow who could handle a boat so well and I'm afraid I used to brag to my friends about him – magic.

Now my uncle George the oldest of the brothers was a real old time fisherman, a regular old fashioned Popeye with his steam boat cap and clay pipe. Him and his wife aunt Edith lived in an old rambling house at the south end of Lowestoft, they had seven children and sometimes if I was fed up I would get on my bike and cycle to their house, but we were never very close. I think he had too many kids of his own, but when he came in from sea he always called at Gran's with big bags of fish which Gran

parcelled up, and my cousin Bobby and I used to take it round to the neighbours and some used to give us a penny or two or a few sweets. One old lady I'll always remember as Bobby and I used to fall out who would take her fish because neither of us wanted to go, she always had current buns she had made and insisted we had one or a few sweets in a bit of paper. She lived in a little terraced house and it was far from clean. Mrs Houston was her name and dirty or not she was a lovely old girl and loved to see us. I remember uncle used to bring live crabs and lobsters and used to chase me with them.

Now we come to Uncle Harry, the jewel in the crown of the family. I think of all my uncles he loved me the most. He was a gentle wonderful man. He was once courting as they called it in those days a girl called Rosie Grint, and she had a few nieces and plenty of relations. What I clearly remember is during one Christmas holiday uncle Harry was invited to a party at her house and I was allowed to go with him. In fact he always taking me somewhere, however at this time I had a rag doll who I called Betty, I thought the world of this doll and when uncle and I went to the party I put her on the settee to sleep till I got back. We had games and I had a great time and won a small pair of rubber pants just right for Betty. I could hardly wait to get home to try them on but "oh dear", disaster awaited me, during the evening nobody had noticed but Spot, Gran's dog, had got Betty and really had a go. He had pulled her to bits. Well I was so upset I cried for a week, and his romance to Rosie did not last and he later married my aunt Jenny, who was a cook at a big hotel on the prom. Uncle Harry worked at the same hotel for a while and that's how they met.

When I was young I used to call him uncle Monny, because when he was christened the priest said name this child and my Granddad, having had a pint or two, shouted out Mornington Harry, and everyone was so stunned they just did not say anything. So poor chap he was stuck with it, so as I said, I used to call him Monny, that is until he married aunt Jenny and she always called him Harry so Harry he became. At one time he worked at a big pub called The Grand and when the dray men were delivering the big barrels of ale my Mum and I used to go to watch them slide them down a big chute into the cellar and uncle Harry used to catch them at the bottom. I always got a drink of lemonade on those days, a treat, they had very big shire horses to pull the beer carts, massive beasts they were and very strong but beautiful to see.

My Dad at this time was fishing out of Fleetwood and lived in Thornton with this widow, an unheard of thing in those days, but he was still a young man and would not divorce my Mum as he still loved her. Although being how she was she never knew, but he was loyal to her the best way he could, and was still married to her till the day he died aged 46. So sad, but before this happened my uncle Harry and aunt Jenny thought I should keep in touch with Dad even though Gran had tried to stop me from seeing him because of as in those days he was living in sin as they called it. However, uncle Harry did all he could to keep the link with Dad and I going, and uncle and aunt Jenny paid my train fare for me to meet Dad at my aunt Emily's, Dads youngest sister in Norwich, and that way we kept in touch as often as we could. My Dad had an older sister, my auntie May and her husband uncle Ted who lived in Dereham, Norfolk, and they had a large family, but sometimes in the summer holidays auntie May used to come to Gran's and take me on the train to Dereham for a little holiday and although they had a big family of their own they always made room for me. I remember sleeping four in a bed top to toe and at night we used to lie in bed and tell stories.

My aunt was a worker, she used to take in washing for the local shops so she could feed her family as Uncle Ted worked in a brewery and did not earn much money. I can't remember ever seeing her sitting down, she worked all her life for her family and had a few tragedies along the way. Her eldest daughter died young from a brain haemorrhage after having a baby, and the husband didn't want the baby. Aunt May and uncle Ted took Terry and brought him up with their own, there was always room for one more. Then her son my cousin Eddie died of TB quite young, so she had a very hard life but through it all I always had my share of love. She lived into her nineties after working most of her life, even after uncle Ted died of a heart attack she went to work in big fields fruit picking and was still at it well into her seventies when she almost lost her sight and nature took over and forced her to stop. What a woman - so caring for others, a real mum to all her family, who used to say to

stop her they would have to shoot her, but her children really loved her in return and made her last years as happy as they could surrounding her with love and care until the end. I'll always remember aunty May with great love and respect for the person that she was - true grit.

Now my uncle Albert, my Grans youngest son, what can I say about him. To me when I was young he was a young man getting his first job as a fisherman, a real jack the lad with his flat cap and one gold earring, all the rage for young fishermen in those days, but he also was kind to me in his own way. Now he met a girl called Edie, very old fashioned, and she lived on a farm with her mum and dad and brother. Albert, carefree and careless, got her pregnant and in those days no two ways about it, there was a shot gun wedding as they say. Her mum and dad died and in the mean time her brother moved away, so Albert and Edie took over the farm and they went on to have six children. I remember going to the farm, talk about the Darling Buds of May and then some, everybody mucked in together. I never got close to them as they had a big family and plenty of work to take up their time, so I kind of lost touch, although I did see them from time to time. After I was married my husband John and my two girls once went to see them while we were on holiday at uncle Harry's in Lowestoft, and that was the last time I saw them. Years later I heard that Albert had died suddenly, but by this time his family would all have been grown up.

Going back I remember the muffin man ringing his bell with hot muffins for breakfast, also the milkman with a big churn on a cart and a tin measuring jug. You had to take your own jug to put the milk in. Then on a Friday night a big horse, and to me it looked like a stage coach, used to stop in the street outside Gran's and it sold everything and in the winter at night it had lanterns lit at the side of the couch and no matter what the weather it always turned up. Then an organ grinder used to come round and he had a monkey sitting on the top, the man used to turn a handle and music used to play and all the kids in the street used to be dancing around and giving the monkey pennies. We learned not to get too close as the monkey would snatch at the money and give you a right nip if it could but what fun we had. Then the rag and bone man with his cart would arrive and he used to shout in a very loud voice "Rags get your balloons here", we used to get anything we could an old shirt or jumper just so we could get one balloon - oh happy days.

Shall we call this part two because this is where my life takes a new path. I often wonder if I did the right thing, but I believe in fate so perhaps all that follows was meant to be. The next part of my life all stems from my beloved uncle Harry and aunt Jenny, as I said they always encouraged me to keep in touch with my Dad, you see at one stage they had wanted to adopt me as they never had children but dad did not want to give me up completely, so like the wonderful couple they were they did all they could to keep us together. I had left school at this time and was going out with a lad called Alan, his dad was a driver on the trains and could get free rail passes for his family. Alan and I used to go to uncle Harry's and aunt Jenny's a lot, always having supper there. Of course we still all met at Gran's, Alan as well, we used to all play darts at night and Alan soon became one of the family. I used to go to his house sometimes, but mostly we were at Gran's or uncle's. We had many happy hours together. I almost forgot, Alan and I met at the silk factory where we both worked, dying raw silk. It was dirty work at times but everybody worked in those days and our kind of job was a stepping stone till something better came along. Holiday time was coming around and Dad wanted me to visit him in Thornton. Gran wasn't too pleased but aunt Jenny and uncle Harry said I should see Dad as it had been a while since I had seen him, so they arranged it all and Alan and I set off. We went by train and were to be met at Manchester by Lena, the widow dad lived with, who I have mentioned before. She had two sons John and Ronnie.

John had a car so he met us with his mum. What a journey, I thought we were never going to get there, it was very dark and we had a right job to find them as we didn't know Manchester at all; however we were rescued in the end and finally arrived at Thornton. Dad was still at sea but due to dock the next day. Lena, Alan and I went down to Fleetwood docks to meet him in from sea, in those days you could see the ships arriving in port from the sea front. What a lovely sight, all the boats coming down the channel and families waving like mad to welcome their men home. What a lovely reunion we had, we were so happy to see each other, we had a good holiday and after much discussion

I was persuaded to stay for a while. Alan returned to Lowestoft to see his parents, he was coming back and we were both planning to get jobs for a while so he had the job of telling my Gran and of course she was upset, but seeing it was only for a while it was agreed. From then on although I didn't know it at the time, fate had stepped in and my life was about to change forever. Alan returned and we both got jobs, Gran had sent on my bike and a trunk of my belongings so when I got a job, on a chicken farm of all things, my bike came in handy as I had to bike miles everyday as it was way out in the country. What a terrible job, talk about being up to your neck in chicken "s--t" wasn't in it, but it was a job and I coped. Alan did odd jobs at anything he could find, so for a while things ticked over, but I was secretly worried about Dad as he did not look very well although he didn't say anything. Christmas was coming up and Alan's parents wanted him to go home to be with his family and as work for him was scarce he decided to go for a while.

Now here comes the twist in the tail. As I said Lena had John and Ronnie, and they were both in a brass band. Oh, I forgot to say when Ronnie got married to Edith I was bridesmaid and I used to go to their house a lot. Well, during the Christmas period the band went out carolling and on this day I was at a loose end, what with Alan being away I decided to have a walk through Thornton and end up at Ron's for a cup of tea with Edith. On the way I passed the band and of course both John and Ron gave me a wave. Now also in the band was another John and he wanted to know who I was, Ron told him and he invited himself to Ron's to meet me and being a bit of a lad told Ron he was going to get a date. Ron just laughed and thought it a joke but decided to go along with it. Well we met, Ron and Edith were going to the cinema that night in Cleveleys and seeing I was on my own and in for a lonely night, he talked me into making up a foursome and from then on my life was to take a different road. I'll never forget that film, it was called the Four Feathers. Christmas came and went and things settled down. Alan was still away and had got a job on the railway learning to be a driver and everybody was expecting me to go back soon, but during this time John had continued to see me and to tell you the truth I fancied him myself. He was handsome in his uniform and could play the trumpet and cornet like a dream, so being young and flattered by being chased by a bandsman I had a lot of thinking to do. On one hand how unhappy my Gran would be if I did not go back after all she had done for me, all the love and care she had given me, and then on the other hand my Dad had missed so much of my life, through no fault of his own and I felt he needed me. So I stayed and married John and as they say the rest is history.

This is where mum got up to with her story, so anything else will have to come from me which I hope to do in the near future.