

## PAULINE'S STORY

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England

Little thing that she was, but my what a woman! Even today though I am over seventy, I'll always love and be thankful I was her daughter. Even though, she put the fear of God into all five of us. Such a strong will she had, but when that sanctimonious woman came to our house in 1934 or there about, she did not know her as we did, telling her she couldn't possible take care of five children on her own. We would all be poor urchins, almost beggars! She just said, "I've just lost my husband and I am not going to lose my children as well." So, thanks to 'Emm', we did not end up in Australia.

Dear Emm,

I've got these nice digs in Teinmouth and I've missed you, so try and come soon. Get your mother or sister or my mother to look after the children next week. The show is going so well, I know you would love to see it.

Be seeing you, my little sweetheart,

Your loving husband,

Frank xxx

So, she went to stay, saying to herself, I'll be able to tell him now that there is another baby on the way. It was a lovely sunny August day, sitting on the beach ...such a lovely couple. He's such a tall, handsome man. "Frank", she said, "I'm expecting another baby." He, a bit worried, said, "Oh Emm, I am sorry. I did not mean to get you that way again, but we'll manage." He loved swimming ... I do too! But, he never came back alive, such a gorgeous man and so young. That was in 1931, I was a toddler and a baby on the way. But she managed! We five belonged to her and not someplac3e in Australia. Funny, though, I have always wanted to visit Australia.

"Now, that is all past, that's a life I can't remember" is what our mother said to us at different times when we were older. But, I do remember September 3, 1939. I remember we were all upstairs busy doing our chores when the milkman came to the door shouting "Oy Mrs! ...War has been declared!" I was only nine, but I remember that, (we did not have a wireless) ... not everyone did.

Well, my mother came flying down the stairs, really frightened, she was! She'd heard so many stories and had seen the Pathe news at the pictures, you see. "I'll put all your heads in the gas oven if we get invaded", she said. Anyway, that was the start, but things seemed to quiet down, until all the evacuees came ...that was quite some time! We were really excited! I believe Mother thought we had elastic walls. Already, Grannie lived with us together with one auntie and a lodger. Then we had a lovely cockney family come to stay with us, as well ... two sisters and two boys and another girl, as I remember. We had such fun with that family, so comical they were. I had never experienced cockney humor before. But, things went quiet in London and it was coming up to Christmas and the two

sisters' were missing their husbands, so they went back to London. It wasn't long though before they were back again. Bombed out this time, but still a good-humored bunch.

Grannie had died about Christmas time. What a lady she was and oh, how I cried when she died. I loved her so. She came from a very upper class family. Her father was a head teacher at a school in Devon, Teignmouth, I believe (it could have been his own school). Anyway, Grannie married a man named Will Norton. He was the black sheep of his well-to-do family, so it made her the same in the eyes of her well-to-do family. They were all ever so posh! I remember, when Grannie's brother came down to see her. He lived in Somerset and came to our door ...#10. Mother let him in, and well, I've never seen someone so posh. Me, my brother Frank, and my youngest sister Babs just stared up at him. I suppose our two older sisters were there, but I can't remember. Anyway, he seemed quite tall. Though, looking back, I don't suppose he was, as most of the Skinners were quite small, delicate people. He wore a lovely gray hat that looked like fine fur. It was very stylish ...I think they called them homburg hats. He wore gray spats and carried a beautiful silver topped cane, gray silk tie with a silver pin. Quite a gent he was! Good looking too... very dapper! He gave all of us children a sixpenny piece each. He then went upstairs to see his sister, Kate, (my Grannie). He was visiting her for the first time in many years. It wasn't long after that visit that my Grannie died. I don't think that we ever saw him again. There was such snobbery in those days!

Then there was a soldier and his wife and two daughters billeted with us. They came from Essex. We used to take the mickey out of their accent and they laughed at ours. We all got along well. In fact, they did not return to Guilford, they made their home in Cornwall. We were all friends until time caused us to lose touch.

"And the Yanks came!" They took over our lovely park down by the river ...that was the white ones; the black GI's were billeted at the top of the hill, on land, which is now the Crematorium.

The town was always full, yet by today's terms, there was never any real trouble. I used to go and sleep at my Auntie Florries as my uncle was away in the navy. She wanted company at night and I was about 13 years old. In the evening, Mother used to say, "you had better get around to Florries now". It was about a ten minute walk, passing the Cathedral all on my own with loads of servicemen all around! Well, one night, I was walking down the road, nearly there, when this Yankee sailor came walking along side of me. He said, "Hi Honey, How are you doing?" I told him I was going to my aunties and he responded with something else ... must have been something cheeky, to which I responded "I'm only thirteen" to which he said "OK Honey and went his way. Mind you, I was very tall for my age and looked a lot older. It was different then. About this time, my eldest sister joined the WRAF. I don't think Mother was too keen, but it was either the forces or the munitions factory and she couldn't see her doing that. It was more exciting in the forces. How I had wished I were old enough to go. She used to come home on leave with loads of cigs and let me have a smoke quite often, saying that it will stop me from growing so tall. I did, however, grow to 5' 10", but I was nice and slim and had plenty of boyfriends even at 13. It was all so sweet then. A year later, I finished school at

the age of 14 in 1944. School wasn't much good during that time as we only went to school half a week and the evacuees went the other half. My Mother found me a job in a shoe shop, three of us started together. I don't know why they hired three of us, as there were only a few pairs of shoes in the shop. We didn't do much other than just dusting cleaning the shop front and things like that. During our tea break, we would practice dancing while singing "Sleepy Lagoon", "Tropical Moon", "Two on an Island" and just waltz away ... girls together! It's funny to say, but sometimes I think we were a lot better off during the war. Mother got herself a good job in the NAAFI Stores. She met some lovely fellows too. I remember one who was really keen for her, but once again she thought only of us, saying it wasn't fair to us. Silly she was, so attractive and smart too. She used to make clothes out of next to nothing. She would buy curtain material, as you didn't need clothing coupons. She would make all of us girls lovely dresses. She would stay up half the night sewing. Mind you, there was some bombing in Cornwall and German planes coming over the channel and on the way back they would drop their bombs. My brother and I and loads of kids would go miles looking at craters in the fields and finding all this shrapnel, funny pieces of metal that we treasured. We kept them long after the war. They used to drop loads of leaflets, propaganda! We burned them in disgust! The docks at Falmouth were bombed and the hospital in Truro, too. We would go to the top of the hill outside of town to see the glow in the sky which was Plymouth burning. It was terrible how they suffered! Every Sunday after church, we would all troop down to the park to talk with the GI's. My brother would be really mad, jealous he was. He used to say, "Overpaid, oversexed, and over here." Actually, they were lovely. We always got Hershey bars and gum from them. One time, I remember, one GI gave me a tin of chopped chicken. What a luxury! There was an American kitchen by the quay, and they made these scrumptious ring doughnuts. I can still taste them now! All scrunchy and covered in sugar. Always giving us some, they were. Then, all of a sudden, they were all gone. It was at a time when I was just getting interested in boys. The river was empty, all the DUKWS and landing craft and troop carriers were all gone! The park was bare ...there were no tents! Nothing! I bet many a girl cried that night.

Mother got a job with the Land Army after the NAAFI, but she had enjoyed the NAAFI. Best that I know, those servicemen chatting her up, and we had plenty of cake! I laugh now about her bringing home these big pieces of cake with holes in them, telling us that the mice had gotten to them. It was more like pencils being pushed in them, but there was a war going on. In the summer, we would go off to the beach, crowds of us. Even though much of the beach was closed off with barbed wire as there were still land mines found there. Above Falmouth, there were loads of Barrage balloons. There was a thunder and lightning storm one time and the balloons got stuck and all the wire cables came crashing down, but we still stayed on the beach. Our Mum used to pack up sandwiches and cakes. I don't know how she managed when everything was rationed, mind you it was only meatpaste sandwiches, not much butter, just a scrape, and she would bring a teapot with a little bit of tea in and one of us would go to the café on the beach to have the teapot filled with a jug of hot water. I believe it was only a few pennies and we would have a bottle of drink made with water and lemonade powder. We all thought we were so lucky going and coming back on the train. We would all crowd in even in the guards van. I think half of us never paid. Those were happy days even though we were at war.

Life gradually got back to normal after the war ended in 1945. Food and clothes were still on ration. I remember that my Mum got a load of parachute silk and made us some lovely petticoats and panties. When my eldest sister got married, her wedding dress was borrowed as well as the dresses for the bridesmaids. I managed to get some silver strap sandals with some clothes coupons I had saved and my sister, Barbara, did too. We thought we looked like the "Bee's Knees." That was in 1947. Then, when I got married in 1951, things were not much better. I also borrowed my dress. It was lovely and we had to cut down on the number of invited guests, as food was still in short supply. However, I did buy a lovely green coat and gray wool dress and a hat. We all wore hats at that time. This was my "going away" attire even though we only had three days away in Plymouth, as Den was leaving for Malta. He was in the Royal Navy. We got to this little boarding house in Plymouth late in the evening. We thought it was so romantic, but it was only a little room with a big bed that filled it. Anyway, we thought we would go out to get something to eat and we found this little place (like a little Nissen hut) that did a mixed grill. Not for a long time had we eaten so well. One consolation about the shortage of food was we were all ever so slim and healthy. Then we went to bed and the son of the house had a trumpet and he played, "I'm In The Mood For Love" for hours! I was going to go to Malta to be with Den to live in the married quarters, but they came home quicker than expected. I was very disappointed and not until 30 years later did I get to Malta. What a wonderful place and the people were ever so friendly. Den got demobbed from the Navy and we came to Coventry. That was where the work was. It was a boom-town after the war. I always longed to be back home in Cornwall. It took us five years for our first baby to arrive. I thought we would never have a family especially since my sister, Pam, was having babies nearly every year. She had eight altogether!! Then as we did not have another, we decided to adopt. We had this gorgeous baby boy when our daughter, Gillian, was nine years old. She loved him dearly. When Bob was three and I was nearly 39, we fell for another baby. What a shock! We had a lovely baby boy, Simon, in December 1968.

**TO BE CONTINUED**