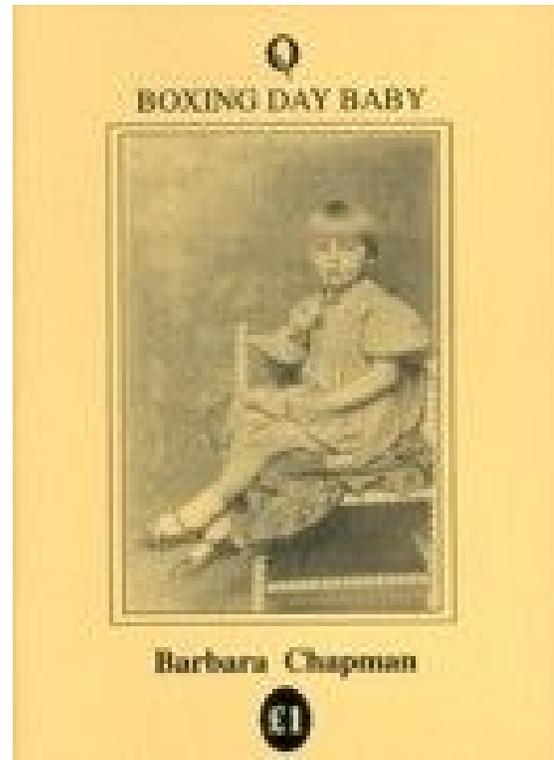


## About QueenSpark Books

QueenSpark Books was founded in 1972 as part of a campaign to save the historic Royal Spa in Brighton's Queen's Park from being converted to a casino. The campaign was successful and it inspired participants to start collecting memories of people living in Brighton and Hove to preserve for future generations. QueenSpark Books is now the longest-running organisation of its kind in the UK.

More than one hundred books later, as part of our 45th anniversary celebrations, we are making the original texts of many of our out-of-print books available for the first time in many years.



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## About this book

Barbara Chapman was born in Brighton on a snowy Boxing Day in 1927. In this 1994 autobiography, she reminisces about her early childhood; focusing on her memories of home and school, and the effects of the Second World War on herself, her family, and the community.

Barbara shares her experiences of working life in the Brighton area; telling stories of her jobs, including her work as a waitress and a telephonist at the Old Ship Hotel, and the hardship, restrictions and freedoms of life during wartime. She recollects vividly a bygone era, narrating her life history with honesty, humour and charm and invoking for the reader a very personal impression of the city during the 1930s and 1940s.

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# **BOXING DAY BABY**

## **Prologue**

### **Christmas 1927**

Mabel Bourne, aged thirty, was a very pretty woman, she had light brown long hair, brown eyes, with a lovely creamy colour skin. She smiled and laughed a lot, especially when she was with her husband, Tommy Bourne. He was aged thirty-two, a large man with fair curly hair and brown eyes; he walked with a limp due to being born with a club foot. He earned his living as a singer, baritone, appearing on the stage in musical shows; he had a lovely voice and great stage presence. He even appeared locally with Jack Sheppard and his Entertainers along Madeira Drive, Brighton.

On Christmas Eve 1927 Mabel's mother Rebecca Ward was busy putting up the Christmas decorations in her terraced house in Compton Avenue, Brighton. She had been a widow for many years and worked as a cook for a rich elderly couple. This was her only source of income. Because of the lack of financial help for women (i.e. Widows Pension) she became a Suffragette and went down to the Town Hall in Brighton to protest and chained herself to the railings with the others.

Rebecca's son William Ward, who was known as Billy, and his wife Jessie were coming to spend Christmas day with her, along with Rebecca's daughter Mabel and her grandson Stanley. Stanley, who was nine, was illegitimate. Mabel had met his father, an Australian soldier, during the First World War. He was sent to France and she never heard from him again. When Mabel knew she was pregnant she tried to trace him, but never found out if he was alive or dead. Stanley had spent a lot of his childhood staying with his Granny Rebecca. Mabel was now heavily pregnant again; the baby was due any time. Tommy her husband would not be able to come as he was away appearing as the Dame in the Pantomime 'Dick Whittington'. Before she was pregnant Mabel travelled with her husband, as she used to sing and dance in the chorus.

Christmas day dawned grey and cold with a threat of snow in the air. Rebecca made up a lovely coal fire in her drawing room, where she had laid the table for the meal. When Billy and Jessie arrived they expressed their concern about Mabel. "I do hope she will soon have this baby," said Billy, "If it snows who is going to look after her? You can't Mother, you have difficulty in walking up the hill now."

Rebecca tried to reassure her son, "We will manage".

At that moment Mabel and Stanley arrived and were welcomed with Christmas greetings, with Jessie laughingly pointing to Mabel's large tummy, "I see you have brought the Christmas pudding with you," she said.

Mabel laughed, "Don't think I am going to have it today Jessie."

The day passed very quickly and in the evening friends of Rebecca's called with presents, mince pies and sweets, they all thought it was cold enough to snow.

Billy said to Mabel "I think I should take you home now." Although Mabel only lived in the next road, Westhill Street, she agreed, as she was feeling a little tired from the excitement of the day.

Stanley began to cry, "I don't want to go home, can I stay with you granny?"

Rebecca comforted him, "Your mummy needs you with her tonight, but tomorrow I will come to your house and bring some of the sweets and mince pies that are left over from today."

The following day when Mabel woke up she felt very well. The day was sunny with no sign of any snow, although it was still very cold. She woke Stanley and gave him his breakfast. They talked about yesterday and then looked at all the presents he had been given. Stanley wanted to know where the Christmas pudding was that Jessie had mentioned. Mabel laughed.

"It's in my tummy and soon it will pop out," she said.

"I thought you had a baby in your tummy," he replied, "I hope it's a boy so that I can have someone to play with."

Mabel again laughed, "What if it's a girl?"

"It will have to go back," said Stanley.

Mabel then felt like doing some cleaning. She set about washing her kitchen floor, and lit a coal fire in the drawing room. The sun had disappeared and the skies were clouding over.

"It could snow," said Mabel.

"I hope it does then I can build a snow man," said Stanley.

Then they sat down on the comfortable settee in the drawing room and Mabel read him a story from one of his new books.

She must have fallen asleep. She was woken by a sharp pain and her waters began to break.

"Stanley you must go and tell Granny that the baby is coming, she will get in touch with the nurses. Put your warm coat on, and don't loiter."

Stanley was only too pleased to go, as it had started to snow. When he arrived at Rebecca's house, he told her, "The baby's coming."

Looking at the snow falling, Rebecca decided not to venture out but to give him a note to take to the Doctor's house. Fortunately he lived in the next road.

Meanwhile Mabel had taken some of the burning coals from the fire upstairs to her bedroom, where a fire was already laid, unlit. She then placed old sheets and blankets on her bed, found the baby's clothes, and returned to the kitchen where she put kettles and saucepans on the gas stove to boil. She also lit paraffin heaters and oil lamps. It was getting dark now and the snow was coming down fast. The nurses arrived.

"You better get on with having this baby," one of them said, "Or else we will be spending the night with you as the snow is getting worse."

When Billy arrived at his mother's house he was greeted by Stanley, "That baby is coming and I am going to stay with Granny tonight." Billy decided he would go round to his sister's house and find out if the baby had arrived. He found it hard trudging through the heavy fall of snow (1) - thank goodness the baby decided not to come in the middle of the night, and that all the family lived close to each other. When he arrived at his sister's house there was a lot going on, he promptly made the nurses and himself a cup of tea. He was just finishing his own when he heard the sound of a baby crying. A nurse appeared and told him Mabel had given birth to a lovely 9lb baby girl. She told him Mabel and the baby were comfortable and that when they had settled them both they would leave, but return early next morning.

Billy went quickly to the Post Office, which was just about to close, and sent a telegram to Tommy.

"What a night to be born!" The Post Mistress exclaimed.

Billy then managed to struggle back to his mother's house.

On hearing the news, Stanley said,

"Send it back, I want a brother," and then he added, "If you can't, I won't go home again."

When the telegram arrived at the theatre the evening performance had begun, with Tommy on the stage doing his big part.

"What shall we do?" said one of the stage hands.

"He should be told immediately" said the stage manager. "I know let's print the message on a large board and take it to the side of the stage and wave it to him."

A board was found and on it was printed in chalk "ITS A GIRL, MOTHER AND BABY DOING WELL". At first Tommy did not see the board but the audience did, and they began laughing and clapping, which made Tommy look. This news stopped the show.

My father continued to tour England in various musical shows, and so was seldom home. My mother never returned to work on the stage again, as she wanted to stay at home and care for her children.

### **Early Days**

About a year after my birth my father announced that he had fallen in love with another woman and wanted a divorce. My mother was not unduly surprised as she had seen him chasing other women, or them chasing him. He had terrific charisma and was very sexy. She had laughed when he told her this news, "You will never stay with this new woman long, so why don't we just separate?" In her heart she knew she was still very much in love with her husband, so was even prepared for him to be unfaithful to her. She hoped that he may tire of this woman as he had so many others, and then return again. This time she was wrong. This new woman was pregnant. My father again asked her for a divorce. My mother remained obstinate but agreed to a legal separation.

I did not meet my father until the death of my mother in 1959. Neither did I ever meet his parents Thomas and Alice Bourne, although they were living in Brighton near Queens Park. Grandpa Bourne was a fisherman on Brighton beach for many years and ran a fish shop opposite the Town Hall. My father was the oldest of three children. Molly his sister was married to Roget Dupart, who was a Basque. She had met him when he was at Plumpton Agriculture College. After they were married they returned to his father's farm in France, where he farmed and bred horses. Jack the youngest child, went into the Palestine Police, where he met Ruth, who was a Queen Alexandra's Nurse. They were married in Jerusalem. Neither Molly nor Ruth bore any children.

During my childhood we were forever moving into rooms and flats because my mother was now very poor and could not afford to rent a house. When I was about three I remember living on the third floor of a large house in Charlotte Street. We had one large bedroom which I shared with my mother and brother and one sitting room with part of it made into a kitchen. The only illumination was by gas lights which made a hissing noise when the gas mantle burnt and needed replacing. Sometimes we had to use candles when mother did not have any mantles or because she could not afford to buy them.

My brother used to play with me and was allowed to go out if he took me with him. We lived near the sea front and we often went onto the beach or along Madeira Drive, where we used to play hide and seek. One day he hid and I could not find him, so I had to try and cross the busy sea-front road alone to get home. My mother then gave my brother a good hiding. He refused to take me out again and told me I was Mummy's pet and a cry baby.

In spite of this I adored Stanley. For many years he was a father figure in my life. I

experienced my first moment of jealousy when he brought home his first girlfriend. As I grew older our roles appeared to change. He then came to me for help and advice, which I was able to provide and this strengthened our relationship.

To have a day out was a great thrill. Most of these days were spent with Granny Ward taking us by bus to Rottingdean, or by train to Devils Dyke. Granny was a large woman with brown eyes and grey hair. She wore spectacles, smelt of lavender water and had little pouches filled with lavender which she kept amongst her clothes and handkerchiefs. She always wore a hat which was frequently retrimmed with different coloured ribbons and artificial flowers. She never went out without her gloves on even in the summer. Her shoes were kept highly polished and she always carried a black umbrella.

I remember one very hot day all of us arriving at the Dyke Railway Station (2). Granny was feeling the heat so she put up her umbrella. Because she had difficulty in walking we all had to help push her up the steep hill from the station. I thought she was never going to get to the top. Our reward was an ice cream from the ice cream man on a tricycle with a little cart attached, where the ice creams were kept on blocks of ice.

I enjoyed spending the day on the beach near Banjo Groyne, east of the present Peter Pan's playground, on the way to the Brighton Marina. This groyne is shaped like a banjo. The Volks Railway train used to cross over this crowded beach, going over our heads because the beach was then lower. Sometimes my brother used to throw stones up and try to hit the wheels of the train. I used to worry in case one of these pebbles hit the train and made it topple over onto us sitting underneath - of course it never did.

I loved Guy Fawkes night as we used to make a Guy and take it down to the beach where we would build a large bonfire with all our friends. When the bonfire was well alight bangs could be heard, not only from the fireworks but from the pebbles which were being split by the intense heat. Most of these had been thrown on the fire by my brother.

I loved going on the two piers. Brighton Palace Pier was my favourite; the West Pier was more for the adults to enjoy. In those days you had to pay to go onto the piers. The Palace Pier had more machines to play on, at a penny a go. I don't remember ever winning any money on these machines. Some of the machines had flicking, moving pictures which was very exciting especially one called 'What the Butler Saw'. I did not really understand the story it was telling, but found the adults were laughing, especially the ladies who giggled when viewing this machine. As to the present-day machines, I am sure my granny would have been horrified, "Evil devils!" she would have exclaimed.

There was a very different atmosphere then, people appeared to get lots of pleasure from experiencing simple things: just walking the length of the pier, down one side and back up the other; sitting watching the sea and people on the beaches below. I always

wore my Sunday best when we went on the piers.

Every summer they held a Bathing Belles Carnival competition on the Palace Pier. The pier was usually crowded on the day it was held. Mother had a friend, Dorothy, who used to enter the competition. One year she came third and the adults had tea in the posh cafe near the end of the pier and I was given a large ice cream in a dish.

Another treat was going with Granny on the paddle steamers which we boarded on the end of the Palace Pier. I was fascinated by the engine room, where I could see the large paddles going round when the boat began to move and all the highly-polished brass machinery. The best trip was going to the Isle of Wight. This usually took about four hours there and four hours back again. We took a packed lunch with us, but when we anchored at Ryde I was allowed an ice-cream with Granny having a cup of tea.

My mother used to take us on the coach trips, which commenced near the Palace Pier. These were mostly taken in the afternoons when the coaches displayed a blackboard stating where they were going. I loved the mystery trips, these usually went into the countryside, where we ended the tour in a tea garden.

Along the seafront near the bandstand just past the West Pier, there used to be donkey rides and a Punch and Judy Show. I would stay and watch for a long time if my mother allowed me. I never became tired of watching and laughing at this remarkable show. I still watch Punch and Judy if I ever see one being performed.

## **Childhood**

I was about seven when we moved again. This time my mother went to work for a widower, Mr Brooks. He lived in a large house in Beaconsfield Road near Preston Circus. My mother had the top part of the house for us to live in and to my joy we had electric light, also a garden that was full of rose bushes which his late wife had grown. I think this is when I fell in love with the smell of roses and with digging in the soil trying to grow things. I remember using an outside lavatory which used to hoard lots of insects, especially big spiders. There was a wooden seat on the toilet, from which if you were not careful, you got a splinter in your bottom. My brother was very excited as next to us lived a fireman. As the fire station was only just down the road at Preston Circus, every time there was a fire a bell would ring in the house next door. The fireman would then be seen running down the road putting on his jacket and helmet, with my brother running after him so that he could see the fire engines coming out of the garages.

I used to like being taken to the Duke of York's Cinema nearby. I believe this was my first cinema. The films were shown in black and white, with no sound, only a piano being played. Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin films were my favourites and still make me laugh today. Charles Laughton left a vivid impression on me when I saw him in the film *Jamaica Inn*, which in parts I found rather frightening. When I saw *Snow White and*

*the Seven Dwarfs*, which was in colour, I was very frightened of the witch. I believe even when it was shown in later years some children were frightened of the witch and this part of the film was changed. When Charlie Chaplin's talking film *Modern Times* was to be shown, cinemas had to have new equipment installed to be able to hear and see this film, which everyone thought was marvellous. A child star, named Shirley Temple became my favourite child actress and I used to plead to be taken to see all her films.

When Uncle Billy's wife Jessie died, he was at the time employed as a caretaker at Belmont Boys Schools in Hassocks. They were living in the gatehouse and in the summer we all used to visit them making it a day out in the country. A year later Uncle Billy announced he was getting married again, to a woman named Mollie, who lived in the village. I remember the wedding being very grand. I went with my mother to the church at Hurstpierpoint in a big shiny black car. I had never been in a car before. Sharing our car was a man in a grey suit with a funny hat on. It was a top hat. He had a patch over one eye. I found this fascinating and just stared and stared at this man, wondering if he was a pirate. My mother later told me off and explained he had lost his eye in the war.

The wedding seemed to go on all day with the reception being held in the village hall. My mother later told me I had amused everyone by picking up my dress to show off my long frilly draws, which she had made. In those days, you could not buy pretty underwear.

I often went to stay with Uncle Billy and his new wife at the gatehouse in Hassocks. I can still remember the smell of the lovely soap they gave me to wash myself with, it was buttermilk. To me it was wonderful as my mother used lifebuoy soap, which in those days was supposed to be antiseptic and smelt horrible. They had a large black cat called Blackie. There were several Blackies over the years and ever since then I have always loved cats, especially black ones. When my Granny used to visit she always took with her a tin of sardines which were given to the cat as a treat. I thought this was terrible. When my mother opened a tin of sardines they were shared between the three of us.

I loved my Uncle Billy. He was a tall thin man with wavy light brown hair, with brown eyes and a serene face. He smoked a pipe, although he should not have done so as he was badly gassed in France in the First World War. He loved gardening and was always reading. He used to play with me and my brother on the lawn in the garden, where we hit white balls into sunken flower pots. I feel Billy was a father to me and my brother. His second wife Mollie was very kind to me. She was the youngest of seven children and the only girl. She had always lived in the country. She appeared to be forever cooking, making bread, cakes, jams, pies and lovely dinners. She used to take me for long walks in the fields where she would pick wild flowers. Even now at the age of eighty-seven, if

taken out in the country, she will still pick wild flowers.

As my mother was very deaf I grew up pronouncing words incorrectly because when I was smaller she had not been able to hear me. It was at Ditching Road School that this was discovered and was thought to be a contributing factor to my difficulty in spelling words. I do remember having to pull on her skirt to attract her attention, and to tell her that someone was at the door.

My brother was a naughty boy. He used to tell her the bell had rung when it hadn't. He was always a handful and at times he was out of control. He was also enuretic (3). He frequently played truant from school and the school-board man used to come and see our mother. We never knew where my brother went during the day. Eventually he was taken into care at Warren Farm Community School in Woodingdean. I missed him very much. However he did conform and used to come home to see us on his bike. When he was fourteen and of school leaving age he went into service as an Under Butler at a large country house in Chailey.

I attended Sunday school at St Augustine's Church in Stanford Avenue, morning and afternoon. If Granny was staying with us I was taken to Evensong as well. I used to protest but was still made to go. I became a Brownie and eventually a Girl Guide. During the summer we were taken on Church outings in the country to the Hassocks Tea Rooms. There must have been a pond nearby, as on one of these outings I remember the Vicar, Reverend Page, who was very elderly, falling into it. I will never forget him getting out of the water with his clothes all stained brown from the mud. The next Sunday when I saw him preaching the sermon I could not stop laughing, remembering the state of his attire at the outing. As I found the sermons boring I used to count how many times he used the word "AND". At the Sunday school sessions I used to like to hear the stories about the black children in Africa and the work the missionaries were doing there. Little did I know that one day I would go to Africa and meet some of the missionaries.

The fireman and his family living next door to us moved away. I was delighted because the new family included a girl called Betty who was about my own age. We began to walk to school together. Our walk took us over the bridge at London Road Railway Station, where we used to wait for a steam train to come along, so that we could stand in the steam as it went by. My mother was not very pleased as my white blouses used to get covered in black specks. It was not until I went to stay at Betty's house that I realised how poor my mother's home was. They had a bathroom while we still used the tin bath in front of the fire on Saturday evenings. Mother used to light the copper and fill it with cold water then empty the hot water into the bath. I used to hate coming home on Monday lunch time from school. There were no school dinners in those days. The copper would be lit and the kitchen would be full of steam and there was a smell of wet

clothes everywhere. Lunch was always cold meat with mashed potatoes on Monday. On Betty's birthday I was invited to her party and for the first time I ate biscuits which were whole. We could only afford broken biscuits in our house.

Betty was a very sweet, kind girl. She used to give me some of her toys. Her mother gave me some of Betty's dresses which were a good fit for me. I was not ashamed to have these handouts as my mother was finding it difficult to manage financially. My father was not paying her money regularly. This was resolved when mother took him to Court.

The Court in those days was in the Parochial Offices, a large red brick Victorian building in Princes Street, Brighton. In these offices she was given vouchers to get food and some shoes for me, as I had been going to school wearing Wellington boots in June. I went with my mother to the Court and I remember how the other people who were waiting looked poorly dressed and unhappy, with pinched faces. The Magistrate told my father that he had one month to pay the arrears or else he would be sent to prison. When the people waiting heard this news they all cheered.

I shall never forget the atmosphere in those offices and I was to be reminded of this event when I was much older and took a job as a clerk in the same buildings. The office I worked in was that old Court room.

I spent many years visiting Preston Park. My earliest recollection, was the Jubilee of King George V, when I was given a commemorative mug. Polo used to be played in the park and I can remember the horses coming very close to where we were standing. They seemed very large and we had to move quickly out of their way as clods of earth used to fly everywhere. Our school sports were held in the park. I was good in the egg and spoon race and the hurdles. My mother used to go and watch the cricket in the lovely cricket ground which also had a racing cycle track around it. Most of all I loved the rose garden at the beginning of the park.

Somehow my mother managed to obtain a second-hand bicycle for me as a reward for passing my exams. Although it was very heavy and old fashioned, I was delighted. My brother took me to Preston Park to learn to ride the bicycle, which did not take me very long. I was allowed to ride it in the park, not on the road, so I had to walk with the bicycle to the park.

One of the outings I enjoyed was going by tram from our house to the Old Steine to go to the beach, or the pier, if my mother had enough money for the fares. If not we would walk there and then ride home. The trams had polished wooden seats, sometimes with cushions on them, which I used to kneel on, so that I could see out of the window. There were tram lines in the middle of the roads which the traffic had to avoid. One day I remember playing with my whip and top on the pavement outside our house, when the

top went into the road and landed on the tram line. To my horror, before I could go and get it, a tram came along. I imagined a dreadful crash with the tram toppling over, but all that happened was my beautiful top was crushed to bits. In a way I was sorry when the trams stopped running as there had been trams running in Brighton since 1901. The last tram in Brighton was in September 1939 when they were replaced by trolley buses.

When a wireless appeared at our home I was overjoyed. Before this happened, when the man who lived downstairs went out my mother used to allow me to go and listen to his wireless. We only had a wind-up gramophone which sounded dreadfully noisy, unless you put a sock down the horn. You knew when the needle required replacing as the sound became scratchy on the record. My mother loved listening to Gracie Fields, Richard Tauber and the musical *Maid of the Mountains*, with Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy, singing *Indian Love Call*. I had nursery rhyme records. One particular record, which I can still remember was called, *Ain't it Grand to be Blooming Well Dead?* I found this record very amusing. On our wireless I heard the announcement on 21st January 1936, of the death of King George V and the Abdication speech of King Edward VIII on December 12th that same year. I remember my mother being very upset, as she adored Teddy which is what she always called him. We used to listen to a programme called 'In Town Tonight'. The opening music of this programme was the Knightsbridge March. My interpretation of this piece of music, gave me a visual picture of what I thought London would look like. I think I only went to London once when I was small and this was a visit to the Zoo. I remember having a ride on an elephant and waving to the large brown bears. That was the longest train journey I had ever taken.

## **School**

I commenced school at Queens Park Infants, just after my fourth birthday. I had been longing to go to school but was disappointed when the teacher told me and the other children we were to have a sleep in the afternoon. I tried to tell the teacher that I was not tired as my mother put me to bed early every night.

I then attended Preston Road Junior School. My mother had gone to the same school and from an old photo she showed me we discovered I was sitting in the same class room as she had been in many years before. Unfortunately, I had to change schools again. This time not because we moved, but because the school was condemned by the authorities, so I attended Ditchling Road School, where I sat my exams and obtained a scholarship for a secondary education.

I was very happy at Ditchling Road School and settled down to improving my education. I was behind the others in the class, mainly due to the poor standards of education at my previous school. In my last year at Ditchling Road I became a prefect and in spite of this role was very popular with the other children. I sat my exams and passed for a Grammar School education at Varndean School for girls, but due to the fact that you

had to wear a uniform there my mother told me that I could not go, because she could not afford to buy one. I had to settle for a Secondary School education at Brighton Intermediate School for girls in York Place.

I remember the grownups talking a lot about a German man called Hitler, and hints of perhaps another War. It seemed to me that they had never stopped talking about the First War. On 12th March 1938 Germany entered Austria followed by the Invasion of Poland. I remember hearing the wireless broadcast of the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain announcing the outbreak of War on 3rd September 1939. It was then that my mother received a letter from the education authorities stating that I could not go to my new school as they did not have enough air raid shelters for the new intake. I was to attend Pelham Street School, until the shelters were ready. I was terribly upset and even more so when I first attended, as the teacher taking our class was from Pelham Street School and according to her, we were a bunch of dunces. The other girls there delighted in taunting us and made our time there very miserable.

We were issued with gas masks, which I hated as when I put mine on I felt as if I was going to suffocate. My mother was always reminding me not to forget to take it with me when I went to school. My mother had to black out our windows, some she did with dark curtains, others were boarded up, when it was time to put the lights on.

There were no street lights and you had to see with the aid of torch. I was very aware that the moon and stars appeared brighter without the street lights on, but also people were more anxious when the moon was out as the enemy planes could see their targets better. Ration books were issued and my brother was called up for war service and became a Royal Marine.

At last they had finished the air raid shelters at the Intermediate School, and so with the others I finally attended. About six months later, I was out playing on my bicycle when I fell off it and unfortunately the bicycle landed on top of me, trapping my right foot. Someone took me home in a wheelbarrow as due to the intense pain I could not walk. My ankle and leg became very swollen and after a week my mother took me to the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital in Dyke Road. The Doctor there examined me and took an X-Ray. He told my mother I had badly damaged my ankle and to put it right he would have to operate. I was admitted to hospital and whilst there I remember the air raid siren sounding, and all the nurses moving our beds into the middle of the ward.

After my operation my leg and foot were in plaster to my knee, and I was given crutches to help me get about. My mother hired a wheel chair and used to push me into the rose garden in Preston Park, where the smell from the roses was prolific. All the people passing by asked if I had been hurt in an Air Raid. This rather amused my mother and me, although I used to worry in case a bomb did drop, as I could not move quickly. Eventually the plaster was removed, they took out 14 stitches and the Doctor told me I

would have to learn to walk again with this foot. I never thought I would be able to walk on this foot, but I did with the help of physiotherapy and heat lamps. I don't know what happened to my bicycle, but I did not ride again until I was grown up.

My Sunday school teacher discovered my love of reading, and during the time my leg was in plaster she lent me many books which I had never read because my mother could not afford to buy them for me, such as Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland. I then joined the children's library in Church Street and was so happy reading everything I could borrow, even 'Just William', much to the amusement of my brother.

In 1935, Uncle Billy and Auntie Mollie moved to a council house at the Highway, Moulsecoomb. Auntie Mollie took a job as a telephonist at the Metropole Hotel, as while living at Hassocks she had been working on the Hassocks telephone exchange. Uncle Billy obtained a job as gate keeper at the Metropole. A year later my cousin Mary was born and I remember going to her christening in the church nearby. My cousin Anne was born three years after that and later they attended Moulsecoomb School. Now that they were living in Brighton we used to see them regularly.

Granny Ward died in March 1940, and I was terribly upset when I was not allowed to go to her funeral. I knew I was going to miss her, as she was part of my family life. She taught me a lot of things, like how to truss a chicken and skin a rabbit, and where to find the best blackberries, (at the top of Mill Road on the way to the Devils Dyke), and then how to make the jam from the berries. My brother came home on compassionate leave. He was sad, as was my mother, but my mother cheered up when he gave her his rations allowance, which meant we could have some extra meat, eggs, bacon and sugar that week.

At school I felt as if I spent most of my time going down the trenches, when the Air Raid sirens sounded, some of the teacher tried to carry on with our lessons. There was one occasion when bombs were dropped. I think it was because our school was near the railway station, or else the bombers were on their way back to Germany and wanted to unload their bombs. I remember pieces of bomb being found in the playground. Also the boys' school next to ours was hit by an incendiary bomb one night which damaged the roof.

Mother and I were moving again, this time to a top floor self-contained flat in Grand Parade - with a bath room! Since I'd got too big for the tin bath we had been going to the public baths in North Road. I used to get into the bath first and then the lady let my mother use it, with a top up of hot water. I think it only cost 2d. Our new flat was a stone's throw from my school in York Place. This turned out to be very handy as due to so many disruptions from Air Raids the school times were changed. They closed at one o'clock and at noon on Saturdays, with about five hours of extra homework to do unless one was lucky with a power cut. I then attended St Peter's Church and also went to the

Girl Guides there.

I enjoyed school, in spite of the war. I remember the P.E. teacher Miss Bland who wore her long hair in pigtails, I thought she was a good teacher. Miss Mansell, our music teacher, gave us our first introduction to classical music. She was always telling us to sing louder, so that the people sitting in the cafe in York Place could hear us. I was good at maths and was getting on fairly well with learning French. I liked drama, especially Shakespeare, and took the part of Lady Macbeth in the school play.

I was excellent at domestic science, although our attempts at cooking were limited due to the rationing. I even saved my egg so that I could use it in a cake, and then dropped it on the way to school so had to use powdered egg. We learned how to make meals without using meat and I frequently made vegetable hot pot for us at home. I know I always felt hungry, especially as I was still growing. I considered our diet to be very inadequate, in spite of what recent surveys have said. After the war they found I required extra vitamins. I had trouble with my teeth and gums due to lack of calcium.

## **Employment**

Due to the numerous disruptions of the War there was no hope of any exams being taken so, when I was 14, my mother announced I was to leave school and go to work. I was very unhappy as I was just about to learn typing and business studies. But she was adamant mainly due to the fact my father did not have to keep me after I was 14 years of age. She found me a job as a waitress in the 'Twitten' cafe down Middle Street. It was a good class cafe, where they served business lunches to most of the office staff from the Gas Board opposite. I know that I had a lovely meal each day and although my wages were small, I earned extra money from the tips people left. It was not enough for me to have much pocket money though mostly because I had to help my mother financially as she became ill and was admitted to the Royal Sussex County Hospital. They were going to perform an operation for a hysterectomy, but found her blood count was too low. They kept her in to build her up.

My mother arranged for me to be looked after by the cook at the cafe, but I managed to get a living in job at the hospital as a Doctor's maid. My salary was a pound a month all found (4). I had to get up at 6.30 a.m. when I was given a cup of tea and a slice of buttered bread. I then took early morning tea to the three doctors I had been allocated to look after. I waited on them for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner making sure I ate as well. The pantry had to be scrubbed out every day with soap and hot water, and all the silver platters had to be cleaned with blue bell polish. I also had to make their beds and clean their rooms.

I used to be fascinated by the jars of specimens the Doctors kept in their rooms; one was a tiny foetus, another was an appendix, I'm not sure what the others were. I worked shifts and had one day off a month. I was able to be close to my mother though, who

was going through a difficult time. I thought she was going to die. I was once allowed to watch an operation of an appendix being removed and thought that I might take up nursing when I was old enough. By this time I was fed up working so hard for such a low wage, so I took a living in job, in a pub near the hospital - The Sudeley Arms. This again proved hard work and as my mother was now fully recovered I went back home.

I now decided that I wanted to obtain better employment, but I did not think I could get a job in an office without training. I did not want to work as a shop assistant and I was too young to train as a nurse or to join the forces. I saw an advert in the Evening Argus for a telephonist at the Old Ship Hotel and to my surprise, I got the job. (6)

On my first day I remember meeting another girl working on the switch board about my own age - I was then about 16. Her name was Milly, she took me under her wing and showed me what I had to do. Apart from answering the very small switch board we had to operate the lift and deliver messages to the residents. We even had to carry their luggage as there was only one porter, one page boy and the Head porter, who was a very sick man (or else he would have been called up into the forces). The hotel was indeed very old, with lots of stairs and creaking floor boards. The ballroom was closed and the hotel appeared very run down as it required inside painting and refurbishing. But to me it was wonderful and a chance to see the comfort of how the other half lived when they came to stay - for whatever reason.

Milly appeared to me to be a very sophisticated girl. She wore very smart clothes, with high heeled shoes and lots of makeup which was difficult to obtain then because of the war. Outdoor Girl and Ponds were the makeup I seem to recall we used. This was her first job on leaving Varndean School, where I had wanted to attend and to my surprise she was only 15. We became friends and have remained so ever since, sharing most of our lives and family events together. Milly was a very thin, tall girl, with beautiful blue eyes which looked straight at you, especially when she was serious - but when she laughed they twinkled. I was tall and plump and dressed very plainly with low heeled shoes and only wore lipstick. Milly was always wanting to put on weight whereas I was always wanting to lose weight - this situation still remains today.

## **War Memories**

They were miserable days, especially in the winter. I remember having to take home bags of coal when they appeared in the shops and having to put coats on our beds at night to keep warm when there were frosts. There were always unpredictable power cuts so we had to have meals to fit in with these, as we cooked on an electric stove.

When I had been working and living in at the hospital, my bedroom was in the nurses home at the back with the other domestics, mostly young girls like myself so we had a good time. I remember one night looking out of my window to see a dreadful bombing raid going on towards Portsmouth, with the search lights picking out lots of planes and

our defence guns firing at them, making a terrible noise. Afterwards we heard that Portsmouth had been badly bombed that night. Not only were the wounded public admitted to the hospital, there were also lots of soldiers, airmen and naval personnel. There were several attempts made to bomb the hospital and I marvelled at the doctors carrying on operating during these raids.

After two months in hospital Mother had her operation and went home.

The war was really affecting us. Most nights we were woken up by the Air Raid Sirens and as we lived on the fourth floor flat of a large house, I used to go down to the lower floor and sleep on a blanket. My mother would not go down; being deaf she said, "I can't hear what is going on, so it don't worry me". Sometimes she did feel the house shudder when a bomb landed nearby. I used to be very frightened and was always glad when the All Clear sounded. One day when the Air Raid Siren had sounded, I was walking down a side road by Carlton Hill, a short cut to our house in Grand Parade, when I heard a plane diving down. I heard a whistling noise and thought it was a bomb, so ran into the middle of the road, only to realise it was machine gun bullets coming down. I screamed and stood still until an arm pulled me into a doorway. The arm belonged to an A.R.P. Warden. He took me home and I was glad he did because later I had a bad attack of nerves.

Another day on returning home I found our road blocked off by Police and Wardens. A bomb had hit the church on the opposite side, near the Astoria Cinema. My mother had a lucky escape as the windows in our flat were blown out and pieces of glass landed in the rooms. Fortunately she had been in the kitchen, but knew something had happened this time as on the roof we had a small washing line where she had hung some clothes. They went flying with the force of the explosion and were never seen again. I hated the Doodlebug bombs especially at night. When the engine stopped you used to count up to 10 and knew they would then land. There were fire bombs as well and I saw one very close to our roof. It was very eerie.

As the war was on there were very few other hotels open, so the Old Ship saw a lot of celebrities. I fell in love with the actor Michael Redgrave who had the most beautiful blue eyes I had ever seen. Milly liked Richard Tauber and my mother came down to the hotel especially to get a glimpse of him because he was one of her favourite singers. My greatest thrill was when Field Marshall Montgomery came down to Brighton for the day. He met with very high ranking war officers, army and navy, in a special room in the hotel. The staff had been told it was very hush hush and that we must not tell anyone about this meeting. Afterwards we all realised it had something to do with plans for D-Day; especially as there was a lot of army vehicles being moved along the coast, plus masses of servicemen everywhere.

Milly and I started to go dancing, although we were under age no one took much notice

as long as you did not buy alcoholic drinks. We used to enjoy going to the Dome which had a lovely sprung floor to dance on. This is now covered with seats for concerts and shows. They had different bands most nights, such as Joe Loss and Stanley Black. Vera Lynn put in appearances, especially before D-Day and Douglas Reeve played on the lovely organ. There were also the Charwood Formation Dancers, who produced a lot of shows. One of the boys in the formation taught me how to dance. I enjoyed ballroom dancing but wasn't so keen on the jitterbug which the Americans introduced us to. We also went to the Regent ballroom which had a cinema attached. This was on the site where Boots now is, opposite the famous landmark the Clock Tower. There Syd Dean and his hand played. We also went to Sherry's dance hall at the bottom of West Street, where my mother had danced many years before.

The dance halls were full of servicemen, some of them looked so young - even to me. All of them went to dance halls in the evening to have a good time. This was where they could try to forget what might be ahead of them. A lot of them did this by having too much to drink. They knew there would be women to hold when they danced and, if they could, they would go home with them for the night. The women felt the same way as you never knew if you were going to be alive the next day. This was due to the unpredictable bombing from German planes. Either on their way over to bomb London, or on their return journey when they wanted to off load their bombs. This would help to make the planes lighter and fly faster to evade the spitfires. This meant the South Coast was the dumping ground. Milly became attached to one young naval officer who told her he did not expect to return from the war and that he was sure he would be killed. She later heard that he had died.

We met Australians, South Africans, Americans and French Canadian servicemen. I did not like some of the Canadians, who were very strong, well-built and often uncouth men. Some of them told me they were employed as lumber-jacks and lived in the backwoods of Canada. Since the war I have realised that some of these men were the first to land in France on D-Day and that many of them were killed on the beaches immediately on landing. Some of them may have been convicts, who were given the choice of staying in prison or enlisting. If they enlisted, they were specially trained for D-Day. In the dance halls I was aware that they spent most of their time drinking. They did not know how to dance or how to behave with women. When trouble arose in the dance hall, the Military Police appeared and took them away.

I had a nasty experience one night going home on my own from one of the dance halls. I usually walked along main roads, never the back streets. But this particular night it was getting late and I knew my mother would be worried and cross with me as I had to be home by 10.30pm. I decided to go by the back streets, I was nearly home when I saw a drunken soldier coming towards me. I quickly turned off my torch hoping that being pitch black he would not see me, but he did. He spoke and staggered towards me. I could

smell the alcohol on him and also sensed he was looking for a woman. I began to run past him but he caught hold of me and held me tight in his big arms. When he attempted to kiss me I wanted to scream but he kept on trying to kiss my mouth. The street was deserted but I knew that I had to make him let go of me for I feared the worst could happen. Being drunk he wanted to have a good time before he went overseas to fight. My brother had given me advice on what to do in this type of situation. I brought my knee up and pushed it into his groin as hard as I could. He swore and immediately released me and I quickly ran down the street screaming all the way. At the bottom I stopped as there were a few people about on the main road. I tried to look back up the street to see if he was following but there was no sign of him. On the whole most of the men respected you if you told them to behave.

Our English servicemen were very jealous of the foreigners who were handing out nylon stockings and chocolate to the women. One American gave me some clothing coupons and tins of food. It was a very sad time as you would frequently hear that someone's father, sweetheart or brother was reported as missing, taken prisoner, or had been killed on active service. I began to have several boyfriends, local boys and servicemen. I always took them home to meet my mother but did not regard them seriously as I was still too young.

My mother always wanted to vet the boyfriends I went out with, mainly I think because she did not want me to make the same mistake she had made by getting pregnant and not knowing enough about the man who fathered her son. It was a very difficult time for girls like myself who had never had a chance to be a teenager, because of the war. One day you were attending school, the next out to work, wearing grown up clothes - some of them my mother's. There were no teenage clubs or any young activities, so Milly and I went dancing instead. My relationship with my mother was fairly close but we did clash at times as I was very strong willed. I felt that I had been pushed into growing up too fast and that if I was capable of doing adult employment, I was going to do my own thing. Later in my life I realised that my mother was only caring about my welfare and that she wanted me to have a better life than she had, as most mothers do.

### **D-Day and VE Day**

Rumours that a ban on visitors to the coastal areas was about to be enforced made the hotel very quiet with hardly any guests staying. We were issued with Identity Cards. If you went out of Brighton by road or train you had to show your card on your return, confirming that you resided in this area. It was obvious from the movement of so many troops that D-Day was about to commence.

My brother came home on leave for a week and told us that he did not think he was going to be involved in the D-Day battle in Europe. His battalion had been issued with tropical gear. My mother was obviously very upset when he left especially as we knew

that we may not hear from him for a while and that when we did he would not be able to tell us where he was as all the letters were censored.

On 6th June 1944 D-Day landings were made on the Normandy coast of France and then all the news we ever seemed to hear about was 'D-Day'. The invasion and battle for the Channel Ports, the capture of Brussels, allied airborne landings in Holland and then the final link up with the Russian Army in April 1945.

During this period no visitors were allowed to the South Coast and so the Old Ship Hotel was closed. Milly and I were unemployed. In spite of the war we occasionally went by train to spend a day in London. By chance we happened to be there on the day Winston Churchill announced Victory in Europe - 8th May 1945. We were near Oxford Circus and all the people came running out of their offices hugging and kissing everyone in sight. They also let streams of paper out of office windows and the traffic came to a standstill. We joined in the celebrations and one song I clearly remember us all singing was *Tipperary*. Milly and I started to get concerned as we were jammed in tight along the streets. We began to worry about how we were going to get back to Victoria Station, let alone Brighton. I seem to recall that we shoved and pushed our way through the excited crowds of people and eventually reached Victoria Station.

On arriving at Brighton Station, for the first time since they'd been introduced, no one wanted to see our identity cards. We arranged to meet later and both rushed home. That evening we met up with Milly's family and my mother at the bottom of West Street.

A bonfire was lit with the tarred wooden road blocks which the roads in those days were made off. Everyone began singing and dancing around it and I recall the bonfire getting out of control. The fire brigade arrived telling us all to move and to stop piling up the wood-blocks onto the fire. No one took any notice until the fireman turned their hoses onto us. We were drenched with water. Even so we were all very elated and did not go home until very late that night.

We eventually heard that my brother had been posted to Iceland and then to Freetown, West Africa, where his tropical kit had obviously been intended for. He and the majority of his battalion caught malaria and were sent back to England. He was very ill for some time and when he eventually came home on sick leave he had lost a lot of weight. For many years, afterwards he suffered a recurrence of malaria but not so severe as his first bout had been.

After six years of being at war people found it very difficult to settle again. We still had food rationing for several years afterwards but in spite of a food shortage there were numerous street parties held and other celebrations. The street lights came on again and once more we could go onto the seafront. The beach was reopened after the mines and barbed wire had been removed. I was delighted as I had missed going to the beach and into the sea. Consequently, I didn't learn to swim until after the war. Husbands in

particular, on being demobbed, found difficulty in settling back into their family life again, mainly because they had been stationed in different parts of England or abroad and had seen a different way of life. Whereas, the wives had experienced a difficult time with a shortage of food, clothing, warmth, having to bring up the children on their own and the worry of their homes being bombed. Even the children had to get to know their fathers either again, or for the first time. My mother was very relieved as she had been made to work in an ammunition factory - Allen West. In an attempt to save fuel the country had double summer time all the year round. When she was on certain shifts my mother had to get up at 5.00 am. In the winter months it was very cold and dark. She always complained bitterly especially about her poor hands which were red and sore from the work she was doing.

Milly managed to get a job as a switch board operated at Plummers Store, Western Road, now known as Debenhams. I managed to get the office job I had always wanted. Getting an office job meant status in those days and to me this was wonderful, for it meant better working conditions, more money, more holidays and a chance to progress, if you stayed long enough.

I was now about 17 and a half years old.

## Epilogue

It is January 1993 and since retiring from work in 1992, after working on and off for nearly fifty years, I am aware that I have often been reminiscing about my past life, especially the significant events that have taken place; these have affected the path my life has taken. I've been thinking about all the people who became involved with me. Some of them still remain in my life, others have died, the rest I have lost contact with. I have always considered that life is fascinating, as it is so unpredictable, although we may feel in control of our lives, there are times when we cannot control the way it is going. Some events which have occurred have made me very unhappy, like the death of my relatives and close friends, other events have provided me with joy and happiness. I do feel that these events have in some way played a very important part in making me the person I am today.

Although retired I can always find something to occupy my days, especially doing activities I did not always have time to do when I was working. I still have a zest for living and hope that I am alive at the turn of this century and to join with others in welcoming the new millennium, which I foresee as being a very exciting time with great celebrations being held. My greatest wish and hope is to see all nations in the world at peace with each other and together helping to look after the planet we all live on. It can be a very beautiful place, if only we do not continue to destroy it and our neighbours.

I was born in Brighton and spent most of my childhood days there, and therefore consider it my home town. Although since then I have travelled and lived elsewhere I always get excited when I visit Brighton and the South Coast again. I now live in Peacehaven, which makes it easy for me to visit Brighton. I like to keep in touch with the local news and constant changes being made to the town.

Barbara Chapman

## **Appendix**

1. According to records the end of year 1927 had the heaviest snowstorm for many years.
2. The Dyke Railway closed on 31 December 1938 and the station is now part of a farm.
3. Enuretic - Bed wetting
4. "All found": Barbara's food and board were included in addition to her wages.
5. The Old Ship Hotel is probably the oldest hotel in Brighton, as the original building became a coaching inn, as it is called the Open Ship in the Brighthelmstone court rolls for 1670. In 1735 the landlord William Hicks decided to add an assembly room to his building, and although he did not live to see it completed, you may dance in the same ballroom today. In addition he built new public rooms and a cardroom. The Ship owed much to Mrs Fitzherbert, the Prince Regent's companion, as she acted as lady patroness at the Ship. Today the greatly enlarged and modernised hotel maintains the high standard which William Hicks set when he took over this famous coaching house in 1735.

### **About this book**

This book was made by students attending the 1993/4 Media Studies course run by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex. Media Studies is one of a range of courses developed by the CCE, open to all adults and offering the opportunity for sustained study at a level comparable to undergraduate work. CCE have also contributed to the costs of making this book, and provided students with the use of their Desk Top Publishing facilities.

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