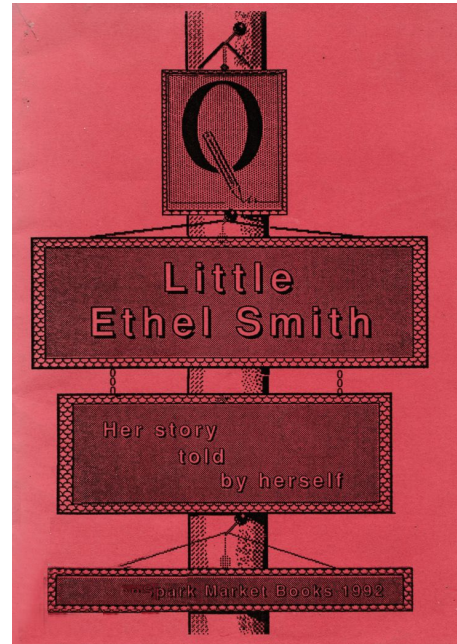


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About this book

Ethel Smith’s autobiography was published in 1992 and it tells the story of a girl born in 1912 in a working class family who grew up in the Old Kent Road in London and came to live with her family in the Sussex countryside when still a young girl. She started work age 14 and her book vividly highlights the instability of life in service in the 1920s.

It describes Ethel’s life working in Brighton during the Second World War, her courtship and marriage and the sad tale of her first love, a doomed romance that was unable to overcome the class barriers that were prevalent at that time. Wartime life was dangerous and difficult, and Ethel recalls the bombing of The Level and a polio outbreak, which left her disabled.

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LITTLE ETHEL SMITH

The Old Kent Road

"It's a tiny little girl", exclaimed the midwife at three a.m. the morning of July 19th, 1912. "Ah well," came the answer from Ada Smith, "I didn't really want any more babies, you see my boy Frank is nearly eight, but anyway she will be a playmate later on for my other little daughter Winifred, who will be two next week." "What will you name your new baby, Mrs Smith?" asked the midwife. "Well, of course I shall talk it over with my husband, but I think I shall call her Ethel, after my elder sister who lives downstairs with her husband and three children, Edgar, Freda and Florence."

This conversation was carried on in a spotless small bedroom in a modest terraced house in Hugon Road, Fulham, South West London. This small house was pleasantly situated two doors from South Park where many famous people played polo on the Hurlingham ground. The garden of 58 Hugon Road was quite long and it backed onto the park with its many beautiful trees, affording a little shade to the garden during the long hot summers London appeared to be blessed with in those days. Six chickens strutted around at the bottom of the garden and although it seemed, particularly on the Sunday mornings, that the cockerel would be in competition with all the neighbouring crowing cockerels, the hens did produce the luxuries of Sunday morning breakfast.

The two mothers shared this house with their husbands and children until Ada's last baby Ethel was nearly two. One day William, Ada's husband, who was a London omnibus driver, came home saying that he had been transferred from Fulham to Catford garage and that meant the family would have move to nearer his garage.

William and Ada soon found another house in Catford. It was very easy in those days to rent a house. Although Ada was very sad to leave her sister, she did appreciate having a little more room in which to bring up her family. Ada adored her husband William, who was tall and handsome and a very quiet, kind man, if not always ready to accept life's responsibilities.

The three children were all so different: Frank a very pleasant, helpful lad to his mother, Winifred growing into a very attractive little girl, with a mop of dark curly hair and brown eyes inherited from her father. Little Ethel was just the opposite, plump with blue eyes and fair hair which, much to her disgust as she grew older, was straight. Frank and Winifred were quite placid children but Ethel was beginning to show that she had plenty of spirit, and would often show it when Frank and Winifred took her for a walk, usually on a Sunday morning, and would think nothing of throwing herself on the ground if she could not have a particular "dolly" she had seen in a window.

Frank, who adored his little "babe" as he always called her, until she was twenty-one in fact, would give her coat a brushing down and they would take her home with never a complaint to their mother. From then on Frank would always shield his younger sister

and a special bond appeared to form between them. He was also very fond of Winifred but if a squabble arose between the two girls, in Frank's opinion somehow it was never "babe's" fault, although naturally on most occasions it was.

August 1914 came, and with it the outbreak of the First World War. William was among the first to be called up to fight for his country against Germany. Sister Ethel's husband was called up at the same time, and in order to save expense and to be company for each other, Ada and Ethel decided to share house again at 58 Hugon Road, Fulham. The four years of wartime were very hard for everyone at home, with shortage of food, but of course the air raids were not as frequent as those during the 1939-45 World War, although little Ethel can remember to this day, whilst living at No. 476 Old Kent Road, and sheltering in the cellar of the house from an air-raid, a sudden call from the garden to watch a Zeppelin being brought down. The amazing reddish hue from it appeared to cover the whole of the city.

The husbands, Edgar and William, arrived home for good in 1918. They were very proud of all of their medals, William especially so as he had earned the Mons Star, which was a much-coveted medal, and which Winifred still has among her most precious possessions. Although there was much jubilation with street parties, and of course the families which were now complete again were very thankful, they were also very sad when they thought of so many of their comrades who had not returned. Thus when the Cenotaph was built in London, the men were only too pleased to show their respect to the fallen by marching along Whitehall to place poppy wreaths on the Cenotaph and to observe the two minutes silence each following year on November 11th. Little Ethel still has a wonderful recollection of the ride on peace night, on the top of an open bus, all around the city. The excitement was electric, especially to the little six-year-old!

William, upon return from the war, was transferred once again to a garage just off the Old Kent Road, and suggested to Ada that they should now find accommodation near to his starting place of work. A flat to rent was found at No. 476 Old Kent Road. It was a first floor flat in quite a large house with a long front and back garden. The ground floor flat housed a family with seven children, and although Frank, Winifred and Ethel at first missed their cousins in Fulham, they soon made friends with the children below. There was a gate at the end of the back garden and Winifred and Ethel used to go through the gate which led into a cul-de-sac where neighbouring children would congregate to play hopscotch, tops, bowls, hoops and skip, as of course in those days without radio, television or even homework these games amused the children all of the summer evenings.

Frank was now fourteen and although he had won a scholarship to a better school, Ada and William could not afford to keep him any longer, as shortly after moving to the Old Kent Road William was told his services would no longer be required. Women drivers, who had managed during the war and were cheaper, were replacing the men.

Frank was employed by a good engineering firm. He was a very good, quiet lad and got on very well, his knowledge having stood him in good stead the remainder of his life, which incidentally is eighty-six years this August. He celebrated his diamond wedding (sixty years, on the 27th June 1991) with his wife Hilda, aged eighty-four. The five bridesmaids, now all over seventy years, were able to attend, one coming all the way from Toronto.

Ethel and Winifred soon got used to the Old Kent Road. They certainly had to be more careful crossing the road than they did in Hugon Road. They made friends with girls of their own age whom they met either at Rolls Road School, which they both attended, or in the cul-de-sac. "May we join the Primrose League and the Band of Hope?" Ada was asked by the girls one evening. "Where do you have to go to join?" asked mum. "Only just across the road to the chapel where we go to Sunday School," came the reply. "Very well," said Ada, "as long as you hold hands crossing the road." "Of course we will, Mum," both girls promised, but Ethel thought to herself, "Why do I have to hold Winifred's hand all the time? Anyone would think I was a baby." Thus Ethel's spirit was beginning to assert itself again.

However they did join both. The Primrose League was really a very young members Conservative Club, and they provided a beautiful day out for the children, either to Hampton Court, Crystal Palace or somewhere similar. Of course, a new dress was always a part of the day's pleasure. The dresses were always made by Ada on her little hand sewing machine while Ethel worried the life out of her to turn the handle. The Band of Hope gave all the children a wonderful Christmas party, an event remembered all year round.

During this time Ethel had made firm friends with a girl from school called Connie Wilson. "May I go to Pepys Park with Connie on Saturday?" "I'm sorry dear," replied Ada, "I can't afford the tram fare for you." The fare to New Cross, the stop for the park, was one penny each way. "I know what we can do," said Ethel, "Connie will have a penny on Saturday, so if she sits on my lap going and I sit on hers coming back, that will be all right." "Very well," said Ada, "as long as the conductor will let you do that, but if he doesn't allow that don't you dare be rude to him, you must come straight home."

A friendly conductor was on duty that day and turned a blind eye to what was going on. Not much of Ethel could be seen with Connie on her lap, as she was a much bigger, plumper child than Ethel, who liked her very much because she always agreed with any suggestion made as to what they should do or where they should go.

The chief attraction of going to Pepys Hill Park, for Ethel, was the walk up the hill to the park. It was a tree lined road with detached houses either side, each house with its own driveway leading up to a flight of steps to the front door. "I'm going to live in a house like that one day, and I'm going to learn to speak like the people who live in them," Ethel told Connie. "Aint you getting stuck up," came the reply. "I don't care if I am," said Ethel, "and my mum says I mustn't say `aint', it's `am not'." These little conversations

frequently occurred but they still remained very good friends. Ethel always felt just a little superior when she was with Connie.

The summers when they were living in the Old Kent Road always appeared to be very hot, and so when swimming classes were introduced at school, the girls were delighted. Ethel took to the water like a duck. Winifred was not quite so keen, she was a more timid nature, which showed itself to the extent of being almost bullied. One day when Ada had gone to work, Ethel informed Winifred that she did not want to go to school that day and she wrote a note saying, "Dear Teacher, I am sorry my little girl cannot attend school today as her boots let in water." Of course she had overlooked the fact that it was a perfectly dry, sunny day. Winifred as usual gave in and took the note. Of course, when she was found out Ethel was severely reprimanded and Ada thought to herself, as she did on many occasions, "Why am I blessed with two children so easy to manage and one so difficult?"

Ada had been obliged to find some work to help with the housekeeping when William finished driving the buses. A lady called Mrs Checkley who owned the butchers shop where Ada was a customer had asked her if she could help two or three times a week in the house. The dole money for men after the First World War was very little, so the work was readily accepted. There was not any children's allowance in those days and so it was a very difficult time to live in. Prior to this new offer of work Ada had been cleaning at the Piccadilly Hotel, which was very hard indeed as it meant a bus journey. She had to get up very early in the morning and leave food and clothes ready for the girls. William was hopeless with household chores and she often said that without her Frank she didn't know how she would have managed. He was so good, even with that somewhat awkward little Ethel.

However, after a few weeks of working at the butcher's shop, Mrs Checkley asked Ada whether she would consider moving into the flat above the shop which would be rent free, plus a small wage for washing all the butcher's overalls and aprons, cleaning the shop, and making the dripping. As usual, Ada discussed this offer with William, and as the outlook was very bleak, they decided to accept the offer. Mr Checkley had bought a new shop at Wapping, so as soon as the Checkleys left for Wapping, another move was made by the Smith family from 476 to 569, Old Kent Road.

The girls hated it at No. 569. They missed the garden, and the cul-de-sac, also all the friends they had made in that area. It worried them to see their mother working so hard. The smell of the rendering of the fat to make dripping was appalling. There were rats out in the backyard where the one and only toilet was situated. Mrs Checkley had asked Ada if she would also launder the butcher's overalls and aprons from the new shop in Wapping, to which Ada had agreed. This became an outing on Saturdays for Winifred and Ethel to take and deliver the washing to Wapping. The girls really enjoyed this outing, as it meant a ride on the underground train, which made them feel very grown up.

The unemployment problem in London by 1923 had not improved at all. William could not find a job anywhere. He had tried to earn a little by repairing china and glass, a trade he had learned when he was young. But with so much cheap china and glass coming into the country, people could buy new, cheaper than having articles repaired, unless they were of sentimental value.

Ada was getting very tired of all the work at the shop, together with the laundry and the horrible living accommodation, and her health was suffering. She at one time suffered with gastric ulcers, which resulted in three weeks in St. Georges Hospital. The girls had to go and stay with an auntie at Bexley in Kent, whilst William and Frank managed to look after themselves at home. Neither William nor Ada wanted a repetition of that episode, so they scoured the newspapers every day, with the hope of finding a job for William.

One day an advertisement appeared for a private chauffeur in the village of Balcombe, near Haywards Heath. William applied and was successful, the only stipulation to the job being that the wife of the successful applicant must be willing to serve in the house as parlourmaid for six months, after which time, if the employer was satisfied with their services, a cottage would be allocated to them, and the wife would be allowed to terminate her services in the house. Ada was a little apprehensive. Although she had been trained in private service as a youngster, she was very worried in case her services were not good enough to keep William in a job.

Balcombe and Barcombe

Imagine the excitement when the girls were told that they were going to move into the country, they thought anywhere must be better than that horrible butchers shop. The problem though was what was going to happen to the three children for six months. Frank had now left school, and was getting on well with an engineering company, so Ada asked her sister Ethel if Frank could stay with her family in Fulham to be able to carry on with engineering. Of course, Ethel readily consented, and Frank was happy to be with his cousin Edgar again.

Ada was determined she was not going to leave the girls in London, and an arrangement was made for them to stay with a Miss Mitchell in the village of Staplefield, which was two and a half miles from Ditton Place, Balcombe, the house where Mr. Horne lived, their new employer. Ada did not want the girls too far away from her. But she was so thankful to think that, at last, William would have a secure job, and with this in mind she was able to bear the thought of parting with the girls for six months.

Life for Winifred and Ethel with Miss Mitchell was very different from home in London. The cottage, Barnhall, was 400 years old, with almost all of its original features. Stone floor, outside pump, oil-lamps, and the only heating was a black iron cooking range in the kitchen. It was November when the Smith family moved to Balcombe and Staplefield, a bitterly cold day. At first the girls missed their parents, brother and all their

friends in London. But Miss Mitchell was really very kind, and looked after the girls well, always giving them a well-cooked hot lunch. Fortunately the cottage was only two or three minutes from the school where they soon made friends, although it took them quite a time to get used to the Sussex dialect.

Tuesday was Ada's off-duty day. She had settled in at Ditton Place, and Mr. Home was quite pleased with his new employees. As a little recompense to Winifred and Ethel, for being separated from her, she would meet them from school and take them to Handcross to the quaint little tea-shop where they would have tea, and beautiful home-made cakes. This was a real treat. There had never been sufficient housekeeping money in London for eating out. A visit to the little stationers always replenished the stock of pens, pencils, crayons and drawing books which Ada liked the girls to have in order to amuse themselves in the evenings, as in 1923 there still wasn't any radio or television in humble homes.

One day a week several of the girls from Staplefield school were selected to go after school to Nymans, a lovely big house on the way to Handcross (now National Trust property) which was owned by the Messel family. Mr Messel employed a lady teacher, expert in drawn threadwork. She taught the girls the art, and they made tray cloths and similar, which were sold for charity. This outing was quite a highlight of the week for many of the girls, as tea, sandwiches and sticky buns were provided. One thing marred this happy event, which was that the number of lovely large sticky buns was never quite sufficient to allow two per child, therefore this did rather encourage "gobbling".

The girls were always driven safely home by the chauffeurs. That in itself was a treat in those days.

Miss Anne Messel was captain of the girl guides and Winifred and Ethel, now aged thirteen and eleven, were encouraged by Ada to join. They did, and Ethel, after the first meeting, remarked to Winifred that she thought Miss Anne was the prettiest person she had ever seen, and hoped that one day she would be able to speak like Miss Anne. Miss Messel, upon marrying, became the Countess of Rosse, and her son is Mr Armstrong Jones.

Imagine the excitement for the girls once again, when one lovely hot day the following June, just over six months since they had moved, their parents collected them, and took them to the promised cottage at Ditton Place. It was a delightful cottage, covered with roses. Haymaking was proceeding in the field behind the cottage, and the farmhands allowed Winifred and Ethel to go out there and try to help. It was like heaven to the girls to be back with their parents. They did not mind the two and half miles walk to school, or the sandwiches for lunch, instead of Miss Mitchell's hot lunch. They knew that there would be a lovely hot meal for them when they arrived home. It was all worth it to be with Mum and Dad again.

The family had only been in the cottage a few months when Ada received a letter from

her sister to say she had to go into hospital straight away, and could Ada mind her three youngest children, Freda, 10, Florence, 8, and little Fred, only 15 months old. Of course, Ada agreed, and William was allowed to borrow the staff car to collect sister Ethel and her little family from Balcombe station. Naturally the sisters enjoyed their day together, and after sad farewells, William drove sister Ethel back to the station. That was the last time Ada saw her. Very sadly she died three weeks later from cancer, for which in those days there was no cure.

Although of course Freda and Florence were sad to have lost their mother, little Fred was too young to understand. They soon settled in, knowing that Auntie Ada would look after them well. Of course, it was a great deal of work for Ada. Twice as many sandwiches to be made up in the morning, twice as many hot meals for the girls when they came home from school, and the toddler Fred to be cared for all day. The four girls were each set little tasks, and together it was a very happy little family. When Ada got extra tired, she would say to herself, "I know sister Ethel would have done it for me." When little Fred got old enough for nursery school, the children's father said he would like them to return to him in London. Freda by this time was as a mother to little Fred. She was a wonderful young girl, and sacrificed everything for him without a complaint.

Winifred was now 14, school leaving age in those days. There was little choice in work for girls in the country as Ditton Place was two and a half miles walk to the nearest bus at Staplefield, and three miles to the nearest station at Balcombe. Private service was really the only answer. Ada thought that to train as a cook would be the most beneficial to Winifred later on in life. So into private service Winifred went, although she hated it. Having to pluck game that had been hung for weeks, with maggots crawling up her arm, was not a very enjoyable job for a young girl, but learning the art of cooking did prove an asset to her in later life.

Ethel was left the only child at home now. It was a lonely life after having three other girls to giggle and play with. However, life at Ditton Place came to an end. Mr. Horne, the owner of the house, died and the house was sold. The new occupiers brought their own chauffeur, which of course made William redundant. William applied to an advertisement for a private chauffeur in Barcombe, and was successful in obtaining the post. To Barcombe, near Lewes, the family of only three now moved once again. Winifred was found a position in Lewes so as to be able to go home on her off-duty time. The house where William was employed was at Spithurst, about one and a half miles from Barcombe. Mr and Mrs Philips-Jones, the new employers of William, were the owners of Spithurst House. A little cottage adjoining the house went with the chauffeur's job. It was not quite so lonely as Ditton Place, and brother Frank, who had a keen interest in cycling, had a beautiful cycle built for Ethel, so going to school now was no effort.

The headmaster at Barcombe school, Mr Bishop, was always very helpful to Ethel. Perhaps he thought she was a little brighter than the average country child, having been

born and had her early schooling in London.

Ethel had always loved to dance, although there had never been sufficient money in the housekeeping for dancing lessons. She and Winifred had often danced at home to a little portable gramophone, and had given their mother much pleasure.

Mr. Bishop was a very artistic man, and enjoyed producing a pantomime with the school children as the artists, which was performed in the village. The first Christmas that Ethel was at Barcombe school, the pantomime was called "Jan of Windmill Land", and she was chosen by Mr Bishop to play "Jan". Strangely enough, although Ethel was born in London of a Cockney father, as he was born within the sounds of Bow Bells, she did not speak the Cockney language at all, maybe because her mother was born in Chelsea and before her marriage had spent many years in very good private service, where she had learned a lot regarding speech and manners, and naturally had passed this training on to her children.

Mr Bishop, who was a Northants man, could not stand the Sussex dialect, which naturally the remainder of the class spoke. As for her dancing, Ethel was held up as an example, which she rather enjoyed, but always wishing she had been born of wealthier parents, so she could have had a better education, and dancing lessons. The pantomime was a huge success according to village standards.

Ethel was now thirteen-and-a-half. On her next birthday in July, she could have left school, but her mother allowed her to stay on until the following Christmas, so as she could take part in the next pantomime, which was an eastern theme, "Abou Hassam", in which she again played the lead. The remainder of the class did not appear to be jealous, in fact, some of them needed quite a lot of persuasion to appear on stage. Not Ethel, she lapped it up.

Now came the question, "What was Ethel going to do when she left school?" Again, living in the country offered very little choice. "One thing I am not going to do," she said to her mother one day, "that is to go into private service in a big house as Winifred did, after the horrid jobs she told me she had to do." "Oh well," said her mother, "we shall have to see!" Fortunately for Ethel, just before she left school Mr Bishop asked her whether she would like to help his wife just around the house, and with their two children. She consulted her mother, and both agreed that it would not be too far away from home, and that she knew the family. There were two children, Monty, 10, and Angela, 6. Ethel earned the princely sum of six shillings per week, but was quite happy with the Bishop family. Their house, Erskine, was built facing up the village street.

On the opposite corner of the road, leading to Barcombe Mills, was a large house called The Gables. It was owned by Dr Samuel Woodhead, who was then the public analyst for Sussex. He had two sons, Leslie, aged eighteen and Lionel, aged fifteen, a very tall, good-looking, quiet young man. He travelled daily to Brighton, as he was being educated at Brighton College.

Lionel had been in the habit of occasionally visiting Erskine, as he shared a mutual interest with Mr Bishop in steam engines. During one of these visits, shortly after Christmas, Lionel inquired as to who was the pretty little girl who took the lead in the pantomime. "Oh, that was Ethel Smith, one of my ex-scholars. She is coming here next week to help my wife". From then on, Lionel's visits to Erskine became more frequent. When one day Ethel inquired as to who was the tall, good-looking boy who visited, Mr Bishop suddenly realised that the steam engine was not the only interest to Lionel.

Ethel used to walk home one day each week, and every Sunday, to see her parents. Lionel became a constant companion on those walks, always made over the fields. "Why do you prefer to walk over the fields instead of the road?" Ethel asked Lionel. "Because if my parents found out that I was spending time with you, instead of doing my homework, they would send me to Brighton College as a boarder, and then I would never see you again. We are less likely to be seen together in the fields, as opposed to the road," came the reply. Ethel began to realise that of course the real reason for this was that his parents would not deem a private chauffeur's daughter to be of high enough social standing for their son. After all, the Woodhead family were "top drawer" in the village, whereas the Smiths were only "third drawer". This sort of thing was of high importance in those days.

Ethel always wanted to be with Lionel. She loved his gentle manners and very pleasant voice, assets that had always appealed to her, but every now and again she would rebel at always having to go together everywhere in secret, and having the knowledge of "not being good enough socially", she would tell Lionel to "get lost". The times that this would occur were quite numerous. But Lionel would always re-appear with a huge box of chocolates under his arm. Even in the snow, he would sit for hours on his cycle outside her house, until she came out to talk to him. She always relented. She could not resist that little something between them.

When Ethel had been with Mr and Mrs Bishop for a year, earning six shillings a week, the other teacher at Barcombe school, Mrs Pullinger, offered her twelve shillings and sixpence a week to help around the house and to mind her little daughter, Pat. This was a big increase in her wages, which she could not resist. Ethel was very happy with the Pullinger family, until an epidemic of scarlet fever broke out in the village. Ethel was not very well one day, and fearing for her little daughter, Mrs Pullinger called the doctor in, and Ethel heard the doctor say, "Well, if it wasn't for the epidemic, I wouldn't say it was scarlet fever, but I think to be on the safe side I will send her to Chailey Isolation Hospital". In a couple of days Ethel appeared to be normal, and was allowed to get up and help the nurses to make up the beds. She had been in hospital for four weeks, and was counting the days to going home, when she contracted the fever, and was kept there for a further six weeks. Ethel was so cross, and held Mrs Pullinger responsible for the unfortunate affair. Therefore, as soon as she was out of hospital, she told Mrs. Pullinger that she was leaving her.

Ethel's next place of work was in Lewes. One of the girls from Barcombe met Ethel one day, and told her that another "help" was needed where she was working, at Morrish's shop in Lewes. The "help" was needed in the house, and Ethel got the job, but there were five children, and plenty of work, and Ethel did not get on very well with Mrs Morrish. She went home by train twice a week, and Lionel met her at the station. There was a station at Barcombe Mills then. He would take her home, and then go home for his meal, and he would then slip out again on the pretence of going to visit a friend. On one of these occasions, Lionel suddenly saw his father in the distance following him. He suddenly saw a very deep ditch, and hid in it until his father had passed him by. This was only one of the tight situations that occurred, all because he was in love with a chauffeur's daughter.

Brighton life

As Ethel was not very happy with the Morrish family, she started to scour the local papers' situations vacant column, and one evening she read, "General help required, 26 shillings a week". The address was in Brighton. Ethel, always hopeful of earning more money, applied for the job, and was successful. The house was in East Drive, pleasantly situated, facing Queens Park. Her new employers were a Mr and Mrs Randall. Mr Randall was an elderly retired auctioneer. Thus the house was full of very expensive furniture, ornaments and pictures which Ethel was asked not to touch with a duster, so there was very little housework to do. Mrs Randall was several years younger than her husband. She was extremely pleasant and kind. She loved cooking, so in all there was very little for Ethel to do.

But Mrs Randall did appreciate being able to go out sometimes knowing that she had not left Mr Randall in an empty house as his health was not at all good. During their chats, Ethel often told him of her little escapades with Lionel, which highly amused him. Again Ethel went home twice a week and still Lionel met her at the station whenever he could, and often in the evening would travel back as far as Lewes with her. He would have gone all the way to Brighton, but there was not a train to get him back home in time.

Ethel was now nineteen and had grown to love Lionel very deeply, but she was becoming a little weary of always having to avoid being seen together because of his parents. Most of the other young girls were talking about becoming engaged, but this was never mentioned by Lionel. He obviously knew that it would be many years before he could support a wife. But Ethel thought, "If only he would let me know that some day we would be together, I would have understood." But instead of questioning Lionel she brooded on it and even thought, "Perhaps, after all, he is only amusing himself."

At times this made her very irritable, especially so now, as his parents had obviously been informed or even seen them together, and at last had invited Ethel to tea one Sunday. Of course, for Lionel's sake, she accepted, though petrified. The Sunday

arrived and Lionel took her to The Gables for tea. All Lionel's family were very tall and how Ethel ever ate anything she never knew. His mother, father, brother and fiancé, together with Lionel's one time nurse, were all at the table. Ethel wished the earth would open up and swallow her, she knew she was there on approval. All the family, of course, were quite pleasant to her, their breeding would not have allowed anything else. But with all this, Ethel, being so small, had felt like a little mouse.

Even after this ordeal, Lionel never mentioned anything serious, and one evening when returning to Brighton, Ethel, still brooding over five years' secrecy - and now what for? - suddenly told Lionel as he went as customary to put his arm around her, "Don't touch me - don't even sit near me!" This was not the first time during the past five years that Ethel had given vent to her temporary feelings, but somehow they had always come together again. But this time Lionel was really upset over this incident, went home and reviewed the whole situation.

He knew that although his parents thought Ethel was "a very nice little girl", they were still not very happy with the thought of a little "third drawer" girl entering the family. This was perhaps understandable. Dr Woodhead had spent a great deal of money on Lionel's education, Mrs Woodhead was a prominent figure in all the village activities, and naturally they would have hoped for someone of their own "social standing" as a daughter-in-law. Lionel also knew that he would still be dependent on his parents for finance for quite a long time.

When, a little later on, Ethel received a letter from Lionel saying that "in view of the whole situation it would be better for everyone if they stopped seeing each other," she was dumbfounded and terribly upset, her first thought being, "I must see him and perhaps we can talk." Over the years together Lionel had bought Ethel some very nice pieces of jewellery. "If he doesn't want me I don't want his presents, I'll take them to The Gables, we must talk then." But when she saw him she was so upset she couldn't say a word, just thrust them at him and walked away, a very sad girl.

Shortly afterwards, Mr Randall, Ethel's employer, died very suddenly and left her one year's salary "in appreciation of her services and the little 'sparkle' she had brought into his life." Mrs Randall went to live with her sister, therefore Ethel had to move in with her parents and look for another job. At the same time the disused flour mill at Barcombe Mills had been bought by a German and his wife, a Mr and Mrs Schwertz. This was in 1932, the purpose being to make it into a button factory. The necessary power required derived from the old water wheel. Four key men were brought over from Italy to instruct the employees who were mostly local, coming in from neighbouring villages such as Isfield, Uckfield and the town of Lewes. Of course Barcombe Mills station was in action in those days and was only a short walk from the mill, so transport was no problem.

Winifred, still working in Lewes, heard about the button factory and when the advert appeared for staff she was the first to apply. Consequently she became head of the dispatch department and persuaded her sister to apply. Ethel then was taken on and

became charge hand of the spraying department.

Both girls really did enjoy working in the button factory especially as they were able to go to their own home each evening. The only drawback was the fact that they had three miles to walk each way every day. However, Winifred had already met a very nice local boy, Tom Bodle, who worked in the garage in Barcombe Village. Ethel had always had a yen for a motorbike and persuaded Tom to get a small one for her. She soon learned to drive it - it seemed to come very naturally after having ridden a push bike for some years. Ethel persuaded Winifred to become a pillion passenger and apart from one or two spills they thoroughly enjoyed it, even going as far as Dagenham to visit Frank who had married a Londoner, Hilda. They had a son, Stanley, and a daughter, Marion, who later emigrated to America.

Winifred and Tom eventually married at Barcombe church. Ethel was the chief of seven bridesmaids and even then, as they walked down the aisle of the church, Ethel couldn't help thinking how lucky her sister was, to be marrying the one she loved. If only it were Lionel and she walking down the aisle. It was a very pretty wedding and their first home was a cottage in Spithurst called Bye-Law, and their only child Josephine Ann grew up to become a skater and travelled the world with "Holiday on Ice".

A few months previous to Ethel and Lionel breaking up, they had decided to go to Newquay in Cornwall for a holiday the following September. At first, Ethel put all thoughts of the holiday out of her mind. But as the weeks passed and her former spirit began to revive, she said to her mother one day, "How would you like to have a holiday with me in Cornwall in September?" That would be lovely," replied her mother.

Ethel had begun to wonder if perhaps she and Lionel met again in Newquay and could talk, would he change his mind? So to Cornwall she and her mother went.

Unfortunately during the whole two weeks she did not meet Lionel, although she had heard that he was going to spend the same two weeks there with his mother. The holiday was quite pleasant and there were two young men from Scotland sharing the same boarding house. One of the young men was very attentive to Ethel and although they went swimming together every day, Ethel never encouraged the friendship any further. Despite the holiday and her new interest, the motorcycle, Ethel was not really happy. The unfortunate thing was that she had to pass The Gables, Lionel's house, every day, going to and coming from the mill. Of course, it was a constant reminder to her of the days with Lionel.

A Wartime Marriage

One evening Ethel suddenly said to her parents, "How would you like to go to Brighton to live?" Mr Phillips-Jones, William's former employer, had just died and his wife no

longer required a chauffeur. "You would stand a better chance of finding work in Brighton than here in Barcombe." They both agreed and Ethel thought, "Surely I shall forget him in a big town with all its attractions". So to Brighton they moved. In those days it was very easy to find a vacant flat and No. 15 Devonshire Place, Brighton was their new address. There was another young girl living in a flat in the same house, Gwen Morley, and she and Ethel became quite friendly. For a time Ethel still worked at the mill, travelling backwards and forwards on her motorcycle.

Ethel had become quite friendly with the Italians employed at the mill and as they were going home to Italy in the following August they asked Ethel if she and one of her cousins would like to go with them. Ethel, always looking for something fresh to do, readily accepted the offer. It was a wonderful holiday with plenty of male escorts, but with no lasting romance being encouraged.

After a week or two back at the mill Ethel thought she would not enjoy riding the motor cycle to Barcombe Mills from Brighton during the winter and so she left the mill and started to look for work in Brighton. She didn't know quite what she wanted to do and for quite some time she worked in a guest house, but really wanted something brighter. One day she read an advertisement for a "licenced victuallers assistant" which was really just serving in a public house bar. Ethel thought she would try this. It sounded bright and one must meet plenty of people in that trade. The public house, the Western, in Western Road [now the Paris House] was owned by a company named Edlins who were renowned for keeping very orderly houses.

Ethel started her new occupation one Sunday morning, it was a little frightening learning about the drinks and the prices. She soon got used to everything and at least it was a nice bright job. This is where Ethel met Lilian and this was the start of a life-long friendship. Lilian was so kind to Ethel and helped her whenever she could regarding the trade. She was rather a shy retiring girl but perhaps being of opposite natures was the reason they got on so well. They visited each other's homes and it was a ritual each Saturday that after receiving their wages they would go and buy their mothers a little present.

Lilian had never been to a public dance and Ethel, who had been to all the dances held in the village hall at Barcombe, longed to try one in Brighton. Lilian could not dance but was willing to learn. Ethel taught her basic steps and very soon afterwards they went to a dance once a week at the Dome on their evening off. Naturally they met plenty of young men at dances but Ethel still found herself comparing them with Lionel, therefore any attachment at all faded out in a very short time.

Ada during this time had found a little house vacant, No.1 Ditchling Road, which she thought would be more pleasant than the flat, and so to No.1 Ditchling Road the Smith family moved.

Amongst the customers at the Western where Ethel was employed, two brothers were regular customers, namely Bob and David Howell, who lived with their parents in a cafe about fifty yards away. Lilian informed Ethel that Bob worked in the cafe, but David travelled daily to London where he worked in a shipping office. When Ethel started working in the Western David used to come in about two evenings a week but the visits gradually increased to nearly every evening. When Ethel remarked upon this to Lilian, Lilian replied, "I think you are the attraction", to which Ethel passed off the remark with a laugh, saying, "I think you and I are enjoying life without any attachments, aren't we? We can go dancing without upsetting anyone, being perfectly free. I had one boyfriend for nearly six years and it's taken more time than that to forget him, in fact I don't think I ever will." "Of course you will", said Lilian. "David Howell is a very nice kind fellow, I wish he would look at me!"

1939 arrived and everyone was talking about the impending war with Germany. All preparations were being made for safety. By this time Winifred had moved into Brighton. She had missed the family so much that she had persuaded Tom to find some work in Brighton, which he did, delivering the newspapers to shops in and around Brighton for Toler Bros, later taken over by W.H. Smiths. One day, Winifred had taken little Josephine down on to the beach, she had not sat down for long when she saw everyone moving off the beach, it was being cleared and barricaded with the fear of invasion. Winifred still proudly relates today that she was the last person on the beach in 1939. Gas masks were issued, air raid shelters prepared and black-out regulations were enforced. Ethel and Lilian were unable to go home from work together, living in different directions.

Therefore when David Howell, on the first evening of the black-out, offered to see her home, she readily accepted. She had learned from customers that David was twenty-nine, unmarried, and even without a girlfriend, and she had been dreading going home in the black-out by herself. This went on for several weeks before David asked Ethel whether he could take her to the Hippodrome on her evening off. Although David was entirely different to Lionel in many respects, he was always a "perfect gentleman" when in her company and Ethel began to regard him as a very close friend.

One evening when they arrived home at No.1 Ditchling Road the air-raid warning sounded so Ethel invited David into the house where, of course, she introduced him to her parents. "What a nice young man!" was the exclamation from Ada and William after the "All Clear" had sounded and David had left for home. They had always hoped that perhaps Ethel would meet someone to take Lionel's place. "Yes he is", said Ethel, but not with enthusiasm as her parents had done! However, David continued to see Ethel home each evening and their visits to the Hippodrome became quite regular. Also, on a Sunday afternoon Ethel would often go up to East Brighton Park to watch David play cricket. He was a very keen member of the East Brighton Cricket Club, in fact he confessed to Ethel that he had always been more interested in sport of any kind than the opposite sex until he met her.

Another chance was in store for Ethel. When out shopping one afternoon she bumped into Gwen Morley, the girl she had been quite friendly with when Ethel had first come to Brighton. "Hello Ethel," Gwen said, very pleased to see her old friend, "where are you working now?" "Oh, I'm behind the bar in one of Edlins houses in the Western Road, where are you working?" "I have a very interesting job in the Royal Engineers record office in Ditchling Road," answered Gwen.

Knowing that Gwen had only received an elementary education as she herself had done, the next question was, "How did you manage to get taken on there, Gwen?" "A friend introduced me," came the answer, "would you like me to try and get you there?" Ethel, who had always thought she would like to work in an office, but thought that her education would not have been good enough, quickly replied, "Oh yes please!" Within a few days she received a form to complete and take to the R.E. Records for an interview with the officer in charge. This Ethel did, and no-one was more surprised than she when she was told that she should commence work there as soon as was convenient to her.

The next day Ethel handed in her notice to Edlins, and of course, she had to tell David that she would no longer require him to see her home, as apart from the R.E. office being a little more than one hundred yards from her home, she would be leaving the office, with the exception of mid-winter, in daylight. With a very sad expression David asked, "Will you let me take you to the Hippodrome once a week and will you still come up to the park on Sunday? In fact, if you care to come up there on practice evening we could go and perhaps have a drink with the other lads and girlfriends or wives?" Ethel had now become quite used to David's company and enjoyed it, probably because he made no demands on her, of course he was not in the financial position to do so. Before meeting Ethel he had gone about with the lads and spent as he had earned and, of course, now that war had broken out, the motto was "Live for today, we may not be here tomorrow!" Anyhow, Ethel agreed his suggestions but still went dancing with Lilian on Lilian's free evening.

Ethel was posted to the "Casualty Department" at the Royal Engineers office and was put in the "Missing and Prisoners of War" section. Although Ethel was a little nervous on starting she soon got used to the work, which at times was very sad. Most of the people in the office had received a better education than Ethel, but everyone was most helpful and she soon became to feel less inferior. Her mind often switched back to the days when she told Connie Wilson, her little schoolfriend, that she wished she could speak like the people in the big houses in Pepys Hill. Little did she know that one day she would be working with people who mostly all spoke like the Pepys Hill people.

Lilian was very sad when Ethel left Edlins, but before she left, Ethel promised Lilian that if it was possible, she would recommend her to the R.E. officer in charge. This she did and in a few weeks, Lilian was working again with her friend. Again, they did almost everything together, except of course, the time that Ethel spent with David.

The outbreak of war was September 3rd 1939 and had been going on for a few months when David suddenly said to Ethel, "I hope I can get in the RAF if I am called up." "Everyone wants to get in the RAF and if you wait until you are called up I should think the army will be the only choice," replied Ethel and added rather unkindly, "I shan't want to go out with you if you come home in those dreadful army boots!" David took this remark as a joke, he could never see anything wrong in Ethel. However, he must have given the conversation a lot of thought, because the next evening that they were together, he said, "If you think you could be happy married to me I will go tomorrow and volunteer, but only if you agree to us getting engaged before I have to go away." David must have seen that Ethel was not going to respond very quickly because he carried on, "You sleep on it and let me know when you have made up your mind."

Ethel, naturally, could not sleep on it, just the reverse. She did not want to lose David's company but she knew she would never have the same feeling for him that she did have for Lionel, but in all the eight years since parting she had never enjoyed anyone's company as much as she had David's. He was easy-going and so kind. She realised that they were not the only qualities needed for marriage, but at least she had been around the past eight years and had never met anyone she felt she could trust as she did him. "After all," she thought to herself, "I am twenty-eight and would really like a home of my own and perhaps children." The next evening she met David, he caught hold of her two hands and the question was "Well?" "I'll chance it," Ethel laughingly replied. The agreement was sealed, of course, in the usual way and David was over the moon! So were all Ethel's family, especially Ada who was so close to her youngest daughter and understood the heartaches she had suffered.

A few weeks later David was called up to serve in the RAF, much to his disappointment for ground staff only, as he could not overcome air-sickness. After his training period in this country he was posted to Iceland. "I shall really be able to save over there," said David. "There can't be much to spend money on in Iceland," but this proved to be only wishful thinking! He kept Ethel supplied with pure silk stockings, toiletries and even some beautiful satin material. So, of course, this rather depleted his savings. It was early 1940 when David left England with the promise to write frequently, which he religiously kept. Ethel missed him very much, but he had not extracted any promises from her, such as to stop dancing, so she and her friend Lilian still went dancing quite a lot and, of course, met many soldiers, some American, some Canadian, also plenty of navy and air-force, but neither of them wanted to get involved and often would slip out of the back entrance to avoid offers of being taken home.

However, during one evening whilst dancing at the Dome, Lilian met a French-Canadian soldier who appeared to be very taken with her. They danced together almost all evening and Lilian was delighted when this partner asked her to meet him the following evening, which she did, and several evenings after. During the War the girls in dance halls could not be too careful about their choice in escorts. Ethel was not at all

impressed with Lilian's choice. It was rather strange that this fellow was attached to the Royal Engineers. Ethel grew more suspicious of him each time they met. So much that she did not want to see her friend get hurt.

After making enquiries, Ethel found the department which held all the Royal Engineers' documents since the time of enlistment. With the aid of the officer-in-charge she was able to find what she somehow suspected. Lilian's dancing partner was married with children. Ethel knew that she had to tell her friend and although Lilian was very upset, she was also very grateful.

The first really frightening evening for the Smith family during the War was whilst they were still living in No.1 Ditchling Road and were entertaining a few friends for the evening. In a lull of the music being played, some unusual noises were heard going on outside. One of the members of the family peeped out from the black-out to exclaim, "My God, the whole of the Level" - a recreation ground opposite the house - "is ablaze." Following this exclamation, someone went out of the side door and was heard to shout, "Come and look at this!" Of course everyone shot outside to see Pelham Street School in flames as well. Apparently, this time only incendiary bombs had been dropped and the firemen soon dealt very efficiently with the blaze, but this event really did shake people and make them wonder what else was to come. Following this, Winifred and Tom thought perhaps Barcombe would be a safer place to live than Brighton.

They were very lucky and managed to get a house in the village. Very shortly after this move Tom was called up. He was lucky too and was accepted by the R.A.F. as a driver and was posted after training to the Middle East where he remained until the War was over.

Frank and his wife Hilda, together with their two children, had been living during the first part of the War in Dagenham, but Frank being a Heavy Goods Vehicle driver, a reserved occupation, was seldom at home now as munition factories were mainly in the north of the country, and carrying these to the ports was his main duty. Frank was very worried about leaving his family so near to London, which was being very heavily bombed now, so he was very relieved when it was arranged for Hilda and the children to share house with Winifred in Barcombe. A little later on a sister of Hilda, also from London, shared the house, and all together with the children they were very, good company for each other. Meanwhile Ada had found a flat in Grand Parade and moved from No.1 Ditchling Road, which she found too big when Winifred had left for Barcombe.

David came home from leave from Iceland, after a very hazardous journey by ship, being attacked from the air and with the dreadful fear of hitting a mine. Of course they were in convoy, which was very comforting. His first words to Ethel were, "Will you marry me when I get home the next time?" "Of course I will, I try never to break a promise!" "How about a drink to celebrate?" This was January 1941 and the snow was very thick, but they skipped across the grass from 47 Grand Parade to the King and

Queen, hand in hand, David saying it was "the happiest day of his life!"

"When will you be back in England?" Ethel asked. "It should be by April 1942," David told her. Ethel thought the spring or summer is a lovely time to get married! David went back to Iceland after a very happy time on leave. He was very worried about the air raids on Brighton, but as Ethel said, "It's just luck," although at that time Brighton was having quite a few air-raids.

They both corresponded regularly but April 1942 arrived and David had not arrived home. Each letter he had hoped to give Ethel a date but the R.A.F. appeared in no hurry to send him home. The spring went, the summer went, Ethel had made all necessary arrangements as far as she could. However, in late October she received a telegram to say, "Will be home on 1st Nov." They had previously decided to get married as soon as he arrived home, so all the arrangements were confirmed and a little bedsit found in Frederick Place for use later on when David came home on leave.

Ethel had previously arranged with David to marry at Barcombe Church, in the village where she had lived all her teenage years and where she had roamed the fields with Lionel. As Winifred was living in Barcombe again and Ethel often visited her there, no-one thought it strange that she wanted to marry in the church where she was confirmed. She really had her own reason, but no-one suspected it. Memories were still very dear!

Ethel did not have a white wedding, clothing coupons being very limited just then, also she considered thirty was too old to be dressed up in white. But it was quite a pretty wedding with Lilian as chief bridesmaid, Ethel's two little nieces Josephine and Marion attending too. Stanley, Frank and Hilda's boy, now eight, belonged to the church choir which also consisted of some children from Dr. Barnardos' Home which had taken up residence in Barcombe Place, a very large house which formerly belonged to Lady Grantham. The children were only too pleased to sing at the wedding. Lilian had offered to collect the flowers on the morning of the wedding, they had been ordered from a shop in East Street. Unfortunately it poured with rain and there was an air raid warning.

Fortunately no bombs were dropped in or around Brighton that day and Lilian arrived none the worse for the task under such unpleasant conditions. The wedding reception was held in the Royal Oak in Barcombe village and later on in the evening the newly-weds left by train for a honeymoon in London. As the train drew out of Barcombe Station, after saying goodbye to all the family, Ethel sank back onto the seat, and much to David's consternation shed a few tears, the excuse was bidding farewell to the family, but the actual reason, Ethel only knew!

The week in London passed very pleasantly, there had not been an air raid warning the whole week, in fact the only unpleasant part of the week, after having been out for an evening and taken the underground train back to the Union Jack Club where they were staying, was having to step over people too afraid to spend the night in their homes,

who were trying to get some sleep on the ground of the platforms.

When David returned to his R.A.F. station in England, Ethel went home and stayed with her parents, using the bedsitter only when David was on leave. She resumed working in the Royal Engineers office, keeping very busy but still enjoying the friendship of Lilian. About this time Brighton was receiving quite a number of bombs, one having hit a cinema in Kemp Town killing quite a lot of children.

Towards the end of the Summer in 1943, Ethel learned she was going to have a baby. David was delighted with the news and Ethel now being thirty-one didn't want to wait until she was very much older to start a family. She was a little worried about finance, she knew of course that she would eventually have to leave R.E. Records where she had been so happy. Strangely enough she knew that her friend Lilian would have to leave soon. Through dancing she had met a very nice young Canadian soldier, this time a single young man, whom she married, and went with a number of British brides to Canada. Ethel and Lilian have corresponded all through the years. Lilian with her two children visited England once and when they moved south to Vancouver Island in 1980 Ethel visited them there.

Brighton Business Ventures

Ethel's life-style was to change altogether soon. Just before she planned to retire from the records office the family heard, through friends, of a workman's cafe for sale. It was situated at the bottom of Edward Street on the right, number 174, and was named Joe's. At that particular time many people were trying to move away from the coast because of fear of invasion by the Germans, therefore the asking price for the cafe was amazingly cheap, only £300.

There was another cafe next door, but it never offered any real competition, being run by an elderly couple who did not really want to cope with the terrific trade that Winifred, Ethel and Ada were to build up, despite the Food Office regulations. Every day at noon the cafe would be full with a queue outside, passing two or three shops, including the little pawnbrokers shop. This incidentally was where David, upon his demobilisation, bought Ethel her most treasured piece of jewellery, this being a very pretty little fob watch, which has now passed to her daughter Pauline, Ethel knowing that David would want his little "Pauli-Anna" to have it!

Winifred, Hilda and children were still living at Barcombe, but Ada offered to move once again, to a house at No. 8 London Terrace, so Hilda could share accommodation with her. This left the accommodation over the shop to be shared by Winifred and Ethel. This was a way Ethel thought she would be able to earn money even with the baby.

On November 7th 1943, on the first wedding anniversary, the family took over their new responsibilities. Now that they had time to inspect the premises thoroughly they were

horrified to see really how filthy the whole place was. However the four women, even Ethel hampered a little by her six months' pregnancy, soon gave it a very different appearance, which naturally enticed more customers. Of course, during the war people were glad to eat out in order to save their food coupons to buy food for the home.

Winifred's early training as a cook really came in extremely useful. Ethel really enjoyed serving in the cafe, especially taking the money. The trade increased enormously, and some evenings, when she felt that Winifred, Hilda and her mother were getting extra tired with all the work, she would wave a bundle of notes saying, "Well, it's all worthwhile; isn't it?" Ethel was so happy to feel she was earning such good money to put towards a home for her, David and the baby, after the war.

After Christmas 1943 Brighton appeared to be receiving more bombs, consequently more alarms were sounded which always appeared more frequent at night. Therefore no-one was getting very much rest.

David was now stationed at Gosport, so he could get home quite easily when off duty. Just before the baby was due, Winifred and Ethel had spent almost two nights on the lower stairs, feeling a little safer than in the bedrooms at the top of the house. The next day David had obtained compassionate leave to stay at home for the night. At about 9 pm he insisted that they all went over to the Dome air-raid shelter so as they would be almost certain to have a good night's sleep. However this was not to be. After they had placed their blankets in their bunks and made quite sure that Winifred and Josephine were comfortable, "Would you like to walk just the few yards along to the King and Queen for a drink?" asked David. "Oh I would enjoy that," replied Ethel. "Remember the last time we went there?" "Of course I do," said David, "the evening you made me the happiest man in the world."

They had been seated for only ten minutes when Ethel began to feel uncomfortable, and so they thought it wiser to get back to the air-raid shelter. Ethel tried to get some sleep, but the baby was determined to make his entrance into the world, and David decided to get Ethel to the hospital. After great difficulty in obtaining a taxi, he took her as previously arranged to the General Hospital, Brighton. At 4 am the next morning, February 25th 1944, Richard Alan Frank was born. After a few days in hospital Ethel proudly brought her little son home to the cafe and was working again in the shop within a fortnight. A family friend had stood in for Ethel, and with extra help from the family they managed.

The cafe trade was still increasing, which was very reassuring, and Ethel had found a very kind, capable woman to mind the baby. After the cafe was closed in the evening, Ethel had to do the Food Office requirements in order to get the allocation of food for the cafe. Her nights were still being very disturbed, even more so now, with the baby and continuous air-raid alarms. Ethel was beginning to feel the strain, so much so that when an epidemic of polio broke out in 1944, she was again taken to the General Hospital and placed on the dangerously ill list, and David was sent for.

After a time, when Ethel appeared to be making some progress towards recovery, it was a terrible shock to her when with the aid of a nurse she got out of bed only to find that she could not walk at all unaided. When the nurse tried to explain to her that she might never walk again, Ethel almost screamed at her, "Don't be so stupid, I've got a husband, a baby and a business, I must walk again!" She left the hospital after a month and with great difficulty walked unaided.

It was unfortunate that due to the increased trade Ethel felt that she could not leave the cafe every day to attend the hospital for exercises, as advised by the doctor. It took years of determination to walk anything like normal, in fact she was left with a permanent limp, which at times she felt was so unfair. She did however learn one lesson, which is, "No wealth is worth health."

However life had to go on, whilst the men were still away, Winifred's husband Tom in the Middle East, David at various stations in England and Frank still Heavy Goods Vehicle driving, even William was working for Allen West, munitions manufacturer, until VE Day arrived on May 5th 1945. The war was declared officially over with Germany, the country went mad with street parties everywhere and the relief felt at realising there would not be any more air-raids was indescribable.

The war now over, Frank decided to give up driving for a living and when the opportunity arose for him to become a publican he readily accepted. This of course meant Hilda would have to help him. By this time Ada was getting rather tired of working in the cafe, so Winifred and Ethel, who had accumulated quite a capital, bought Hilda and Ada out. Tom and David arrived home about this time and it was agreed that they should work in the cafe in place of Hilda and Ada, which they did. This arrangement gave Ethel more free time, which was very necessary as on August 10th 1947 a little sister for Richard, Pauline Angela, was born.

Ethel could not do very much in the cafe now as she wanted to spend as much time as possible with her children. This arrangement worked very well until one day David said to Ethel, "What do you think about getting a little business on our own?" "Well," said Ethel, "the partnership certainly worked very well and we have saved quite a sum, together with fifty per cent we shall get from whatever we sell the cafe for. I think if Winifred and Tom are agreeable it would be a challenge, and very nice to have our own place." Winifred and Tom also felt that they would like to try a business on their own. So the cafe was put on the market late summer 1948 and sold very quickly, and due to the very much improved premises and trade, for ten times the price given. This of course helped to take the bitterness out of Ethel that she felt for the deformity that she had been afflicted with.

Winifred and Tom bought another, smaller workman's cafe. Ethel and David wanted to get something that would not necessitate Ethel having to work full-time in. No. 8 Southover Street, Brighton was the next address for the Howell family, and on a very

hot day in August 1948 they moved into a grocery and provisions little corner shop. Once again the place had been very neglected and it took a lot of time to clean it all. The living accommodation was very good though, having four large bedrooms of which Ethel very soon let two, only needing two themselves. This helped finances until the trade built up, which it did extremely quickly.

David was very popular in the shop, having such a very friendly disposition. It was very hard work and long hours because food rationing was still in effect, which slowed down serving as the appropriate number of coupons had to be taken from each customer's ration book and, at the end of each week, counted and returned to the Food Office. The shop was without a fridge at first, so all the perishable food such as butter, margarine and bacon had to be carted down to the cellar each evening. There was not even a bacon machine, so all this in the hot weather was very trying. However the essentials were soon installed and the trade gradually increased so much that David had to call on Ethel every now and again to help him.

Pauline was just toddling and of course would follow her mother into the shop. Sugar, rice, dried fruit and all the dry groceries were delivered those days in sacks so as to slow down serving even more, everything had to be weighed. It did not help matters either when Pauline would take a handful of rice and put it in the sugar, etc, sack.

Ethel and David, despite the very hard work, really enjoyed the shop, but there was no garden, only a little yard for the children to play in, and as Richard had shown nothing but utter contempt for his little sister ever since she was born, Ethel was afraid to leave them alone to play together for too long. So David was not really surprised one evening when Ethel said, "I feel now that I would love to have a little house with a garden for the children and where I can live as a wife and mother, only until the children grow older." David, who always fell in with his wife's wishes, readily agreed, so after being in the shop for two years they sold it and bought a house, No. 49 Coleman Street, a turning off Islingword Road, Brighton.

Ethel did enjoy being able to spend more time with her own family, but of course she missed also being able to earn her own money. But as she remarked to David, "I shall still have time to earn when the children are older and don't require so much of my time. At least I shall be happy to remember that I was there when most needed." David had discussed with Ethel as to what he should do now and it was almost decided to do what they suggested before selling the shop, which was to return to the British Amsterdam Shipping Company in Fenchurch Street, London.

Unfortunately, one evening when David and Ethel were out with friends, they were introduced to a very unpleasant man, not unpleasant in looks at all, but unpleasant in business deals. Apparently this gentleman was running a highly profitable mobile photographers and asked David whether he would be interested in going into partnership with him. However this was to prove not so and the partnership was to cost Ethel and David quite a lot of money.

After this episode David decided to apply to the shipping company with whom he had been employed before the war. He was very lucky and was reinstated. Without any business worries the next ten years at 49 Coleman Street passed very pleasantly. Ethel and David encouraged Richard and Pauline in anything that they showed any interest in such as dancing, skating, swimming and music. They all went away each summer for a holiday. David belonged to the East Brighton Cricket Club, and most Sundays the family went out into the country to watch David play. They were very happy days, but much to David's disappointment Richard showed no interest in cricket or any other ball-game, but always amused himself by trying to make little things out of any odd pieces of wood that he could find.

During this time Winifred had dabbled in one or two little businesses, but one day she came along to see Ethel and asked, "How do you fancy coming into partnership with me in a cafe in the Lewes Road?" Ethel gave the question a lot of thought, such as the children were coming up to expensive ages and she did so want to give them the chance of a better education than she had. "Well I would like to come along and see the place." This cafe was at 96 Lewes Road. The accommodation was very large, sufficient to house the two families easily. The present owner for some reason wanted to sell very quickly and was therefore open to offer. Ethel thought too that now David was in employment in London all money from the cafe would be extra. So 49 Coleman Street was sold and the family moved to 96 Lewes Road. Winifred again took charge of the kitchen and Ethel the shop. The premises had again been very neglected but with outside help it was soon cleaned up with the result that the trade grew.

The next six years passed very pleasantly. Ethel was able to send Pauline to Clarks Grammar School in Dyke Road and Richard to Technical College in York Place, which pleased her very much. Winifred could now afford to send Josephine to the best dancing school in town. Marion, Frank and Hilda's daughter, also went to the same school, as Frank and Hilda had proved themselves to be excellent publicans, and Marion and Josephine were inseparable.

After four very pleasant years at the "Sisters' Cafe," which Winifred and Ethel had aptly named, Josephine joined "Holiday on Ice", a company that produced magnificent shows and travelled the world. Whilst in this profession, Josephine married a fellow skater. A little daughter, Kim, was born. As Josephine was under contract to this company it could have been very difficult and expensive for her to resign immediately the baby was born, so Winifred offered to take the baby. Naturally, running the cafe with a young baby was not easy, and although Pauline proved very helpful in this respect, the extra responsibility and work was proving too much for Winifred.

Ethel also was beginning to think that now Richard and Pauline were in their teens it would be nice for them to live in a private house where they would be pleased to invite their friends. A good profit was made on the sale of the cafe which helped Ethel and David to buy quite a nice house in Higher Bevendean. To Nyetimber Hill was the next

move. By now Pauline had decided to become a hairdresser and Richard, with much persuasion from his parents, decided to join Telecommunications. The family were very happy in Nyetimber, but it was not to be for long.

David was never very good at house maintenance work, sport still being his first interest, so after being in the house only a few weeks the tank in the attic overflowed. Ethel was not very pleased as brand-new carpets had been laid prior to moving in. The second time this occurred Ethel was even more annoyed, and when the second Christmas in the house arrived and Ethel, washing up after lunch, suddenly heard water gushing down the stairs, she was more than annoyed, and told David if that was all the interest he was going to take in the house, she thought it best to sell the house and rent a flat, whereby the maintenance would not be his responsibility. David, always ready to fall in with anything Ethel suggested, agreed.

A very nice flat in a late Victorian house, in Surrenden Road, Preston Park, was chosen as the next residence. Of course after a little while, when Ethel's temper had cooled down, she realised what a stupid thing she had done by selling the lovely modern, so easy to clean, little house, and then taking on this Victorian place, with so many original features such as open fireplaces with marble surrounds, brass finger plates and door-knobs, even down to the bell pushes at the side of the mantelpieces. All very nice, if one could afford domestics!

Nevertheless, once she had got used to her new surroundings, Ethel was to live happily in this house for twenty-three years. The flat had a very secluded balcony which overlooked the horse chestnut trees, which grow through the centre of Surrenden Road. They are a beautiful sight in the spring, with a profusion of pink blossom. When sitting out there for the first time, Ethel thought to herself, "Well, the one big consolation of the move is that at last I am living in a house so similar to those I used to admire so much as a child in Pepys Hill. I hope I have learned to speak like the people in Pepys Hill as well, 'partially through working at the Royal Engineers Records Office. Yes, I think I have now achieved my two childhood goals."

It was now February 1963 and Ethel, who had been kept so busy and had always earned her own pocket money, thought she would like to get herself a little job. So when she saw Cornelia James advertising a job, she applied, and was successful.

When Ethel first started at Comelia James Ltd of 123, Havelock Road, gloves were the only product. Mr & Mrs James controlled the company personally. Mr James took charge of the financial side of the business, whilst Mrs James designed and controlled the manufacture of the gloves. The gloves were beautiful, and of course they were worn by the First Lady of the Land. The name is known throughout the British Isles, and they are also exported. When Ethel first started at Comelia James, her duty was to write the tickets giving the information from the customers' orders, which went first to the cutting room, and then on to be either machined or hand-sewn. She stayed with this company during the time she was living at Surrenden Road and was extremely happy with them.

One day when Mrs James came into the office where Ethel was working, under the watchful eye of the late, and very kind, Mrs E. Grinstead, Mrs James had on a pair of gloves, and around her neck was a piece of the material of which the gloves were made. "Why don't you make scarves to match the gloves, Mrs. James?" Ethel inquired. Whether Mrs James had already thought of the idea, Ethel was never to find out, however soon afterwards matching scarves were put into production. Ethel was given the responsibility of running the scarf department. It was so gratifying to see the business increase, and Ethel enjoyed every moment of it. Mr & Mrs James were most appreciative, and Ethel still remembers the wonderful dinner-dances which were given for the staff each Christmas.

Mr and Mrs James's son, Peter, joined the company as soon as he had finished his education. Logo printing on company ties was then introduced and Peter James took charge of this department. As the logos were also printed on the scarves, Ethel worked quite closely with "Mr Peter" for some time. She now feels quite proud to have been associated with a distinguished writer of thrillers.

Many occasions were celebrated whilst living at No. 40, Surrenden Road: Richard and Pauline's eighteenth and twenty first birthdays, then their marriages; the births of two sons to Pauline and her husband Peter, and a son and daughter to Richard and his wife Irene; Ethel and David's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. Then of course there were the sad ones: the death of Ethel's parents, Ada and William, who reached the ages of 83 and 90 years. Winifred and Tom had been sharing house with them until then. The next loss was Tom, but Josephine had now come home so Winifred went to live with her.

David, who retired at the age of sixty-five, had for many years suffered from a chest complaint, but Ethel never considered it as very serious, therefore it was a terrific shock to her when he was taken really ill early in June, 1982 and died on the 17th of that month. Although he had never really ever taken the place of Ethel's first love, they had been true and faithful pals for nearly forty years.

Just before David died the tenants of the ground floor flat had left Brighton. The agents who controlled the house offered Ethel the opportunity to buy it. Ethel was not interested, but thought that Richard, who had bought a house in Woodingdean, might be. It was a very good buy, and Richard quickly converted part of the house into a small, self-contained flat for his mother.

She really did appreciate having this little entirely self-contained flat above Richard and his family. She always got on very well with her daughter-in-law, Irene, and her grandchildren, Emlyn and Virginia, were always an interest. Virginia (as her grandmother always has) loved dancing, and Ethel will never forget how proud she felt when Ginnie came first in the ballet section of the festival at the Dome, when she was only five years old.

Emlyn was always a great source of interest also. Richard had always shown an interest in music. In fact for a while, when he was in his teens, he ran a group. Ethel always hoped that Emlyn would inherit this interest in music, and to help foster this, she bought him his very first piano. When Emlyn at the age of twelve passed his eighth grade in piano playing, Ethel was delighted.

Pauline and her two sons, Ross and Dominic, visited Ethel quite frequently also. Ethel had always felt very close to these boys, as when Pauline lost her husband when he was only thirty-three, the boys would often stay with Ethel and David for the weekend, to allow Pauline to have a little change. In fact, Ross will often relate how he used to worry his grandmother to let him learn how to ride on her moped which she kept for getting to and fro the office.

Therefore, although of course Ethel missed David very much, her family never allowed her to get really lonely. She remained working for Cornelia James until March 1987, just as fate was to alter the remainder of her life.

A Second Chance

When David was alive, he and Ethel used to spend many an evening at a social club in the London Road. To prevent Ethel having to attend the club alone after she had lost David, Winifred offered to accompany her.

On one of these occasions, actually the evening of November the 23rd 1985, Winifred had already arrived at the club, and as soon as Ethel appeared, she handed her the previous day's Evening Argus. "Did you read this?" "No, I didn't," replied Ethel." "Well, I think you may be interested to read the item, 'Son's bid to clear skull hoax man'." "Oh, I don't think so, I've read quite a lot about the Piltdown Man." This was the name given to a skull found at Piltdown, which had been given much publicity. "I think you will be interested when you read who's involved." Ethel took the paper, and read that Mr Lionel Woodhead of Ainsworth Avenue, Ovingdean, would appear on television that evening in order to defend his father's name. Dr Samuel Woodhead had been accused of darkening the bones of the skull.

Ethel had not seen Lionel for over fifty years, and the sensation that overcame her when she read his name was indescribable. In fact she had great difficulty in concentrating on anything else for the rest of the evening.

As soon as she arrived home, she found Lionel's telephone number in the directory. She felt she would have loved to see him appear on television, wondering how he had matured. However, she felt that she must just speak to him, if only to convey her condolences regarding the false accusation against his late father's name. Or was it just to hear his voice again?

Several times Ethel went to the telephone. Ought she? However, as she had been a widow for three-and-a-half years and Lionel, she knew, must be seventy-four, surely there could be no harm in it. She rang. "Who's speaking?" came that voice. "Do you remember little Ethel Smith from Barcombe?" "Good God, not you!" Lionel replied. From then on question followed question, the first being, "Are you married?" "Where do you live?" etc, etc. Then: "When and where can we meet?" A meeting was arranged, and although they had not met in over fifty years, the mutual feeling was exactly as it had been when they were in their teens.

Of course, they met several times after this. There was so much to learn from each other regarding the past. The future also had to be discussed. They decided that a shared holiday would be the best way to find out whether a future together was possible.

They set off in Lionel's car, naturally going back to Barcombe first, passing Erskine, and The Gables, with the memories flooding back. Then they went to the Anchor Hotel at Barcombe Mills. The following day they drove around Sussex, and stayed overnight at the Jack and Jill hotel in Hassocks, going from there down to the delightful New Forest. Lionel told Ethel that when out walking with his mother, soon after they had arrived separately at Newquay all those years ago, he had seen her with her mother, leaving a house on the opposite side of the road. Also, that each following evening after dinner, he had walked along that road, but they never met.

But of course, there must be a happy ending to this true story, which is that they have been happily together for the past four years. And now at seventy-nine and eighty respectively, they hope for many more happy years together!

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