

I REMEMBER
By Tricia Stayne
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Our home in Chester Way, Kennington. London. Anthony as a baby in the pram. We were very young, a happy family, then the war came.

My school evacuated to Dorset, Mum, Anthony and I went with them. We gathered in the village hall waiting to know who would give us a home. The first night we slept in a small room in a local cottage and in the morning we were covered in flea bites!

After that we were moved to a farm, which was great.

We school children were soon billeted with local families, I went to live in a pleasant council house in Bradford Abbas where there were several other children.

Meanwhile Mum and Dad, with Anthony, made the move from London to Ashbury and took on the management of the Rose and Crown, a job completely new to both our parents.

My first clear memory of the Rose and Crown was when Dad collected me from Dorset. I was sitting in the passenger seat of Dad's famous Box Austin 7 as he drove in through the archway, there was my little brother playing in the yard. The family was together again. I was about 7 years old, Anthony only 4.

I heard later that our house in London was hit by a bomb so the move may have enabled all the succeeding generations to come into existence.

Growing up in Ashbury was wonderful.

I remember - - The timeless days we spent with a few friends exploring the villages and countryside where birds' nests and beautiful coloured eggs could be discovered in the hedgerows and bushes. Sometimes we went riding on Darkie and Charlie, the two ponies that belonged to a farmer friend in Ildstone.

Judy, our mongrel dog went wherever we went. She and our two rabbits would play together in the yard, chasing around and jumping over each other. Juliet our first little black kitten, in time, produced several litters. The one Tabby we kept grew very big and we named him, 'Jumbo'. He loved to sit on Dad's shoulders wrapped around the back of his neck, tail flicking on one side of Dad's face and big eyes peering out from a whiskered grin on the other.

And then there was Jack, the baby Jackdaw that a friend rescued when it fell out of its' nest. Jack would fly to us from the top of the garden when we called his name and come into the window of bedroom no 1 to be fed.

On very hot summer days we tried to cool off and swim in Honeybunch, a wonder filled dewpond near Ashdown woods, it was crammed full of exciting creatures, crested newts' and their eggs, beetles and water snails, lots of lovely pond weed, and mud.

We dug a hole in the garden and sunk an old tin bath in it to make a pond for our newts and tadpoles . . . Dilly and Dally, our ducks, found them and gobbled them all up, after that we couldn't face eating any more duck eggs.

One day we spent a happy morning building a dam in the stream by the Lower Mill House, a passing adult reported us to our parents and Mum came to collect us. We had to undam the stream, it was a nuisance to the farmer, but Mum seemed to understand that damming streams is a normal activity for healthy children.

In season, we helped with the haymaking. We had lots of fun leaping from the tops of newly built haystacks and turning somersaults onto the piles of soft hay below.

I remember stacking the wheat sheaves into stooks before the arrival of the combine harvester, milking the cows by hand and my first underage, illegal tractor drive across a field full of cows.

We did lots of climbing, all sorts of objects including the belfry of the village church where we managed to get some of the bells ringing; it was mid-day, mid-week! They made an enormous noise. We escaped hurriedly, unidentified, we thought, but I believe some people guessed who -

The family returned home from church one Sunday morning to find we were locked out of the house, I had to climb up the drainpipe, in my best dress, and squeeze in through the upstairs toilet window above the old still room, to let us in.

One moonless night Anthony and I draped ourselves in some sheets and roamed around the village pretending to be ghosts. I don't remember anyone being frightened.

The Ashbury Coombes are special. Long supple beech branches make superb natural swings, you balanced on them and bounced, or carved your sign on the tree trunks. Baby rabbits hopped around on the warren. Cow parsley and buttercups grew in plenty. The long slope of the coombs was superb for tobogganing but we had to learn to stop abruptly or duck very low when we got to the barbed wire fence that surrounds the allotments at the bottom of the hill.

In Rook Leas Woodland, at the foot of The Coombes we located the position of fresh water springs that feed into the Mill Pond and went scrumping apples from the orchard nearby.

We picked our own treats, blackberries, hazel nuts and tiny wild strawberries. We brought home the dinner-plate sized horse mushrooms that grew in expanding circles along the western border of Ashdown Woods.

A lot of our vegetables were home grown, organic; potatoes, rhubarb, strawberries, gooseberries, carrots, lettuce, broad beans, **and we shucked our own peas**. We ate our own free range eggs, and chickens too, after watching a local farmer pull their necks.

The garden was fertilized by cartloads of local cow manure, famous for its' distinctive healthy country odour!

The apples were stored in the loft above the garage, now the function room. One day Anthony and I thought we would be helpful by clearing out the rotting ones so we threw them out of the loft door into the yard. It made a rather unpopular mess!

There were lots of visits from relatives, Mum's cousin, Uncle Harrold, Emily and their three boys who would later emigrate to Venezuela, and lots more family on Dad's side. Cousin Marie came on a long pony ride, she fell off at one point but hung on long enough to land neatly on a pile of soft hay near Red Barn. Cousin Jackie came on his high powered motor bike. We'd hired a boat for an outing on that occasion. Jack managed to fall, fully clothed, into the River Thames at Radcot.

We had evacuated to the country to avoid the dangers of the bombing in London, - but – **I remember** . . . standing in the yard of the R + C one dark night with Anthony and Nan and Nene watching the Rose and Crown burn down. Nan said she'd left her false teeth in the bedroom and Nene went back in through the burning frame of the door and rescued them for her.

Later that night, Nan, Anthony and I were put in a car with a mattress over the top for protection and left under the big Walnut Tree near the cross roads, because there were enemy planes overhead. Eventually we were taken to spend the night in the Vicarage. Other guests slept in the village hall and some were accommodated at Britchcombe Farm where we camp nowadays. Marcella, the owner, remembers it clearly.

That night Anthony was rescued from death by a hairs breadth, the burning ceiling fell onto his bed as Mum carried him out of the bedroom.

I look back and am so grateful for the freedom and trust we received from Mum and Dad. It enhanced our respect for their un-preached, but lived out, high ideals.

Especially, I remember . . . their generosity. They were always quick to help anyone through a difficulty, and as well as running the HOTEL, they took in the new baby from the cottage next door while the mother recovered from an illness. Mum gave employment to Joan, a 16 year old who could not remember for two days running, how to make a bed, and she organised coach trips for the villagers such as the Pantomime in Oxford and a day out in Western Super Mare.

After Anthony went off to St John's boarding school at the tender age of 10 most of my term time weekends were spent horse riding alone over the, then, Berkshire Downs, along the Ridgeway and the training gallops near Lambourne or exploring Ashdown Woods.

But in the summer holidays, as teenagers, we had a lot of company, St John's boarders arrived, en masse, it seemed. Mum and Dad filled the hotel bedrooms with teenage boys who would otherwise have spent the holidays at school. And sometimes their Matron, Sister Mary A. came and stayed too.

There were long bicycle rides with Nene who told us romantic stories from films he'd seen, but he always gave them a happy ending. After he died Nan went back to Sidcup, but living alone with the doodle bugs flying overhead put her into a distressing nervous state and she came back to stay long term with us.

When the war ended the villagers lit a huge bonfire at the top of Ashbury hill and the whole country celebrated.

Fifteen years after their arrival in Ashbury, after we had both left home, Anthony to Military service and me to College, Mum and Dad left the Rose and Crown and moved with Nan back to 111, Hurst Road, Sidcup.