

Written by Beryl Garner

Second World War Memories

Living at 76 Llewellyn Street with Mum Dad and my two sisters Lily and Flossie was of course blighted by war but even so normal every day life had to go on. I hope that my memories will demonstrate this.

My earliest memories are of Nanny Nethercot's kitchen where I spent most of my informative years whilst the rest of the family were doing their own thing. There was only eleven months in age between Lily and Flossie so they were more or less inseparable. As for me I was a bit of a loner.

Nanny Nethercot's kitchen could be a trifle gruesome at times. Friends and neighbours would bring their dead Poultry and Rabbits to be cleaned and prepared for the oven which she would happily do for the few pennies it earned her. Rabbits would hang there with their bodies skewered almost in the shape of a cross awaiting their fate or perhaps a chicken needing plucking and preparing for some customer or other. Sometimes when I went to play in the back yard I went with this warning ringing in my ears 'don't you dare touch those kittens (or puppies) in that bucket of water'. Of course I never did, I never really understood why they were in there. They looked asleep to me. Nanny also had a large heated box which stood on legs, placed in the outhouse along with a large wringer which was housed there. In this box she would place lots of chicken's eggs which she said would hatch out into tiny yellow chicks.

Over the top of the box was placed a large sheet of glass. I would watch them daily longing to see them hatch but I never did. One day I would visit the box to hear the chicks happily chirping, peering over the top through the glass I could see many chicks running around. No egg shells in sight. I guess Nanny had removed them. They disappeared as suddenly as they appeared with no explanation where they had gone. I suppose they were sold to various people to eventually grow into adult birds to be kept for eggs or for the table.

In the back yard was our little dog Gyp, being a bitch she was not allowed out in the street where there were several strays. Money was a scarce as food in those days so people had no choice but to find ways to provide food for themselves, after all they could not go to the supermarket for a frozen chicken and a huge choice of vegetables.

It was a case of grow it yourselves. Neither was there spare cash for vet fees. One day we returned to the house after sheltering from a daytime air-raid in the wharf only to find an unexploded Bomb in our back yard. Gyp was nowhere to be seen so we three kids started to cry imagining she was dead. She was found safe and sound, fast asleep in a shed at the bottom of the yard. Apparently Bombs dropping didn't bother her one bit. Soldiers came to defuse the Bomb and I remember one of them saying to me 'do you know what we are going to do with this? We are going to stick a note on it saying a present for Hitler and send it back'.

At the front of the house was a paved area, which was fenced and with a gate. All the houses in the row had the same. I was not allowed in the street alone because of the Lorries going to and fro to the

warehouses. Of course none of the families had cars in those days. One day although I could not skate I snuck out of the house half wearing my sisters skates. I say half wearing because they were metal with a bolt in the centre to lengthen or shorten them, I would not undo the bolt to shorten them so I only had them secured around my ankle. My foot would not reach the toe to use the bottom strap so the skate just flapped when I lifted my foot. An enemy plane appeared out of nowhere over the houses across the street. Upon seeing me he dropped lower and started to shoot. Lorry driver sitting in his cab across the road bravely rushed over and dragged me under his lorry. He was raising his fist shaking it at the plane and swearing, disgusted that the pilot would attack a child. The plane carried on going over the houses on our side of the road towards the docks. I don't know if mum ever heard about this escapade as I certainly kept my mouth shut.

This sort of thing happened to a much greater degree at a school in Downham Kent. A plane came over and a young girl in the playground not realising it was an enemy plane waved to the pilot who waved back then shot her dead. He continued shooting and dropping bombs killing many more children and Teachers on that fateful day.

One day I was having trouble with mum, she would not allow me to do something I wanted to do, I can't remember what it was but I knew this was an argument I could not win. I had a small toy suitcase which I filled up with bits and bobs and announced defiantly 'I'm not going without my sweet coupons' which of course were not forthcoming but felt this was an argument I had won. In hindsight maybe I did not.

We were eventually evacuated to Bagshot but the family were not very pleased to have four of us dumped on them, maybe understandably, so we were very unwelcome guests. We were banned from the house all day so we sat in the park most of the time until we were allowed back. The mother and her daughter who was about the same age as Lily loved to make snide remarks. The mother often said things like 'Can you smell our chicken cooking'. The daughter loved to annoy, especially if she knew us kids needed to use the bathroom. One day knowing Lily wished to use the Toilet she stayed in there for ages. When she eventually came out Lily grabbed her by the hair and pulled her to the ground, her prey screaming loudly. Lily was in trouble but the daughter got what she deserved. One day our dad came down to see us as he was on leave. Finding us in the park and hearing our tale of woe he angrily collected our things and took us all home.

Once again we were evacuated, this time to a beautiful village called Lavenham in Suffolk where our reception was entirely different. We were given a tiny cottage behind a pub. The vicar came over to welcome us and most of the villagers were amicable, especially an elderly lady called Mrs Wrist who often invited us kids into her home. One night we were woken by Flossie lying in bed screaming and kicking the wall as she was in great pain, there was an American airbase nearby and they sent their own ambulance and crew to take her to hospital in Bury St Edmunds. She had Appendicitis and the hospital thought she was dangerously near having Peritonitis. Poor mum found herself having a very long walk home. The only telephone in the village was at the Vicarage so mum would phone the hospital daily from there. She was told for many days that 'Flossie was not out of the wood yet'.

Eventually she recovered and came home. When mum used the phone the vicar always said 'That will be sixpence please, put it in the box'.

We stayed in Lavenham until allowed to return home, remaining at the house in Llewellyn Street until 1947 when we were offered a council house in Downham Kent moving there during a very cold snowy winter. Leaving poor Nanny Nethercot alone in that big house but I am sure her son Frankie visited her often.