

Written by Margaret Llewellyn

1. I Want to Go Home

According to my birth certificate, I was born at 156 Canterbury Road, Folkestone in Kent. But the house I remember, and where I spent most of the first eight years of my life, was in 8 Garden Road, a short distance away.

There in that small two bedroomed terraced house, with its narrow back garden overlooking a wood yard, I lived with my parents as sister Doris, known as Dot. Apparently we did not have a great deal of money but I wasn't aware of that. We always had enough to eat, clothes to wear, even if mine were always hand-me-downs, and toys. I was always quite happy cutting people out of the newspaper, and making chairs and tables from a cardboard box for my family.

I was lucky. Dot was five and a half years older than me so was allowed a great deal more freedom, and wherever she went, so did I.

She took me to school - down Garden Road, around the corner, across the main Black Bull Road, and through the brick field to Victoria Road. Opposite the school was a sweet shop, where a halfpenny bought a whole bag of hundreds and thousands.

In our seaside town there were so many exciting things to see and do.

We would go to the Rotunda on the sea front and watch the penny slot machines. The open metal crane would come down, hopefully to close on a prize, but usually it was just a few liquorice comforts. Close by was a small roundabout, with shiny brightly painted horses.

At the bottom of the Old High Street, on the corner, was the rock shop, and we would stand in the doorway and watch the men throw long strands of rock over a post and pull them into shape.

Another favourite place was the cliff top, where we searched for the tiny bee orchids in the short grass, or perhaps the fish market where Dot bought a penny worth of sprats. We would take them home, and Mum would dip them in flour and fry them.

These happy times came to an end on the very day of my eighth birthday, June 2nd 1940. That morning I was given a sixpenny bit and a bag of liquorice allsorts. Then Mum dressed me in her best clothes, best coat and tam. She tied a label to my lapel and hung a square cardboard box on a string on my neck. Then we went to school. For some unknown reason all the other children were there too, each with a label tied to their lapel and a square box on a string around their neck, we were all going for a train ride. Dot was with me so I was happy. There were some men on the train, all dressed in uniform, and they gave us some biscuits.

It was a long journey. I don't remember falling asleep, but the next thing I remember was being pulled off the train, away from the lights of the station, and into the darkness. Even though Dot was holding my hand I was afraid and began to cry. We were taken to a strange house and given something to eat, then put to bed.

I had never known darkness before. At home, even though we had a street lamp outside our bedroom window, Mum always let us have a small night light as well. In that strange place there was no light at all. When we cried someone would come into the room and hold a lighted candle for a short while, but when we stopped crying they left, taking the candle with them. They didn't seem to understand.

The days were bearable though there were no amusements of any kind, only trees and hedges and endless green fields filled with sheep and cows. At the new school, in class, someone would begin to cry and that would start us all off.

I cried so much during that time I made myself sick. I was exhausted, I wanted my mother but above all else I wanted to go home where it was nice and safe and they left the lights on. It was the nights I dreaded. To this day I can still remember that small room with its thick walls, tiny windows and the darkness closing in.

The ordeal came to an end when at the close of that, my birthday month, Mum arrived and took us to Abergavenny, a small market town in Monmouthshire now known as Gwent. Once there we stayed at several different lodgings in other people's houses until Mum found us a small rented house. When Dad arrived sometime later we finally settled down, once again, as a family.

In 1959 I moved to Banbury, another small market town in the Midlands, and there married and had two children, a daughter and a son. But the marriage unfortunately was not a happy or a successful one. Three house moves and twelve years later it came to an end. The years passed, the children grew up. My daughter married, left home and moved on. My son however stayed with me and eventually we pooled our resources and bought a house together.

Our lives would, most probably, have carried on in a calm uneventful way had it not been for a letter which arrived in the March of 2009. It was from a firm of probate detectives, popularly known as heir hunters, based in London. Apparently a member of my father's family in Folkestone had passed away and they, having died intestate, beneficiaries were being sought. I heard nothing more and forgot about the matter until, in the following September, a letter arrived from Girlings, a firm of solicitors in Folkestone and shortly afterwards a cheque for £2,000. Not a vast amount perhaps but, once again, my attention had been drawn back to Folkestone. Over the years I had been back there once or twice to visit but this time I knew I wanted to return to stay.

But I was not alone – there was my son David to consider. To my surprise and delight he welcomed the idea. Aged 77 years I had no time for hesitation or second thoughts. It was now or never. The house was out on the market and from then on events seemed to progress almost of their own accord.

On the 5th March 2010 we moved into a comfortable two bedroomed terraced house in Mead Road, just around the corner for Garden Road and a stone's throw from where I first came into the world. As an added bonus my bedroom window faces north, overlooking the Downs. To the west is a clear sky – Venus, the evening star, brings light and comfort. Our new neighbours are kindness itself and we have been made to feel more than welcome, while David has taken to the town like a proverbial duck to water. In June 2010 I celebrated my 78th birthday.

Surprisingly to me Folkestone has changed very little. True, the Rotunda has gone and the painted horse roundabout. The rock shop has moved from the bottom of the Old High Street to the top and the Channel Tunnel has arrived along with the superstores. But the basic structure remains the same.

And as I walk, once again those familiar childhood pathways and visit all the well remembered places it is to realise that I am, now, far happier and more content than throughout the past seventy years.

It's good to be home.