

Memories of Louisa Johnston Freezer

These are the stories and memories of Louisa Johnston Freezer, illustrating her childhood experiences during the whole of World War Two. Louisa (Lou) was born in New York in 1937. At the age of 10 months her parents returned to the UK bringing her with them. The family spent some time in Cricklewood, London as her maternal grandparents lived there. Later they moved to Fraserburgh, Scotland where her father's family lived. Her mother could not settle in Fraserburgh, so the family moved back to Cricklewood where Lou spent the duration of the war. Lou has written, in her own words, a number of accounts of her experiences, some of which relate to the photographs.

STREET PARTIES

In the photo with adults, my Mum is sitting in the middle, back row. She has a white hat on, my brother behind her, my sister on her knee and me sitting beside them. The Street shelters behind them.

In the one mainly children I'm standing in the middle behind the first row, my sister sitting in front to my left and my brother next to her.

I was born in New York but came to London when I was 10 months old. My Mum and Granny thought it would be good for me to go dressed as Uncle Sam.

My granny used to walk 6 miles to work and back to a restaurant called the Mary Anne in South Molton Street opposite Selfridges. She felt safer walking than going on a bus. People who went there chatting found out what she was doing. Was given a pair of cricket trousers for me and someone else gave her a fold up top hat. For my outfit.

One big problem for me, I felt insulted as I won first prize for a boy haha.

All prizes were books as they were very scarce. Mine was called a Visit to the Zoo (London)

At the VE Party, after our Jam sandwiches and cakes that our mothers had saved their rations for. A very tall policeman that lived at the end of our road, dressed up as a lady, held up an umbrella and we all had to follow him in and out of the shelters shouting "We want ice cream" another thing we had never had.

They were Lyon's Ice Cream, round, about an inch thick with 2 pieces of paper around them. First time we had seen them. We just licked them from both ends.

SHELTERS AND FRASERBURGH

These 4 photos' show the Street Shelters outside our home. We were dressed with clothes we'd just received in a parcel from our relatives in New York.

The other shelter is a Morrison shelter we had in our small bedroom it was the size of a 3 foot bed. Where I've drawn in the middle was where the opening was. I slept inside on a mattress and there was a mattress on top which my brother slept on. When the Air Raid siren went off my parents came through, my brother brought inside and my grandparents next door came in as well. Because my Dad built planes we got to know all the sounds of the different planes. When we heard the German planes we all kept quiet but all the British planes, we used to chat. quite FUNNY AS I THOUGHT THEY COULD HEAR US. There was a very small first Aid Box attached to the back of the shelter. It wouldn't have done much really if we were a direct hit. Apparently there was a bar of chocolate in it. My brother and I were in bed by 5.30pm and every night we Said to each other, "hope we get bombed tonight, we'll get that chocolate" Didn't know what it was like as we hadn't had any but knew it was a treat.

Dad gave me a Crystal Set radio with earphones as it was so early for bed. I loved that as there was a very funny Tommy Handley programme, a character called Mona Lot, it was being so cheerful that kept her going and a Spiv. Always selling stuff. One thing was "Down in the jungle guess what we did,

bought a pair of nylons ten quid.

The house is my grandparents in Fraserburgh, the northern most tip of Aberdeen. It's a modern photo as there were no cars there in those days. We were there for 31/2 months; my brother and I went to school there.

One day, my Mum said she was going back to London the next day. My Grandfather caught Mackerel at night, and my Uncle was a Deep Sea fisherman. All our relatives there came round trying to talk my Mum into staying but she insisted. After my Grandfather came home at 6 am, had a short sleep then helped us to the station, the opposite side of town.

When we got into Kings Cross my Dad met us with a telegram. Saying "Glad Louisa on train, would have been killed. The other photo is the house across the road, a direct hit at 10am when I would have been playing with my friend who was the same age as me. my friend and her mother were killed.

The Germans would never go back to Germany unless they had discharged all their bombs. This was a plane that tried to damage some of our fleet that was anchored at Scapa Flow.

If you notice the house at the back of the bomb damage, no other houses were damaged apart from Windows and doors blasted out. They were built with thick granite blocks, very strong.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

ALL people connected with Telecommunications were Civil Servants - signed the Official Secrets Act. In CRICKLEWOOD

The Telephone Exchange in Cricklewood was called after Prime Minister William Gladstone as he had his Country Home there and was left to the area, now known as Gladstone Park.

It had four satellites.

The Telephone Manager's Office

Brent Building where all Continental and International Cables were looked after.

Admiralty Charts.

This is where the Mary Rose was found.

Dollis Hill Research Station.

At Dollis Hill the site composed of several different buildings.

Situated in the Main Building was the Manual Switchboard. 6 Telephonists and a Supervisor.

Underground there was an exact copy of this that had to be tested every day. There was a tunnel going from Dollis

FOOD

Meals

Potato sliced very thin, 1 onion and 1 streaking bacon R rasher. My favourite meal, the potatoes were all shiny with the fat. It did taste lovely.

Breast of Lamb, took a long time to prepare, take out the bones and as much fat as possible. Mix oatmeal with suet and hot water. Mix, put on top of breast roll up, tie it with string and roast.

Stew, some beef, carrot and onion. Mum would give us all some with lovely gravy but I often saw Mum just have a slice of bread in the gravy.

Fish soup (Cullen Skink)

Mince mat with dry mashed potatoes and carrot. The mash could be spread over the plate to look like we had more.

Our grandparents in Fraserburgh occasionally sent a box of fish on the overnight train. We would get a telegram, my brother and I would go to Kings Cross to get it. Food off the train would be put on a platform. There would be a man we would show the telegram to and he would get it for us.

When we got it home, Mum would share it out with our neighbours.

Twice during the war my Granny went out to a farm and swapped fish for a chicken. Again, same

procedure. This time we saw rabbits and chickens on a clothes rail. We showed the man our telegram, he'd give us a number and left us to go and get the chicken that was numbered off the rail. We were all starving in London, but no one stole any of these chickens or rabbits.

We also got 3 or 4 food parcels from our relatives in New York. They had Maxwell House coffee, rice, sultanas Cannot remember anything else but one time there was some jelly in it. Mum invited a lot of children in for tea. We had bread and Jam and then the Jelly. None of us had seen Jelly before. While Mum and Granny were in the kitchen thinking we were tucking in. We couldn't help laughing as it wobbled so much. Falling off our spoons and in the end, we were really naughty. Started throwing it at each other in fits of laughter. Of course when Mum and Granny saw what we were laughing at they were upset as we hadn't eaten it.

One time my uncle that worked in a big coal mine in Fife went to the docks and managed to get us a treat. We received an enormous parcel, waited for my Dad to come home from work and then my Granny and Grandad came in from next door all watching the parcel being unpacked. Loads and loads of paper came off and in the middle were 2 small things. Bananas I was told. Mum cut them into slices for everyone to have a piece. My slice I started eating and couldn't work out why the others were so happy. Mum helped my brother with his, left me to get on with it. I didn't know the skin had to be taken off.

In Gladstone Park there was a railway line and trains carrying American soldiers were travelling through to Cricklewood Station. Children would go down a slope when they were passing, asking for 'Any gum chum' When my Mum heard about this my brother and I were told we mustn't do this as a soldier might be suffering bad injuries and a piece of gum could keep him going until he got help. My Dad one day bought me some gum with the rations and gave it to me when he'd finished his supper of Smoked haddock cooked in milk. I sat at the table where Dad had just finished. I was told I mustn't swallow it. It was a pack of candy coated gum. Scared stiff in case I swallowed it. Put a piece in my mouth with my head bent over Dad's empty plate apart from some milk and bones, spat it out and put another piece in my mouth, still head bent, spat that out, did this 3 times, when Dad came in the room said what are you doing Louisa? I said I was making sure I didn't swallow it. He said 'It's called chewing gum for you to chew it. Silly me What did I know?

My Dad hid round a corner with a large bag. I queued up at a stall selling potatoes, we were only allowed 2 pounds. I got mine, then went further down the street while John got his, went round the corner to put his in Dad's bag. Then my sister who was very young, had a piece of paper to ask for potatoes. Got hers. I followed her back to Dad. When all our potatoes were in the bag a big one had the same amount of mud on it, really we never actually got 2 pounds. These stall holders weren't daft they would have known we were all together.

In our road a girl had a rabbit. The gang as we the children called ourselves, would go to the factory behind us making all the boxes for weapons. And scramble under the benches as the men were working collecting sawdust for this rabbit.

After a few months I realised we had stopped getting the sawdust. I told her I was sorry as I had forgotten to get some. She told me not to worry, they had eaten the rabbit.

OTHER INCIDENTS

In Gladstone Park there were some Nissen huts at our end of the park which held German Prisoners of war. Throughout the war as children playing in the street, we saw some prisoners with a British soldier coming to the shop on the corner, we guessed for some cigarettes. We just said. "Oh, there's the Germans". Didn't worry us.

There was an Anti-Aircraft gun in the park. we didn't see it, sadly a lady soldier kept firing at aircraft, was wounded but still carried on firing until in the end she died of her wounds and received a posthumous George Cross.

When the war ended, a huge vehicle came into our road, it had something like a tall crane on it with a heavy chain hanging off with a very large concrete ball at the end. This was being used to smash down the street shelters and the Germans were operating the vehicle. When it came to smashing the shelter outside our home, my brother was coming along the road to go home saw the Germans and just stood still, scared to move. One of the men came took his hand, went to our front door, knocked and gave him to Mum. When he got inside, he said the German's are not bad, they're alright..

Our uncle in Fife wrote to my brother and I and told us how to make honey as this was unavailable during the war. Told us to put a nob of margarine on a slice of bread and if Mum had some Tate and Lyle Syrup to put a spoonful of that on top of the margarine, stir it up together then spread it over the bread. He told us that was Buckie Honey. Buckie was a town just along the coast from Fraserburgh. At the end of the war our Granny managed to get some honey which we did not like at all saying this isn't real honey. Our Dad was always making us things with scraps from the planes. Made John Meccano and of course my little case.

Made soap wich Mum said don't use that it will take the skin off your hands.

Got a stick of Spanish wood, (that wasn't on ration,) put it in a bottle and told John and I to give it a good shake each day then put it in the bottom of a cupboard in our living room. AT the end of the week Dad gave us a drink and said it was Sugar Olly water.

One winter Dad put out every pot he had in the garden with water, The next day they were full of ice, got Mum to make some custard, put all the ice into one big pot, put the custard in a bowl inside the big pot and told John and me to keep stirring it until the custard was practically frozen and told us that was ice cream. Something else we never had. Asked us what we thought of it. Me being a horrible child just said "it tastes like lumpy custard"

Dad was so good always trying to make nice things for us.

John being 3 years younger than me, sleeping on the top of the shelter. I used to chase him on it. How can you chase someone on top of a 3 foot shelter? One particular time he fell and put his head through the window. Luckily the blackout curtain was very heavy. I just pulled it down got into bed, Mum and Dad came running through hearing all the glass smashing, I had told John to pretend he was asleep. When they came into the room, they were saying" Louisa, what's happened" because they couldn't see anything wrong, I didn't answer kept making a stupid snoring noise. They gave up on me and went out. Then the lady upstairs came running down, knocking on our front door as we were in self-contained flats all the glass had fallen into her little alleyway leading to her garden. Nothing was said, I got away with that one.

Another time I must have fallen asleep with the headphones for the Crystal set still on. Heard a lady say to a man "You swine". I thought that a good name to call John. I don't think I knew what swine was. Fell asleep. Then some days later Dad was sweeping the chimney in the living room. Mum helping him. John and I were told to stand in the corner out of the way. We didn't have books or toys so just stood there keeping quiet. In my head I thought I could call John a swine now, nothing else better to do. I did, Dad and Mum both stopped and asked where I heard that from, I told them what I heard after that Dad would come in and remove the headphones after the Tommy Handley show. One day our Granny came in one morning telling Mum a man they knew had been killed during the night. I told John to hurry up with his breakfast so we could get to school before others to collect the shrapnel. We used to swap Marbles, Cigarette cards and shrapnel. I had quite a good collection of the shrapnel. It was only after Dad died I got a couple of Gardner's to make the back garden of Mum's house easy to look after. As they were digging it all up Mum told me she thought it would be a good time to throw my collection away.

Our games in our road were always happy times. John decided as there was one bike in the road he would make a wooden shield, polished up a penny, they were big in those days. Fitted it into the

shield. Then the next day, John told all of us if we each rode the bike round the block and counted while each one did it. No watches or stop watches. The lowest number would win the shield. In other words, the penny. He would go round first to show us what to do and told us to start counting as he rode off. We were going 1-2-3-4.. By the end we were all counting so fast as we were getting a bit cheesed off. Well guess the out come of that race. John had the lowest number and won the shield. I will say he was clever.

Another time we heard there was chocolate off the ration in the sweet shop. We went knocking on other people's doors asking if they had any jam jars so we could take the to the Post office shop and get a halfpenny for them. When we managed to get quite a few and sold. Went to the sweet shop for this off ration chocolate. Did some races but made sure everyone had the chocolate. Next day none of us were out to play, the chocolate was called Ex-Lax.

Every time we went to bed in the shelter, there ws a little First Aid box, what that would do if we had a direct hit I don't know. Inside was apparently a bar of chocolate, Every night John and I would say "Hope we get bombed tonight, we'll get that bar of chocolate" We hadn't had any so didn't have any idea what it was like but knew it was a treat.

Our Granny who lived next door to us worked in a restaurant In South Moulton Street off Oxford Street It was called the Mary Ann. Granny used to walk the 6 miles there every day as she felt safer walking than going on a bus.

V. E. DAY HOORAY

Or was it Hooray?

Living in Cricklewood NW London during the Second World War, was a very exciting time for the children in our street. Our parents were brilliant, we felt no fear. Most of us were the lucky ones, our fathers worked at Handley Page's making Bombers, at Smith's making instruments or a factory at the back of our houses making wooden cases for ammunition

The opposite side of our street backed onto the local Infant, Junior & Senior School. during the war up went a row of brick built shelters like another miniature street. We had fun with these ready made play homes. When our Mums were busy doing their washing etc. we would climb up onto the sloping concrete roofs and chase each other up the street. V.E.DAY - This would mean the end of those games!!!

We had an indoor shelter which my brother and I slept in every night, with a tiny First Aid box on one of the bars. There was a bar of chocolate in there. V.E.DAY - this would mean no more hoping we would be bombed to get the chocolate!!!

V.E.DAY - No more bombers overhead dropping bombs so we could get off to school early to collect the shrapnel that was left lying around from the night time raids!!!

V.E.DAY - An invitation to a street party - Hooray - What a beautiful day! It was lovely and warm.

Trestle tables put up at the end of the street near Wooton Road. The people in street were going to join us. That's good, we had some friends from that road. We had to follow Mr Learmouth in a long line shouting "We want ice cream" (Whatever that was"?) It was round, rolled in two pieces of paper, so we could lick the ends. That was lovely!!!

Night time. A BONFIRE!! FIREWORKS!! Some people put potatoes in the fire and everyone was singing. This was lovely. Our mother's cousin arrived in his Royal Marines uniform and came to the bonfire, we were really enjoying ourselves but he had come to bring us home. My brother wouldn't leave until he could get his potato out of the fire. Here was Hugh in his lovely bright uniform on the ground trying to get this black thing out of the heart of the fire. I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about a burnt potato. Never mind, I was very tired and had had a lovely day.

Maybe the end of the war wasn't so bad after all!!!