

I was only two when war broke out. I went to live with my mother's friend on a farm between Birmingham and Wolverhampton in a little place called Kingswinford. All it consisted of was a farm, a country club, and two houses and a water works. That was the entire village.

When I reached school age, I was picked up by the headmistress and taken to school by car. After school, I came back to the farm across the fields with my cousins. My aunt's (mother's friend) husband had died, so she was bringing up her five children and me. It was a busy household. When he died, she had to leave the farm and we had a cottage literally on the side of the canal. We used to be able to watch the horse-drawn barges going up with steel to where they were manufacturing the casings for bombs. It was actually right next door to the school, which was very interesting. My 'cousins' were 3 boys and 2 girls and I have to admit I was a bit of a tomboy. We had a hayloft right by the canal and my cousin dared me to jump out of the hayloft. I did and I ended up with a bang on the ground next to the canal. They ran screaming to their mum, but I was all right. I hadn't broken anything, just winded myself. My eldest cousin really took me under his shield and looked after me.

We had a typical country cottage with the back door on the front and the front door in the garden. To get to the toilet, you had to go out of the front door, down past the canal, passed the pigsty and the toilet was round the corner. So we only ever used that during the daytime. Once it got dark, you had to use a chamberpot, kept under the bed. If you went out in the dark, you had the rats running from the canal. No toilet rolls. You used cut-up newspapers or Radio Times. When the toilet got filled up, the boys dug a great big hole in this enormous half-acre garden that we had and just buried it. It fertilised the ground and we had beautiful vegetables.

It was an idyllic childhood. They went out shooting rabbits for food. The worst part I remember was when they killed a pig. We had an enormous kitchen with a copper boiler. That was the only way of heating the water unless it was a kettle. No bathroom or anything like that but I was idyllically happy.

I did come home occasionally to my parents, to my mother. We lived right near Kings Cross. By bus it was about 10 minutes from Kings Cross Station. By plane it was about 2 minutes. We were right in the middle of it, surrounded by bombed-out places. My aunt used to take me on two buses to go from where we lived to Wolverhampton Station and I'd be put on a train in the charge of the Guard. I used to travel in the Guards Van up to Euston, where my mother used to meet me and take me back home.

This one Christmas we were in London and they used to stop bombing on Christmas Day, it was a truce and they started again on Boxing Day. We lived in back-to-back houses and there were 3 back to back and across the road was, what we would call now an industrial estate, then we called it a factory estate. They had started bombing again, obviously aiming at Kings Cross and they dropped the bomb a bit too soon and it hit this factory site and it turned out to be a munitions factory. That factory blew up and demolished three complete rows of houses and killed everybody there. We lost all our windows and doors and then I remember screaming and saying I wanted to go back to the country. When it was safe my mother took me and put me on the train and I went back to my aunt's place and never came back to London again until the war was over. It terrified me because where I was living we didn't see anything of the war. The only thing we saw was one stray bomb where they jettisoned it on the way back. That was all. Wolverhampton got it but where we were we were totally isolated.

I didn't come back home to London again until I was 10, because to me my aunt was my mother and my cousins were my brothers and sisters. I didn't know anybody else, so coming back to live with my mother, who was a complete stranger and my sister, who I hadn't seen for 5 years. They were complete strangers and I hated it. Plus when you're living in the middle of London with a Birmingham accent it didn't go down well and I got picked on a lot when I went to school. We just played on all the bomb sites because there was nowhere else to play. My dad was a complete stranger. We never knew where he was until he turned up on the doorstep, because of what he was doing. He was an asphalter and he was just moved from one airfield to another to repair them when they were bombed.

My grandparents were still alive then and my grandfather was a printer. He printed the papers and the Rupert Annuals. I always had a Rupert Annual for Christmas because it came literally from the factory, or the print floor.

It was hard coming home. I hated it. To me, I was a real country girl. I loved the country. I loved being able to go across the fields and take the dogs and picnic. I was a country girl and I missed my cousins because to me they were my brothers. I went back after the war and still kept in contact with them. My aunt used to come up to stay with us.

The road we were living in in London was scheduled to be demolished. They called it slum clearance. The road had a blue line down it and one side was safe and the other side was all slum clearance. All the bombed area and where the factory had blown up was all slum clearance. We were the first house in the street to have electricity because up until then we had gas lamps. We also had a telephone. We all lived in the same house. We lived upstairs and my grandparents lived downstairs until they died. My mother had 2 brothers (Harry and Arthur Hewett) and a sister (Violet Hewett) who were all called up. We were lucky when the war ended they all came back. My single aunt lived downstairs with my grandparents.

One day we had to take a tin to school. We didn't know what it was for, but when we got to school they filled it with chocolate powder. It was the first time we'd ever seen chocolate powder. We had hot chocolate for tea that night which was really lovely. In the country, we had chickens, so we had eggs. There was plenty of milk, butter, meat, we had everything. When we came back to London we had rationing.

I remember going to work experience when I was 15, going to work in the Maypole and still having to mark off the ration books. I wasn't allowed to do that because I wasn't old enough so I had to have someone to do it for me and take the coupons out of the back.

I found it very difficult going back to London. I was very unhappy because I wanted to go back to the country and live with my aunt because to me she was my mother. My own mother

and father and sister were complete strangers. To a certain extent I can understand how my sister felt when she was forcibly evacuated. She went with all the school children on the train. The first place she went to they beat her with a strap. She went to a PE lesson in school and a teacher noticed it and she said 'Who did that?' and my sister said Mr and Mrs whoever they were and she never went back there. Then she went to a lovely lady called Aunt Mabel and she was a Christian lady and she healed Pam's back. My sister kept in contact with her right until she died.

I was 2 when I was evacuated so Pam must have been 8 years old. She went back home to London because she hated being in the country. She could have come to the home where I was staying but she hated anything to do with the country. My cousins tormented her a bit. She hated being near the canal. She was very academic. She ended up being secretary to the Governor of the Bank of England.

I loved all the countryside and I still kept in contact with my cousin, Jim right up until recently. They went out to Australia as part of the £10 Pom Scheme. They had 3 children. I rang to tell them that my mother had died and he said, 'When are you coming out to see us?' And I said next year as a joke and a year later I went out to Australia with a friend and I spent 3 weeks with my cousin and his family.

It was such a happy childhood. The film 'Goodbye Mr Tom' was exactly like it.

At the end of the war, we got on a tram and came out on the Embankment and saw all the celebrations. Everyone was so happy. Everyone went mad that night and I can imagine the Queen wanting to go out secretly. Everything was very difficult after the war with no jobs and trying to pick up the pieces but it was peaceful. I never really got on with my parents after the war. I looked after them both until they died. My sister and I were never close and it's only as we got older that we've become closer together. It's because we both grew up totally differently. We shared a bedroom but we were like strangers. She was very clever and I wasn't, not academically clever, I never have been. I was brought up to be practically clever. I could skin a rabbit at one time, I couldn't do it now. It took a lot for families to get back together, because so many people had been lost.

We were a prize target near Kings Cross. They were aiming to stop the trains at Kings Cross and Euston Stations. We lost 3 complete rows of houses near us and all the noise and all the people that were killed. We didn't know what was going on, we just thought it was some sort of factory near us. We had no idea it was an ammunition factory and I'm sure they were aiming at Kings Cross. When they were clearing it all to rebuild they were still finding bombs and some hadn't exploded. Pentonville Prison stayed put. It was still there when I grew up. I used to run a Brownie pack and we used to pick up the Governor's children to go to Brownies.

I think we grew up much harder than this generation because we had to cope. We didn't have much expectation, we were just glad to be alive. If you wanted something you had to earn some money to get it and things were tight. There was food rationing. It gradually got easier. It was a hard life but I think we are a dying generation now and this generation has no idea what it was like. The worst of the times when I came back to London were the Doodlebugs. As long as you could hear them you were all right. Once they went silent and you knew they were going to drop and you didn't know where. Again they aimed at the main buildings. Someone at this event showed me old London maps. They actually had bombing maps, showing where to bomb us. I pray that there isn't another war, but when you see what goes on in Ukraine and Israel...