

Ann - Early memories of WW2 and moving to Basildon New Town



Starting with the war, the first I remember is the sirens starting and things were getting bad. So we went to Upney Station, where there were hundreds of kids – all on their own, you know – but my mum insisted [on] taking us, so there were about six or seven of us, brothers and sisters – the elder ones were in the army. We got there by train, Purton in Wiltshire, just a little village. Then ... no one wanted us because there was a crowd of us, and then this Major Someone – big house and everything – took us in for the night, fed us, stayed there the night, and by the next day there was a field with two cottages in, one was empty and all the villagers had rallied round and put old bits of furniture in, and furnished it for us, and there we lived. I can't remember how long we were there, but it seemed a long time to me.

So we were right away from the war, we didn't know, didn't hear anything, wonderful, you know. Living in the country absolutely lovely. And Dad would come down at weekends because he was still at work – worked at May and Baker's – and he'd go back. The elder ones went to school, the oldest sister went to work; there was a farm there and there was a young – well, there were a few young men there – and [he] took a fancy to my sister, who was the eldest. Fell in love with her, used to come and light the fire in the morning for her to get up early. She never ended up with him; we all wanted her to, but she didn't anyway, she ended up with someone else.

And then at some stage we came home to Barking, and everything seemed drab and miserable, rationing and everything, you know. Then there was another spurt of war and we went to Yarmouth – Rollesby House. It was a big house, you know – one of those really big houses that had housed the soldiers; they took it over. So it was a bit of a wreck, but we were all allocated a huge room each – and then again, you know, I just thought it was great. By then my mum had had my sister – bit of a shock because she didn't think she was having any more, so my sister was only about six months old, I think. And then it used to be a call up 'There's coal arrived,' and Mum had to run down with a bucket and fill the bucket, we got a bucket of with coal. Downstairs you could help yourselves to this milk powder and chocolate powder, which we thought was great, you know. How we got the food I don't know, but we seemed to manage all right – we didn't go hungry. So I think in that part we had quite ... a pretty good time, you know, as kids.

And then suddenly it was all over we went back, came back to Barking, and then the years went on. I got a job at Marks and Spencer's when I was old enough – that was a lot of years later. My sister, my eldest one, always got a job in a butcher's and so did the second eldest one. I'm not sure why, but I think it was because even though we were poor, we always had a joint of beef on Sunday – a joint of beef or a joint of lamb. And Dad used to do veg in the garden, so you sort of weren't bad off in that, really.

And then I met my husband, then I got pregnant; we were living in rooms, then someone he worked with in London – he was driving in London – said that he'd got a house in Basildon, and you'd get one in six weeks. So we went and stayed with them, paid them some rent. I got a job at a factory – a machining factory, Morris and Mead. But I didn't sew at the time, so – his wife was a machinist – so I did the packing. And then the time went on, I was pregnant, and I hadn't told them because you'd just get the push. I was wearing a Little X girdle, to squash myself in, and at some stage the forewoman said, 'The manager's asked me are you pregnant?' And I said, well, yes. She said, 'You'd have got sacked on the spot if I'd known.' I said 'What could we have done?' I said 'We've given our rooms up.' So then, the next day I walked in, no Little X girdle and a smock! I thought, that's it, they can't sack me now! But they kept me on till ... it was October we got the house, and November Alan was born, so I was working through the pregnancy. But the most amazing bit was to get a three-bedroom house – brand-new three-bedroom house – it was wonderful. Yes, Cattawade Link, that was. And from then on Roy got a job with ... first he moved from the London one and then got a job with a sack factory, which paid absolutely awful money, and then this same man who we'd lived with, he was walking along and he saw Roy, and Roy said how are you, and he said I've got a chance to go to get a job at Mobil Oil. So Roy, he went to Mobil Oil and got the job, and he stayed there till he retired. He retired

In summary - we loved our WW2 evacuation!



Roy and Ann
on their wedding day.

2nd October 2024

