

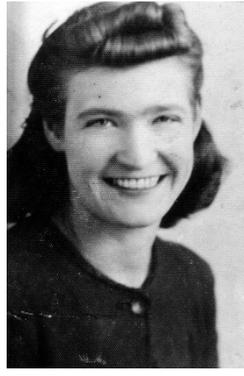
## Susan, daughter of Joan



Bill



Joan



Vera



Bill & Joan

My Mum Joan, her sister Vera and her brother Basil were all in the Children's Home. Mum left in August 1940, and by then Vera and Basil had already gone, being a bit older. (Their other siblings, Elsie, Ron and Len were never at the Home, as they were already working when their mother died.)

At first, Mum went to live with her grandmother, but after 2½ years she wanted to be with her sisters.

During the War, Mum was involved with top secret work at Cable and Wireless, Vera worked in a Munitions factory and was also a fire watcher. Basil was in the army, and he was awarded a medal for bravery after risking his life to rescue a comrade, I believe it was from a burning ammunitions truck.

Mum met Dad (William (Bill Warne) during the War. Dad was in the army, he was involved in both the evacuation of Dunkirk and the D Day Landings.

### **This is what Mum wrote many years later in her 'memoirs':**

I missed my sisters. I felt that they were having a good time in London. In reality they had been directed into a munitions factory and both became very skilled at engineering. Their basement flat in Brixton was right in the thick of the air-raids. On the terrible night of 10th May, 1941, Basil was staying with them as he was on leave from the Army. All night long they were involved in extinguishing the clusters of incendiary bombs which rained down from the sky incessantly. It seemed that all London was afire. When morning dawned at last, Vera and Elsie along with all the other Londoners, wearily picked their way through the debris, stepping over the hoses which snaked across the roads, and because no transport was available, walked uncomplainingly to work.

In January 1942, Elsie was married to Charlie, and Vera and I were bridesmaids. My friend Rose from the Home, came to the wedding, and it was good for all of us to be together again. As Elsie's husband was in the army, she and Vera continued to live in the flat. Early in 1943, I put in for a transfer to 'General Accident's' Head Office in Aldwych. So leaving the comfort and safety of Whittlesey, I plunged back into the heart of London to be with my sisters for the remainder of the War. We moved to a larger flat where we had a bedroom each, though often had to spend the night in a ground floor cupboard under the stairs when the 'doodle bugs' or V2 rockets were overhead.

Basil was next to get married and he spent his honeymoon night in an Anderson shelter in the garden of a house in Woodford, only a few hundred yards from the 'Home'. We guests spent the night in a brick shelter at the front of the house. There was a particularly bad raid that night, and when we returned home to Brixton the following day, it was to find that all the windows of our flat had been blown out and glass lay over everything. To escape the noise of the air-raids, we went dancing almost every evening. As the bombs dropped nearer, the band would play louder. Getting to and from the dance hall was a problem and was quite hazardous, as we dodged in and out of doorways to shelter from shrapnel and blast.

Early in 1944, I had to leave my job in the insurance office, to do work of 'national importance'. I was fortunate to be picked for training in telegraphy at Cable and Wireless. My training was completed just after the D-Day landings. I found this work very interesting, it was highly confidential and much of it was typed in cypher. We had to work in shifts, two weeks of nights followed by two weeks of days. On the night shifts we started at 5pm and worked until 8am or 9am on a Sunday. Not many people nowadays would work a fifteen hour stretch, let alone the extra hour, but we did have a night between. Electra House was sited on the Victoria Embankment, so we spent our half hour break on day shifts, eating sandwiches beside the Thames.

Because of the nature of our work we were able to keep up-to-date with the advance of our troops as they entered Berlin towards the end of the War. It was very exciting when the news came through that Berlin had fallen and Hitler had committed suicide,

especially for those of us who had our menfolk fighting out there. Then at last came the broadcast from Prime Minister, Winston Churchill on 8th May, announcing that the Germans had surrendered and the War in Europe was over. On VE Day, we three sisters were among the crowds pressing against the gates of Buckingham Palace. Yelling at the tops of our voices 'We want the King'. Cheering as King George, Queen Elizabeth, (now the Queen Mother) and the two princesses came out onto the balcony. We were thrilled when Winston Churchill, our great leader, was with them and the massive crowd cheered themselves hoarse. There had never been a day like that, before or since, where everyone smiled and danced in the streets. People from many nations, including those who had fought with us from Canada, America and Poland, linked arms and sang as they made their way towards the Palace. Everyone was bubbling with happiness. The suffering of the past five years was pushed aside for ne momentous, glorious day! It seemed as if all the world was there in London that day, and everyone was a friend.

All that was left now was the War in the Far East, but there seemed no hope for a quick ending there. In early August there was another broadcast to the nation which stunned us all. An atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima in Japan and as details were given we were shocked and horrified by the devastation. Yet, we knew there had to be some way of stopping that terrible War. Another bomb - this time on Nagasaki - and the Japanese surrendered. It was all over. On the 14th August, 1945 Peace came to the world!

One day that stands out in my memory was the liberation of our servicemen from Japanese prisoner of war camps. They were allowed to send free telegrams to let their families know they were alive. The families were also allowed to send a free telegram back. Everyone worked feverishly to get the telegrams out. No-one wanted to leave their seat. We were so happy to have the privilege to pass on the news to wives, mothers and sweethearts that their menfolk were safe and would soon be home. We knew even then that our men had suffered terribly in the Japanese prisoner of war camps. V-J Day was more subdued than V-E Day. The suffering had been too great. That war had to end, but its end was a shock to us all. Surely now the lesson had been learned and never again would an aggressor try to take over the world.

\*\*\*

I first met my husband Bill when he came home on leave travelling with Elsie's husband Charlie, who was in the same regiment - The Royal Welch Fusiliers. I was eighteen at the time and had only been living in Brixton for a few weeks. Our 'courting' was mainly by letter as he rarely had leave. In June 1944 he was in the D. Day landings and spent the next year as part of the liberating army, first in France, then Belgium, Holland and finally Dusseldorf in Germany, where he remained until the War ended in June 1945.

On September 29th 1945, we were married in St Michaels Church, Brixton. It had been bombed, so we had to use a small corner that had escaped the damage. There was no music available, and the Vicar whispered the words so softly that Bill, having arrived late the previous evening, because of bad weather over the channel, and having had no time to swat up on the marriage service, gave peculiar responses, but no-one appeared to notice. I had borrowed a lace wedding dress from Vera, but made the mistake of washing it so the lace was a bit limp. I bought a satin nightdress which had to double as a slip to go under the dress, as I hadn't any clothing coupons left. My white satin shoes were bought in Walthamstow market with a black wool suit with velvet collar as a going away outfit, (Black market, so very expensive!)

I was very lucky to have an iced wedding cake, (single tier) because I only had one egg. Many people had to make do with a white cardboard cover. With an allowance of an extra ½ lb of butter, ½ lb cheese, ¼ lb tea and 1lb sugar, I optimistically invited 50 guests for the reception. Wedding presents were very difficult for people to buy, as even pillowcases and anything that could loosely be called furnishings were on coupons, so I can only remember receiving one or two things. However, I still have a mirror and a yellow china dog.



Mum with Rosetta (Rosie) and her sister



Me, my husband Malcolm, and our 'children' Simon and Jenna



Mum and Dad from the 1990s