Margaret's Memories – Growing up in the 30s

Moving home - from Everton to West Derby

Up to 1931 we lived in a small 2 up and 2 down Victorian terrace – 27 Shallcross Street. Downstairs there was a small living room with a big range type fire with an oven – there was gas light downstairs only. The kitchen had a stone sink, one tap with cold water – stone floor. The boiler was in the kitchen to wash the clothes. I think we had a couple of shelves and outside in the yard there was a 'safe' with a mesh door to keep milk and butter. A staircase – very narrow – led up from the kitchen to the 2 bedrooms – we had no lights up there. Only lino on the floors with a small rag rug by the bed. I shared a room with my brother Joe. There was no bathroom – the lavatory was at the bottom of the yard – there would be an oil lamp in there in the winter but it was always so cold.

We were lucky that we had good furniture and downstairs there was a large rug in front of the fire – very heavy curtains. My Dad made a vestibule door to keep the cold out. There was always a big fire – the oven was used for rice puddings and slow cooking. We did have an oven in the kitchen not long before we left in 1931. Compared the families around we were 'wealthy' as we had good clothes – 'Sunday best' plus shoes, rainwear and wellingtons. I remember seeing children who had no shoes – I briefly went to school in Everton and was horrified at seeing children without shoes playing in the playground and no proper clothes. I had to wear boots up to my knees in the winter over long woollen stockings – the boots had buttons all down the side which I had to use a button hook to fasten them. I had 3 dresses – woollen type – grey or blue over which I had to wear a white apron to keep them clean. On Sunday I wore a kilt and a jumper to go to church which Joe and I had to do 3 times a day. We went to morning service, Sunday school in the afternoon and evening service.

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On moving to West Derby we had a house with 3 bedrooms, big living room, good kitchen and the most important thing – a bathroom – it was a miracle to have hot water coming out of a tap and an inside toilet. At first we would run round the house switching the lights on and off!! Outside we had a large garden. There was still just the one fireplace so it was cold upstairs and we were only allowed to have 1 bath a week – usually on Sunday evening. We were surrounded by fields – not too many houses but they were built later. We used tramcars to move about but often had to do long walks.

We soon made friends with the local children and again we found we were better off than most – people would ask Mother if they could 'borrow' things like sugar, coal and even clothes. The house was in a small close – 20 houses in all – only 2 men had jobs!

School

The first school I went to was Broad Square. I was never very happy there but had a very good grounding in English, spelling and Arithmetic – I always came first in most subjects – the Headmaster told my Mother I had a 'bright future'.

When I was about 8 or 9 I left there and went to West Derby Village school where I was much happier – it was a Church school – Joe went to the boys' department.

I always enjoyed my lessons especially English, History and Geography, also R.E. I was awarded many prizes for excellent work etc etc. My biggest disappointment was not being allowed to sit the scholarship – I was head and shoulders over several girls who took it and passed but I had to stay put and leave school at 14 – to this very day I am filled with resentment. We did get homework – sometimes it was difficult for me to find the time to do it as by this time there was Betty and then John, both of whom I had to mind on getting home from school. Also I had to do housework, wash dishes, scrub the kitchen floor and iron – I wasn't then 11. My Dad would get very cross with Mother as he knew I needed to do my homework. I had 'Chorea' as a child or so they said which stopped me from doing games or sports.

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My teachers were good – they were all so sad that I was prevented from taking the 11-plus and could not understand my mother's reasoning as this Chorea did not stop my school work and caused me no problems.

There were punishments but I never had any. Apart from the general lessons we also had Cookery, Needlework (hated that) and many Craft lessons. We were also taught about Parliament. Each morning we had Assembly – prayers and hymns – Wednesday morning we went to church first. The day started at 9am, lunch was 12-1.30 and finish at 4pm. If children missed school a couple of times a month a 'school board' man would visit the house to find out the reason.

We would go on Nature trails which were along Meadow Lane – no houses there then - or through Lord Sefton's estate – we collected leaves, flowers and nuts. We all enjoyed that. When I got to 12 and 13 I often got bored as I felt there was nothing else they could teach me – I was so envious of friends who had gone to the Grammar school. Later the 13 plus was brought in but that was after my time.

Sunday best, Puddings and Christmas

We all had good clothes but they were made of heavy material for the winter. It was better in the summer being able to wear cotton dresses and shoes instead of boots. We did not wear a uniform to school as such but I wore a white blouse with Navy blue Gym Slip as I got older – black woollen stockings. Navy blue coat or mac and a black velour hat. We always had slimy black oilskins with a sou'wester and wellingtons for the rain and snow. There were no 'leisure clothes' like there are today – we wore 'old' clothes on Saturdays then Sunday best for Church!

Food before the war was plentiful – or it was for us. There would be porage and toast, bacon, eggs for breakfast. Dinner – which was always mid-day – Stews, Hot Pot, Roast, Fish, loads of vegetables and always puddings – Rice, Apple Pies, Spotted Dick, Suet puddings. Tea – usually homemade bread and butter (no margarine) homemade scones and cakes. Stewed Apple or Rhubarb or Plums and Custard. On going to bed Ovaltine, Bournvita and Arrowroot biscuits.

We did have sweets and chocolates until the war came. We as a family always had plenty of good food – never went hungry as so many families did.

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We never had many presents as children. I think birthday presents meant a new item of clothing, new shoes or something practical.

I do not recall we ever had a Christmas tree – in fact the first Christmas tree that I remember was one I bought when I was about 12 or 13. It was only a small one – I think I paid sixpence for it from our local greengrocer. Just a few baubles – no lights at all. We would make paper chains ourselves and bring in Holly from the hedges. We did hang a Pillowcase – there would be a tangerine, red apple, new penny, Selection Box and 1 toy – box of paints or a jigsaw – Joe usually got Meccano or maybe a kite which Dad made himself. We often went to the park to fly the kites – there would always be a lot of people there doing the same thing. The other activity would be sailing small boats on the Lake.

We always had Turkey plus trimmings, Homemade Christmas cake – not iced in those days just the cake. Christmas was only the 2 days then everything was back to work. New Years day was not a holiday – just an ordinary day.

Tramcars and Outings

We only had Tramcars – very few buses – hardly any cars. The local doctor had a car but we seldom saw them. The milk was delivered by horse and cart as was the coal – the roads were always filled with horse manure – some people sent their children to collect it and would sell it! If on the rare occasion an aeroplane flew over everyone went outside to look. I do have hazy recollections of seeing an airship – about 1929 – not sure if that was the ill fated R101.

There were trains to take you away from Liverpool – we had 2 big stations – Lime St and Exchange St. The underground trains went to the Wirral and Chester also Southport. We had the ferryboats and that is how we travelled to go to the seaside at New Brighton. I never went on holiday at all – maybe 1 or 2 days to New Brighton during the school holidays but that was all. I spent a lot of time with Aunty Mag in Wallasey but again I had to do housework and shopping – she taught me to knit before I was 5. People who could afford it (not many) would go on Charabancs (bus) for a day trip to Blackpool or Llandudno.

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The tram service was excellent and very cheap – we could buy an all day return for one penny and use it to go all over the place. Eventually they did away with trams to be replaced by the bus but it was never as good or as cheap.

Doctors and Dentists

We had a doctor – we had to pay half a crown (2/6) a visit – he would make up the medicine himself – which seemed to be the same red fluid for every ailment! Both my Nana and Mother would often help with people who were sick – if they had flu or a fever. T.B. was much feared and lots of people died. Scarlet Fever, Measles, Mumps, Chicken Pox were the usual things that most children expected to have. Diphtheria was greatly feared – my Mother had it when a baby and was not expected to recover! They wrapped her in cotton wool – I don't know why. Dentists were about but not many people went – when I had my two front teeth cracked at 11 years the dentists just took them out! You always saw a lot of people with very bad teeth or no teeth at all at quite a young age – like me for instance! Hospitals were really strict – visiting was only once a week in Alder Hey hospital – only half an hour on Sundays – it was really awful. The wards were cleaned twice a day – the nurses wore spotless white aprons and caps. The hospital food was awful. I had one or two spells in hospital – was really miserable as it was such a strict routine.

Looking back at the 30s

As far as I can recall the 30s were not that good – or certainly not for me. People did not have the material things they now take as part of ordinary life. I do recall the news coming from Europe – lots of talk about war and what Hitler was doing. There always seemed to be talk about the IRA – they would blow up post boxes. In Liverpool there was a large Roman Catholic population – lot of Irish people – they all lived in one part of the city and there would be fights between Catholics and Protestants on St. Patrick's Day and the 12th July which was Orange Day. There would be big processions on 12th July and the city centre would become a no go area. We only knew of the Abdication by the wireless or what we saw on the newsreel at the cinema. Most ordinary people liked Edward but detested Mrs Simpson.

I also remember the street criers in the 30s – women would come along with great baskets on their heads selling salt fish – they each had their own cries. Men would

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walk the streets singing – sometimes they would be given a farthing or halfpenny. Then there was a man with a Barrel Organ who had a little monkey dancing on top.

My only real memories are of being constantly 'baby minding' – doing housework and that is about it. We did not have electric iron or vacuum cleaner – the irons were heated on the stove and were very heavy – I did get badly burnt one time. The few rugs we had would be taken outside and beaten. Floors were washed – kneeling down to do them was awful – I always had sore knees. When we got to West Derby and had the garden it was difficult to cut the grass – Dad did that by hand but eventually we did get a small lawn mower.

Chores and 'playing school'

My weekends were mostly spent doing chores – before Nana came to live with us in 1937 I had to go each Saturday and help her – doing shopping mainly – she always gave me sixpence for this and some chocolate. On getting home which was usually around 4pm I then had to help in the house. Now and then I went to the cinema – there were only black and white films. Sometimes my Mother would take me on Friday evening as a special treat. We had a wireless set – a Bush and a gramophone on which we played '78' records. One of the earliest songs I can remember is 'Painting the Clouds with Sunshine' – this was sung by a street singer. Just recently I saw the words pop up on TV – I assume it was the same song. Sunday evenings we usually played cards – my Dad taught me to play Crib at an early age – we had a special card table and he often had friends in to play Whist or Crib. My Mother always baked her own bread and cakes so it was an enjoyable time for visitors. I didn't see TV until 1951.

In school we had skipping ropes, balls and marbles. Lots of girls played with dolls but I didn't – I had a blackboard and easel and would play school – using Betty's dolls and teddy as my pupils – I really loved that. I would read whole passages of the Bible to them!! I would read on going to bed but the light was not allowed for long.

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