

OUT OF EGYPT I HAVE CALLED MY SON...

CHAPTER TWO OUT OF EGYPT I HAVE CALLED MY SON

My Father, Peter William Maple lived with his family at 78 Blythe Vale, which was at the other side of Catford from where my Mother lived. His parents were William Gravestock-Maple who had been born on the 21st January 1895 at Bethnal Green in London and Winifred Ida Carter who had been born on the 6th January 1899 at Camberwell in London. My Grandfather had two sisters and two brothers and my Grandmother had three sisters, two of whom were twins. One of the twins was smaller and weaker than the other twin and she died in childhood from a simple childhood illness such as measles.

My Grandfather worked for the National Cable and Wireless Company and soon after my Grandparents were married they went to live in Manchester where my Grandfather had been offered a job. They had three children who were all born in Manchester. Peter William Maple who was born on the 4th August 1924, Betty Maple who was born on the 6th December 1929 and Pauline Maple who was born on the 13th March 1935. My Grandfather also had another son who he gave his name to who was called Bryan Maple. He was born in Manchester after my Father was born and his Mother was unmarried. My Grandfather used to meet the woman in St. Anne's square in Manchester and take her out and he had not told her that he was married with a family. When she realized that she was pregnant and my Grandfather had to tell her that there was no hope of him marrying her, she was absolutely devastated. My Grandfather admitted his responsibility and gave the boy his surname and some financial support but it was not enough and the child and his Mother had a very hard time. After Pauline was born my Grandmother found out that my Grandfather was still seeing the woman and because she had good reason to believe that my Grandfather had every intention of leaving her and going to live with his Mistress and his Son, she made him sell their house in Manchester and return to London with her and their children.

When my Grandparents returned to London my Grandfather bought their house in Blythe Vale and a Grocery shop in Stanstead Road, a few minutes walk from their home. He put my Grandmother to serve in the shop and gave one of his brothers, who was out of work, a job as the manager of the shop while he went to work at a full time job in London in order to earn as much money as possible. My Grandmother knew that my Grandfather was trying to raise enough money to be able to set her up with her own house and business in London so that he could go back to the person he really loved in Manchester and she tried to refuse to work in the shop to stop his plans. My Grandfather was firm about it and insisted that the best thing for all of them to do was to work as hard as they could to get as much money together as possible, but my Grandmother detested the Grocery shop. She felt that it was beneath her dignity to work in a shop and handle money and she would not always charge people she knew for the goods they bought or charge people who were too poor to afford the prices.

One afternoon a desperately poor woman came into the shop and asked my Grandmother how much just one thin slice of corned beef would cost and when the woman realized that she could not afford it she asked my Grandmother if she could sell her half a slice.

My Grandmother asked the woman what she wanted the meat for and when the woman told her that she just wanted to cut it into small pieces to give each of her family just a taste of meat with their family meal that evening because they had a special occasion, my Grandmother was horrified. It was less meat than she helped herself to for a snack in her own kitchen or threw to her dog. The woman was genuinely poor and my Grandmother instantly cut her enough of the meat to feed her family for a week and filled a large box with other good things from the shelves of the shop and gave everything to the woman at no cost at all. The greatest problem my Grandmother had was in trying to persuade the woman that it was alright for her to take the things and when my Grandmother finally saw the woman, who was sobbing with gratitude, out of her shop she told her to come back if she needed more another time or to send anyone in the same state of hardship to see her. Within the hour one of the woman's neighbours had arrived and because my Grandmother could see that the woman could certainly do with some things she filled another box with equal generosity. Over the weeks other people in dire hardship arrived at the shop asking to speak to my Grandmother privately and she refused no one.

Finally someone gave the word to my Grandfather, who knew nothing about it because he was working in London all day, and he stormed into the shop in a fury. The shelves were half empty and when my Grandfather ordered a complete stock-taking it was found that hundreds of items of goods were missing and the shop was ruined. It was exactly what my Grandmother had wanted to happen to pay my Grandfather back for all the humiliation he had caused her, but in the face of my Grandfather's anger she was suddenly terrified of him and my Grandfather's brother realized that he had got to take the blame for what my Grandmother had done before my Grandfather killed her, after all he was the manager of the shop and he knew that he should have told my Grandfather what was going on even though my Grandmother had forbidden him to mention anything.

My Grandfather knew the truth about what had happened because someone very reliable had told him but when his brother defended my Grandmother so protectively my Grandfather turned on him and accused him of 'carrying on' with my Grandmother which he had certainly not done. In a terrible row my Grandfather asked his brother to choose what he wanted to be accused of: 'carrying on with my Grandmother' or 'having taken leave of his senses and given away hundreds of items of stock in his shop without charging anyone'. My Grandfather's brother said that 'he had taken leave of his senses' even though he had only done it in taking the blame for my Grandmother's acts of charity. In his temper my Grandfather picked up the telephone and called for the Police. My Grandfather told the Police that his brother had gone completely mental and had given away hundreds of items of goods in his shop without charging anyone and he told the Police that his brother needed to be put away in a mental hospital. When the Police arrived and saw the crowd of people who had gathered at the door of the shop to watch the family row, and when they had looked at the empty food shelves and listened to my Grandfather's venomous accusations, they took my Grandfather's brother away without a second thought despite the fact that he was by then earnestly pleading his innocence to my Grandfather and the Police. My Grandfather was surprised at how quickly the Police

had believed him and taken his brother away to Bexley Mental Hospital, but he thought it would teach his brother a lesson while he got on with teaching his wife a lesson with a good beating. He decided to leave his brother in hospital for a week before he went to tell the Hospital Authorities to let him go but despite my Grandfather intending to tell the truth, the end of that week never arrived for my Grandfather's brother and after only four days the Police arrived at my Grandfather's house to tell him that his brother was dead.

My Grandfather's brother had arrived at the hospital protesting his innocence and when he realized that they were seriously going to lock him up he put up a terrible fight. He was a brilliant man who was of a quiet and gentle temperament, but who spoke with a slight stammer. He was only working for his brother because he was out of work, possibly while he was working his way through University, and while he had not minded taking the blame for my Grandmother's generosity, being locked up in a Mental Hospital was more than he could take. When no one would listen to him he put up a terrible fight and when they gave him a sedative to restrain him he had the most awful reaction to it and he died four days later, in a straight jacket, of Apoplexy. My Grandfather showed no remorse at his brother's death and because of the fight his brother had put up at the hospital neither the Hospital Authorities or the Police had bothered to question the fact that my Grandfather's brother might not have been mental at all. Infact the Police were most sympathetic to my Grandfather when they explained to him that his brother appeared to have had some kind of brain storm in his shop and that there was no hope of recovering the food that had been given away. My Grandfather just listened to what the Police had to say and did not bother to enlighten them with the truth and when local people began to gossip about it he was cruel enough to tell them that his brother had been mental anyway and that if they had listened to his stammer they could have heard it in his voice.

My Grandfather was a very practical man who had never liked the way his brother wasted his time with books and he was more concerned with the fact that his shop was ruined than that his own brother was dead. My Grandfather punished my Grandmother by keeping her desperately short of money and by making her do all the housework in their home which had previously been done by a daily help. He never forgave her for having ruined him and he cut himself off from his own family who would never have anything more to do with him over his brother's death. My Grandfather was forced to stay in London with his wife and children and he could no longer afford to travel to Manchester very frequently to see his Mistress and Son which he was always bitter about. His son Bryan and his Mother suffered hardship in many ways and they became bitter about it but my Grandfather sent them what he could and managed to keep in touch with them. Bryan got married before my Mother and Father did and he had children before they did too. One of Bryan's sons became a Roman Catholic and then joined a Religious Order and became a priest.

As a child my Father had been a quiet and studious boy who had been given a place at Manchester Boy's Grammar School by the City of London Grocer's Company which my Grandfather at that time either worked for or belonged to. When the family returned to

London my Father failed an entrance test and interview to go to St. Dunstan's College in Catford and so he had to go to an ordinary state school to finish his education. The boys at Manchester Grammar school had been well brought up and had come from some very good homes and my Father had got used to their way of behaving. When the family returned to London my Father had to get used to much rougher boys at his new school and my Grandfather always said that they had not realized what a 'Nancy boy' the Grammar School had turned him into until my Father came back to London and had to go to a state school. My Father mixed well with the other boys but he started to become almost backward in his ways and his schoolwork suffered. My Grandparents said that they thought it was because the state schools made the boys do too much aimless running about in the school playground. In Manchester my Father had played cricket on the school playing fields but in London the new kind of 'Physical Training' in which 'running about' was considered to be good healthy exercise had a most peculiar effect on my Father's brain and seemed to leave him behaving peculiarly and 'running wild'.

While my Grandfather was out at work my Grandmother also let my Father do as he pleased which did not help matters and things went so far that one day a neighbour came rushing into my Grandparent's house to ask her if she knew that my Father was sitting on top of the roof of my Grandparent's house resting back against the chimney stack. My Grandmother could not get him to come down and my Father stayed up there all day making rude remarks at her until my Grandfather came home and realized that having climbed up there my Father had become too scared to climb down by himself. My Grandfather had to go up and help him down and to save him from being embarrassed about having felt afraid of the height he told him to tell my Grandmother that he had gone up there to get some peace and quiet from her while the only other man in the house was out at work. Another time my Father spent hours awkwardly and painfully trapped inside the lower part of my Grandmother's treadle sewing machine after she had let him and his friend play a boisterous game of hide and seek in the house. My Father had to stay there for hours in agony waiting for my Grandfather to come home so that he could cut my Father free. A piece of metal had cut into my Father's leg so deeply that he was lucky not to lose the leg but he was permanently scarred and became terrified of sewing machines. My Grandfather was horrified that my Father had been trapped for so long and he could not understand why my Grandmother had not telephoned the Fire Brigade to come and free my Father instead of sitting in a chair watching him crouched in agony for hours. She said she had been afraid that if she called the Fire Brigade they would have to pay for their services and my Grandfather would be furious about having to spend the money but my Grandfather said he would have paid what was needed if they had been charged anything. My Father was always in more trouble than my Grandfather ever fully knew about and time and time again my Grandmother threatened my Father that she would tell my Grandfather what he had done but she never carried out her threat, which she should have done.

My Father loved animals and especially small furry creatures like mice that had tiny dainty paws but because my Grandfather despised keeping anything less than a large masculine dog as a pet, my Father had to keep some pet mice he was given by a boy at school hidden in their cage under a sack in the garden shed incase his Father found them.

Finally my Father's sister Pauline who was about four years old told my Grandfather because she could not keep a secret and my Father was made to get rid of them. When my Grandfather found out about the mice he thought my Father was 'too soft' for a boy and he decided to toughen him up a bit and make a man out of him by showing him what should happen to small furry vermin. He took my Father to a Slaughter House to see a polecat killed by axe but taking my Father there had quite the opposite effect on him than my Grandfather had expected and he said that my Father showed him up in front of all the other men present by getting into an awful state and crying. My Father never forgot the death of such a beautiful animal, or the blood on its fur, and far from making a man of him my Grandparents could never get him to eat liver again which was what the animal was killed for and the liver given to him to take home for his Mother to cook for him.

When the second World War broke out my Grandfather offered his services to the Army as a civilian and taught wireless telegraphy to female recruits at St. Albans. Betty was evacuated to Blackpool where she joined the Red Cross and loved nursing, and my Grandmother and Pauline went to stay with a relative in Manchester who they did not get on very well with. They came back to London and got through most of the Blitz before anyone thought about their safety and found them accommodation near my Grandfather's billet in St. Albans. My Father joined the R.A.F. as a mechanic and was sent to Leeds and several other places in England before he was sent abroad to Egypt.

My Father hated leaving my Grandmother while he went away to war because he was worried about what would happen to her but on the actual day that he left home he went away more worried than he should have been because my Grandfather would not let my Father say goodbye to my Grandmother. My Father had to leave home very early in the morning and although he had spent the previous evening with both his Parents, my Grandmother had insisted that she would get up early the next morning to say goodbye to my Father properly and to see him off at the front door. When morning came my Grandfather woke my Father up himself before his alarm went off and told him that he did not want the alarm to wake up the whole household and so he had switched the alarm off and woken my Father up before it had gone off. My Father got ready and came downstairs to breakfast to find that my Grandfather had cooked him a huge bowl of hot, sweet porridge that tasted delicious because my Grandfather had taken his time to make it properly and cook it slowly. My Grandfather refused to let my Father wash up the breakfast things and when my Father was ready to leave he told my Grandfather that he was just going upstairs to say goodbye to my Grandmother but my Grandfather refused to let him. He told my Father that my Grandmother was asleep and said that he was not to wake her, then he made my Father take his things which were packed ready in the hall and leave before he was late for the train he had to catch. My Grandfather stood at the front door and quickly waved goodbye to my Father himself before going indoors and closing the front door. My Father found himself hesitantly walking along the deserted street towards the station all by himself as if he had been 'put out on the street' and because he felt unsettled about leaving home without saying goodbye to his Mother my Father suffered more homesickness because he kept wondering if his Mother was alright than he would have done if he had said goodbye to her properly.

When my Grandmother got up later that morning thinking that she had overslept and worrying that my Father would be late for his first day with the R.A.F. my Grandfather told her that my Father had gone. He told her that she must have slept through the alarm and he lied to her that he had called her several times to come down and see my Father off. She wondered why my Father had not woken her and my Grandfather told her that going off to war was 'Men's business'. He said that my Father was a man now that he had gone off to war and that he had not wanted a silly woman crying over him in a tearful farewell at the front door. Then he took her and showed her the dirty washing up that my Father had left her to wash up which he had never done before. My Grandmother did not mind the washing up being left but she was very hurt that my Father had not said goodbye to her and my Grandfather kept upsetting her by continually saying that my Father was such a softie that he would be one of the first to be killed and that he bet it would only be a matter of days before they heard that he was dead. My Grandfather talked about the war as if it was the same as the first world war when some young boys had only survived for a matter of days on the battle field but the second world war was better organized and as far as was possible men were trained for it. It was not until my Father came home for his first leave that he found out how hurt his Mother had been that he had not said goodbye to her and my Grandmother found out the truth about the alarm clock and that it had been my Grandfather who had not allowed my Father to go up to the bedroom to say goodbye to her. My Father was very upset to think that he might have died in the war and left his Mother thinking that he had not cared enough to say goodbye to her. After the war my Father had an obsession about setting his own alarm clock every night without fail and he always had to have the loudest alarm clock that he could buy. When the alarm went off in the morning, and always before six o'clock even when my Father had a day off work, he always insisted on letting it ring loudly enough and long enough until everyone who was asleep in the house had woken up. When he first married my Mother he always made her get up as soon as his alarm went off even when she was desperately tired and needed some sleep, then my Father would go and make himself a cup of tea and a bowl of hot, sweet porridge and leave the sticky porridge bowl for my Mother to wash up which she hated because she could not bear porridge and if anything upset my Father's routine each day he used to become really agitated about it.

Once while my Father was on leave from the R.A.F. an incendiary bomb fell through the roof and into the hall of their house in Blythe Vale before my Father, Grandmother and Aunt Pauline had time to get to the local air raid shelter during an air raid. My Aunt Pauline had a nasty stomach bug which many local people had and was in the upstairs bathroom as she did not want to use the facilities in the air raid shelter. She was too ill to leave the bathroom and my Grandmother was waiting outside the bathroom door for her while the air raid sirens were sounding when the bomb fell straight through the roof and down into the hall by the front door. For some reason the incendiary bomb did not go off straight away and it just lay ticking in the hall of the house a few feet away from where my Father was standing shouting to his Mother and sister to hurry up and get to the air raid shelter. The front door was wide open and without thinking about it my Father just kicked it straight out of the house right into the road where it instantly exploded into a massive ball of fierce flames. My Father had saved the house from fire and saved my Grandmother's and Pauline's lives by his action because they would have been trapped

upstairs with no escape when the fire went straight up the carpeted stairs but although he was considered to be something of a local hero, the incident made him feel more uneasy than ever about leaving my Grandmother when he went back to the R.A.F. because he was not sure if she would be alright if he was not there to look after her. After the war my Father became fascinated with fire and he used to spend hours playing with anything that would burst into flames like matches or his cigarette lighter in front of my Mother and us children. He either used to pour cigarette lighter fuel over his lighter and set it on fire or else he would run his lighter up and down his arm or his chest singeing all the hairs and then make a great fuss of putting it out with his bare hands. Surprisingly, he never burnt anything more than his own fingers and a few of his own hairs.

My Grandfather was also too hard hearted to allow my Grandmother to send any parcels to my Father while he was away from home. My Father always sent his pay from the R.A.F. home to my Grandparents and my Grandfather always insisted that it was carefully put into a bank account for my Father but my Grandfather never allowed my Grandmother to send my Father anything more than just a letter especially when he was sent abroad. Instead of presents my Grandfather would ask my Grandmother to decide what she would like to give my Father for his Christmas or Birthday present and then he would put the exact amount of money that would pay for the present into my Father's bank account and tell my Grandmother to write and tell my Father that the money for whatever they would have bought him was safely waiting for him in the bank for when he came home. My Grandfather would certainly never let my Grandmother send anything so unmanly as any knitted articles to my Father. He tried to say that Red Cross parcels never got through to the men they were intended for, until Betty became hotly indignant because she was working for the Red Cross and she knew that they made every endeavour to see that the mail did get through. In the end my Grandfather just said that he was not going to send any presents abroad with a war on because the Post Office had enough to do trying to deliver urgent mail and he said that by doing things his way it meant that if my Father came home alive at the end of the war then he had got a good bank balance to come home to and if he did not then the money still belonged to my Grandparents as his next of kin so that nothing had been wasted. In the R.A.F. my Father was one of the few people who never received a parcel from home and for years after the war my Father used to send off for small useless items which he read about in newspaper advertisements but which cost him a small fortune, so that he continually received 'presents' for himself in the post.

While my Father was in Egypt he became very ill indeed with Malaria and only recovered after spending months in an Egyptian Hospital. When the war ended my Father stayed on in the R.A.F. for a further two years service, during which time my Grandparents did not have any idea where he was, my Father did not have any leave or write any letters home and my Grandparents did not receive my Father's pay from him. When he left the R.A.F. my Father told my Grandparents that he had left because he was undecided about signing a contract that would commit him to a further seven years service in the R.A.F.

When my Father returned home after his service in the R.A.F. he was so different that my Grandparents hardly knew him and if it had not been that he knew so much about them then they would not have believed that he was their son. He spent his way through all the money that they had saved up for him in no time at all and he had nothing to show for what he had done with the money. My Father just used my Grandparent's home as a board and lodging place and he wanted to come and go as he pleased at any hour of the day or night. He was also very secretive about the places that he went off to in London and he became most aggressive when my Grandparents tried to insist that my Father should have enough good manners to at least mention to my Grandmother when he was likely to come home, if only for the sake of saving her staying up with hot meals ready for him which he always expected to have when he arrived home no matter how late he came in. More than anything, the only 'use' my Father had for my Grandmother was to take as much money from her as he could and the only way my Grandparents could describe the way my Father acted in his affection towards my Grandmother was to say that it seemed to them, who knew my Father well, that it was as if he was actually 'acting' the part and had no idea himself that he was not getting it quite right.

One afternoon while my Grandfather was out at work my Grandmother was alone in the dining room when my Father came in and asked her where my Grandfather kept his cash box. It was something my Father should have known about and it was the first time he seemed to slip up about anything that he should have known. My Grandfather's cash box was a family joke because he kept his socks locked up in it to stop my Grandmother throwing away the holey old things that he swore had plenty of wear left in them. My Grandfather was so careful with money that every penny was safely deposited in the Bank and he would never have left money anywhere in the house. As far as my Grandmother was concerned my Father had given himself away and she was certain of something she had thought ever since he had come back from the R.A.F., and that was that he was not her son. My Grandmother knew she was alone with him and she felt afraid of him so she told him that she did not know where my Grandfather's cash box was and she got her purse and gave him what money she had as if it was the normal thing to do. She suddenly noticed with an awful feeling of dread that the weather had become dark and stormy outside making the light in the dining room seem dim and it was as if a cold evil feeling had settled over the house and that the man standing beside her waiting for the money could more easily have been the devil himself than her own son. She said that at that moment she knew that her son Peter, whether just in his character or bodily during the war, was dead. When my Grandfather came home my Grandmother told him exactly what had happened and that she had given my Father money because she was afraid of him. My Grandmother told my Grandfather that she was certain my Father was not her real son and my Grandfather did not disagree with her. He told her that she had done the most sensible thing to give my Father the money and to wait for my Grandfather to come home from work so that they could think about what they could do about the matter together.

My Grandfather knew that he had got to do something about my Father's waywardness which was becoming a serious problem as well as putting a stop to their money disappearing so quickly. So he decided to go straight to the R.A.F. and ask them where

my Father had been for the previous two years and how it was that a decently brought up boy could spend four years with them and return home a monster that my Grandparents could not recognize as their own son. My Grandfather was concerned about what my Father had actually been doing while he stayed on in the R.A.F. because when my Father had come home on leave during the war he had been his normal self. My Grandfather wanted to know what had happened to my Father in Egypt and after that, because that was when my Grandparents considered that they had 'lost' their son. At one time my Father had tried to tell my Grandparents that he had stayed on in the R.A.F. because he was suffering from Malaria but my Grandfather said that Malaria did not last for two years and that if my Father had been that ill he would have been sent home, which was the usual thing, not kept on in the R.A.F. for a further two years. My Grandfather asked the R.A.F. if Malaria could affect someone so badly that it could change the persons whole character, and he was even prepared to let them take into account some of the things that had happened to my Father as a boy in his own home, if only they could tell my Grandfather how to handle his own son and how to sort out the situation in the best possible way for the whole family's sake. The R.A.F. Personnel Officers listened to my Grandfather and said that they would make what enquiries they could but they were not able to answer my Grandfather's questions at that moment. Finally after some weeks my Grandfather was asked to meet two ununiformed men from the Military Police at a very expensive hotel in London. It was so expensive that my Grandfather hired the right kind of dinner jacket to wear to the hotel and even though he was wearing the correct clothes my Grandfather still felt uncomfortably out of place in the dining room. The two men from the Military Police assured my Grandfather that my Father was my Grandparent's son and not an imposter but they told my Grandfather very officially that my Father had spent the two years that he had stayed on in the R.A.F. in a Military Mental Hospital for kicking a small boy to death in Cairo, Egypt in front of the boy's Father. They told my Grandfather that the boy had shouted "Kropple" at my Father as he passed them in his R.A.F. uniform, which was some foreign word (possibly begging sweets ??? or money ??? from him), but since my Father walked with a slightly unsteady gait due to his previous accident with my Grandmother's sewing machine, my Father thought the boy had shouted "Cripple" at him and in a mad frenzied rage my Father had kicked the boy to the ground where he had killed him in a matter of moments by stamping on the boys skull and crushing it with his heavy boots and my Father did it right in front of the boy's Father who was powerless to stop him.

My Grandfather was told that if my Father had done that in England, then he would have been hung for it without question but since my Father had done it abroad during war time he had got away lightly with two years treatment in a Military Mental Hospital, which was where my Father had been when my Grandparents did not know his whereabouts and it was also the reason why my Father had not been able to send any money to my Grandparents. Nothing that the two men said about my Father surprised my Grandfather since he had always brought my Father up to believe that such foreigners were vermin anyway but he thought that after so many years of trying to make a man out of my Father when it had happened my Father had gone out of his mind and gone about it in the wrong way. My Grandfather said that my Father should have exercised more self control for his own sake instead of being put away for two years and also out of a sense of duty to the

R.A.F. and his country because he had been sent out there to protect the civilians, not murder them.

My Grandfather listened to the two men and understood when they said that there was nothing they could do about my Father now that he had left the R.A.F. My Grandfather left the two men without staying to have the meal with them quite satisfied that he had found out the truth about what had happened to my Father. He went home and had a man-to-man chat with my Father who knew about the Hotel meeting and my Father and Grandfather reached an understanding about my Father's behaviour. After that my Father was more civil about the hours he kept and about the meals he expected to be kept ready for him even when he came home at very late hours but my Father still remained secretive about the places he went to in London and he still spent all his money without having anything to show for it. One day my Grandfather followed my Father by train to London to try to see where he went to and he was most dismayed to see my Father disappear into a dirty club for homosexual men.

After leaving the R.A.F. my Father went to work as a shop assistant in 'Colletts' the left-wing bookshop in the Strand where he became an active member of the British Communist Party, and it was while changing trains at London Bridge Station on his way to work that my Father met my Mother. On the day that my Parents met each other, my Mother and her younger sister Marion were waiting for the London Bridge train to Catford when Marion noticed one of her friends called Betty Maple with her brother Peter and she asked my Mother if she could introduce her to them. When Marion took my Mother across to meet them my Mother was astonished to realize that the person she had recognized as the man she would marry from a crowd of complete strangers on the station some days before that was Betty's brother Peter. As much as my Mother did not want to she found herself getting friendly with my Father and going out with him, mostly because she did not want to seem unfriendly by turning down his invitations. They went youth hostelling and hiking with groups of other young people on summer weekends and then to evening classes and the pictures on winter evenings. Eventually my Parents became engaged and were married on the 10th of October 1953 which was the Coronation Year of Queen Elizabeth II. My Parents decided to go to watch the Coronation procession and to be sure of a place at the front of the crowd lining the streets they and some friends camped out all night under the statue of Eros in Picadilly Circus but as the newly crowned Queen drove past in the royal carriage the crowd swarmed forward and my Parents found themselves six deep behind a roaring mass of people with hardly a glimpse of her over their heads and they were dismayed at people's rudeness and unfairness.

My Mother's family were pleased that my Parents were getting married in Coronation year because after so many celebrations it was nice to have something to celebrate quietly in their own home and also because their family bore strong resemblances to the Royal Family it somehow seemed fitting. My Grandmother was less than a year younger than the Queen Mother and looked like her and my Mother was less than a month older than the Queen and also looked like her. Marion strongly resembled Princess Margaret and when they found out that my Father, who looked very much like Prince Phillip, was

born on the Queen Mother's birthday and was willing to marry my Mother in Coronation year they thought it was a perfect match. The whole affair of the family resembling the Royal family was treated as a light hearted joke that they were never the less very proud of but one day when my Grandmother remarked jovially to my Father that if he looked like Prince Phillip and my Mother looked like the Queen then my Father must always remember to walk two paces behind her for the whole of their married life, my Father was livid. He answered my Grandmother crossly that he knew how to treat a woman but because my Mother's parents knew nothing except thoughtful, gentle courtesy between a husband and wife, they had no idea that my Father was referring to the beatings his Father had given his Mother.

My Father was also not very pleased that my Mother's family were so loyal to the Queen but when he realized that they did actually look so like the royal family and that my Mother had been born with a rare abnormality identical to one of Queen Alexandra's children, my Mother said he behaved as if they could all be positively dangerous to him for some reason. My Father was determined to marry my Mother even though she called it off several times, including for a few hours during the evening before their wedding, but my Mother said that when he found out about their family history and connections with royalty he behaved exactly as if he had discovered that he had a bigger problem on his hands than he had previously thought he had. Although my Father showed only a moderate interest in my Grandparent's Spiritualist activities it did seem as if he had heard rumours about the family being 'Psychic'. He already knew about their family medical history of congenital abnormalities and the history of twins in their family and that was what he was interested in. My Mother said it was as if he had been 'sent' to marry her by military intelligence and that he was just cold bloodedly carrying out his orders but she still stupidly went ahead with the wedding because her pride would not let her count her losses and suffer the humiliation of cancelling her wedding or offend the people who had gone to the expense of buying them wedding presents.

The main reason for my Parents marrying each other was that they were both nearing their thirties and they wanted to get away from their parent's homes and from their families who tried to refrain their bad habits and go and live in a place of their own where each of them could do as they pleased which they could not have afforded on their own. Neither of them did more than tolerate their own families and although my Mother's family knew nothing about my Father's past and approved of him because he was so charming towards them, my Father's family made it quite clear that they disapproved of my Mother. My Father had left a very nice girl called Margaret who he had been practically engaged to so that he could go out with my Mother which his Parents thought was a shame for Margaret. They also disliked my Mother because her family had quite dark skin and my Father's family were colour prejudiced and called them 'Indians' very nastily.

My Mother found my Father's family slow and boring and when they asked her to spend the evening with them she always took something to do with her such as her knitting because she did not want to waste her evening sitting with them doing nothing but listening to them talking a lot of rubbish when she had a lot of things she wanted to do

and only her evenings to do them in. She hated the way they only had the lamp on in their sittingroom while they sat by the fire in the evenings, they said it was restful to read and listen to the radio by but she said she could not see properly to do anything and that knitting in the dim light started to ruin her eye sight. My Mother's creative attitude annoyed my Father's family and my Father's two sisters were always trying to get her to improve her looks even though she knitted and sewed all her own clothes and was better dressed for less money than they were. My Mother said that Betty ruined her hair with a home perm that she insisted on giving her although Betty argued back that it came out a mess because my Mother would not sit still or let her touch her hair properly to perm it and that my Mother had insisted that Betty should take the curlers out and finish it long before the hair was ready.

When it came to my Parent's engagement party, my Father's family took over all the arrangements and held it in their home at Blythe Vale which upset and insulted my Mother's family. My Father's Mother also insisted on making the wedding cake by saying that she was quite expert at cake making and although they did let her do it my Mother's parents had to politely tell my Father's Family that there was a strict wedding etiquette as to who provided what and that the cake should have been their responsibility. The cake turned out to be too dry and my Mother's Mother was insulted that it was put on the table because a cake that she or my Great Grandmother had made would have been absolutely perfect as they were really excellent cooks. My Mother could see that there were going to be arguments about the wedding and as she did not want her parents put to any unnecessary expense she insisted on making all the arrangements for the wedding herself and on having the reception in her own home.

There was only one point about which she could not have her own way and that was that my Father's Parents were most insistent that their son should not be married in the Catholic Church. They did not go to church themselves except for Christening's, Weddings and Funerals but they insisted that their son should be married in the Church of England and so my Mother had to give up her Catholic religion to marry my Father. My Mother wanted to get married in a beautiful white wedding and she did not really care who married her or where she got married. She kept telling Olive that she was going to go forward dressed as 'The Bride of Christ' as in the family prophecy and Olive was horrified. She told my Mother that the only way she could 'Go forward dressed as the Bride of Christ' was to become a Nun. She tried to tell my Mother that if she married my Father she would go forward dressed as 'Peter's Bride' but my Mother would not listen and when my Mother refused to discuss it with a Catholic Priest, Olive said that it seemed to her that my Mother was either 'possessed by some devil' or that she had gone too far with her idea of a white wedding to be able to turn back, even though she really knew that she should. Olive urged my Mother not to give up her Catholic religion and although she made my Mother's wedding dress because my Mother had set her heart on it, Olive refused to attend the actual wedding service. My Mother paid for the whole wedding herself and made the four Bridesmaid's dresses. My Father bought my Mother's flowers which she even lent him the money for and never got repayed and his Father bought pearl necklaces for the Bride and Bridesmaids as my Father's gift to them, although my Grandfather bought only one string of pearls each for my Mother, her sister

Phyllis and Arthur



Betty, Pamela, Pauline and Marion





Marion and her young cousin Pamela Parker and gave his own two daughters Betty and Pauline two strings each of larger pearls that were more expensive. My Mother even got up early before everyone else on her wedding day and determinedly prepared all the salad for her own reception and laid all the tables correctly with herself and her husband at the head of the table, which my Grandparents said nothing about because it was my Mother's special day but they would have loved to have set the tables themselves for the only one of their children who would ever have a white wedding.

When all the family had gone off to St. George's Church which was at the other side of Catford very close to Blythe Vale where my Father's family lived, my Mother and my Grandfather finally left in the last of the hired cars. When they got to the Church my Mother had expected to 'float slowly up the aisle on her Father's arm to the beautiful Church music with beautiful flickering candles and flowers decorating the Church' but she found no candles alight for her because it was not the custom in the Church of England. The previous wedding had taken longer than expected and the Woman Verger ruined the wedding for my Mother by walking up the aisle behind my Mother and Grandfather saying loudly "Hurry up, hurry up, we've got another wedding to do after this one!". She made my Mother and Grandfather walk quickly which ruined the precise, slow and correct Military March that my Grandfather had made my Mother practise with him for hours on end so that they would look elegant and graceful as they walked down the aisle. Then the Woman Verger waved to the organist to cut the music abruptly short as soon as my Mother and Grandfather got near the altar in a way that disgusted all the guests because they had never seen anything like it and it ruined the wedding service for my Mother. While my Parents signed the register, the Woman Verger said nastily to my Grandfather that she did not think "Indians like you" got married in a Church, which really upset him as he thought his dark appearance had been the reason why the Woman Verger had ruined the Wedding Service.

On the way back to my Grandparent's house from the Church it had been decided that the cars would stop as they passed my Great Grandmother's house so that she could see my Mother on her wedding day. My Great Grandmother had not felt up to going to the wedding or reception, partly because of all the family arguments over the wedding but also because she was elderly and her sight was not good at all but in order to see my Parents on their wedding day she had agreed to be waiting at her gate as they passed by to wish them good luck before they went on to their reception. As she had promised, my Great Grandmother was waiting at the gate to see my Mother and Father and before anyone could stop her my Great Grandmother had crossed the busy main road to where the cars had stopped on the other side of the road and she eagerly wished my Parents good luck through the car window. My Parents tried to persuade my Great Grandmother to get into the car with them and come to the reception but my Great Grandmother wanted to go indoors on her own and make herself a nice cup of tea and wait for someone to run back to her house later on with a piece of the wedding cake when it was cut. My Parents said they understood how she felt but then as my Great Grandmother went to cross the road to go back to her own home she was so excited to see my Mother on her wedding day that she forgot to wait for the traffic to clear and she did not see a huge lorry coming too fast to stop for her. Luckily one of the Chauffeurs was just going



Olive

Caroline Parker nee Renfrew



Thomas Parker

to get out of the car to escort my Great Grandmother across the road to her home and as he turned to open the car door to get out of the car he was able to put his hand through the open car window and catch hold of my Great Grandmother's arm and pull her towards the car as the lorry thundered past only inches in front of her. If the Chauffeur had not been so quick thinking then my Great Grandmother would have been killed instantly and my Mother felt so sickened at the narrow escape from death that she had just seen that when my Parents got to their reception my Mother hardly touched any of the food and she sat very quietly indeed. She felt that the wedding she had waited so long for was over and not what she had really wanted. The wedding Service had been ruined, she had signed away her Roman Catholic faith, she had nearly seen her beloved Grandmother killed and she had a most awful feeling of foreboding about her future.

For my Parent's honeymoon my Father had promised my Mother a surprise. He had made my Mother agree that they would go to the nearest station, catch the first train to the end of its destination and do the same again and again until they had travelled as far as they could go and then they would spend their honeymoon wherever they arrived. My Father made my Mother agree that they would head down towards the South Coast because that would give them the chance of catching a ship. He said that if they left their destination to fate then it would be a mystery tour and they could either end up in a quiet country cottage or on a beach in Gibraltar. My Father made my Mother agree that they would let fate determine their destination and my Mother excitedly agreed. In the weeks before the wedding my Mother kept talking about the surprise that she was going to have and she felt sure that my Father was planning a wonderful surprise honeymoon for her in Gibraltar since that was where the Queen had spent her honeymoon with Prince Phillip and especially when my Father kept talking about it and asking my Mother if she had got her swimsuit and her passport ready.

My Mother's sisters, Olive and Marion told my Mother that 'Catching a train to the end of its destination' sounded like the instructions troops had been given during the war when they had not been allowed to know where they were being sent to and that there was something odd about it all. My Father's sisters Betty and Pauline kept telling my Mother that my Father had no intention of taking her abroad because he had no money but she refused to believe them and said that they were being spiteful and trying to spoil her happiness because she knew that my Father had a steady job and she thought he was just saving all his money for the honeymoon which was why she had paid for the whole wedding herself. When the time came for my Parents to leave for their honeymoon my Mother and Father went to my Father's house to collect his suitcase and then they went to the nearest station to where he lived where they caught the first train due in that would take them to the South Coast at the end of its destination and then another and another until they spent their honeymoon in Bournemouth, which was the only possible destination from the nearest station to my Father's house at that time of day, and he had probably even timed the trains.

My Parents stayed in a sea front bed and breakfast house where they were the only winter guests of a very active but elderly widowed lady who had once run a thriving business with her late husband. The house was immaculately tidy but it was thick with

dust and my Mother found the deserted rooms rather creepy. The old lady was glad of my Parents company and she showed them her dog called 'Susie' who she had taught to do tricks during the long winter months when they only had each other for company. The old lady idolized the dog and one of the games they played was hide and seek with a slipper. The old lady would tell Susie to 'Sit and stay' while she went upstairs and hid one of her dead husband's slippers in one of the empty guest rooms, then she would come downstairs and tell Susie to 'Go and find it' and the dog would race off upstairs and fetch it back no matter where the old lady had hidden it and the two of them would play that for hours and hours during the long winter days to keep themselves busy.

Although the house was very nice and the old lady did more than she could ever have been expected to in seeing that my Parents had everything they wanted, my Mother was heartbroken because she had paid for their whole wedding herself and she had been looking forward to my Father repaying her with a gorgeous honeymoon abroad. My Mother asked my Father what had happened to their trip abroad and in answer to that my Father took my Mother across to the Isle of Wight on the second day of their honeymoon, which he had obviously planned to do, and he made her look silly at the boat trip booking office by joking with the Clerk that my Mother thought she needed her passport, which she had also paid for unnecessarily with money she would not otherwise have spent, to go to the Isle of Wight. My Mother hated the boat trip to the Isle of Wight because the sea was very rough and windy and my Mother felt sea sick. She had not realized that it would make her feel sea sick and my Father kept telling her how silly she was to think that she could go abroad if she was sea sick getting to the Isle of Wight. When they got across to the island my Father insisted that they should visit Carisbrooke Castle and because it reminded my Mother of Conisbrough Castle in Yorkshire where she had stayed during the war, it really upset my Mother. It was the place where my Mother had looked after twin boys while she was there to help their Mother. Conisborough Castle had the oldest round keep in England and my Mother had often gone to the keep and battlements for a walk with the other girls who were stationed there. My Mother had hated Conisborough Castle and so Carisbrooke Castle brought back some horrible memories to my Mother which really upset her.

At the Castle there was a Donkey who turned the wheel of a well bucket by walking round and round the well and my Mother felt sorry for it. My Parents made enquiries at the castle about the Donkey and despite not having anywhere to put him they thought they could make an offer to buy him in order to give him a better life but the man they spoke to told them that the Donkey was very well looked after and he told my Parents all about him. He said that the Donkey only worked for a certain number of hours each day and then he was taken back to his own little stable that was clean and warm and he was very well fed. The Donkey had a field that he was taken to graze in and he was well loved and made a great fuss of by all the staff and visitors. He said the Donkeys loved all the attention they got and he asked my Mother if she would like to give him some carrots that he had got for him.

The man seemed more concerned that my Parents were alright because it was cold weather and my Mother did not look too well. He asked them if they were enjoying their

holiday and when he found out that it was my Parent's honeymoon he told them that they must make a wish at the well. He said that the wheel that the Donkey was on was a wishing well and that visitors threw coins into the well to make a wish. The man told my Mother to throw a small coin into the well and make a wish and because it was her honeymoon he told her to wish for a baby. My Mother knew that she was not supposed to have children but she saw that the man was trying his best to be friendly and try to cheer my Parents up, so she took a coin out of her purse and went to the well to make a wish. My Mother said that she did not have the heart to wish for a baby boy and as she thought about her wish, being in a castle with the weather so cold reminded her of the Queen in 'Snow White' who sat sewing in the window of her castle and when she pricked her finger three drops of blood fell onto the pure white snow and so the Queen had wished for 'a baby girl with hair black as ebony, cheeks pale as snow and lips mauve as blood.' My Mother was feeling a bit romantic in her head because it was her honeymoon and so she threw in her coin and made the same wish as the Queen in Snow White for 'a baby girl with hair black as ebony, cheeks pale as snow and lips mauve as blood' and she let that be her wish.

After that my Parents went and bought two brass ashtrays with pictures of homely cottages in Old Street, Shanklin on them as souvenirs for their new home as they were both heavy smokers and then they went back to Bournemouth. My Mother was sea sick again on the return journey and they arrived back at the guest house very much the worse for their journey. My Mother was very upset and homesick, she felt that her wedding service, reception and now her honeymoon had all been ruined for her and she had the most awful feeling that it was an omen of what her married life would be like.

My Mother was most concerned that my Father had cheated her and even though he had quite a lot of money in his pocket he would not give her back any of the money he had borrowed from her. My Father kept saying that my Mother had just married him in Church and vowed all her worldly goods to him and so the money was his now anyway. My Father kept speaking to my Mother in irritating monotones as if he was implying that she was simple minded and saying that he could not understand why she was asking for anything as she was married now and as he had paid seven shillings and six pence for a licence for her he could do what he liked with her now. He would not give her the railway ticket to go home on her own and she was really miserable. My Father kept telling my Mother that she had agreed to let fate decide where they spent their honeymoon and so it was down to fate that they were in Bournemouth because they had caught the first train to the end of its destination as they had agreed to and this was where fate had brought them to. My Father went over and over what he was saying as if he was explaining it very simply to my Mother because she was stupid and did not understand him and as he went over and over it in his soft smooth voice she began to believe it was all her own fault. Then on the fourth day of their honeymoon my Mother kicked up such a fuss and threatened to go to the Police and ask them to help her get home that my Father gave in and they caught the train back home.

When my Parents arrived at my Grandparent's home in St. Fillan's Road my Mother shocked her family by walking into the house from the side entrance to the house

through the garden gate that the tradesmen used when my Mother and Father should have used the front door. No one had expected my Parents to come back so soon because it was only the fourth day of their honeymoon and they had been expected to be away for at least a week. It was obvious that my Parents had been rowing because they were not speaking to each other and my Father kept saying nervously to everyone that he did not know what was the matter with my Mother. My Mother went straight upstairs to her old room and was shocked to find that all the things she had left behind were out on the landing packed in boxes ready for her to take to her new home and that Marion had taken over the whole of the room that they had previously shared and had changed everything around to make herself comfortable in there. My Mother had known that Marion would have the room to herself but she had expected all her belongings to have been left exactly where they were, not packed up and moved out straight away, or the furniture moved around. After all, my Grandmother had never so much as allowed anyone to touch any of Alfred's things since the day he had died, let alone move them, and my Mother had expected my Grandmother to be just as possessive about her things.

While my Mother was upstairs my Father confided in my Grandparents that my Mother was not 'worldly wise' and that she just had 'nerves'. He asked my Grandparents to help him because my Mother just needed 'time' and he asked them to be firm with her if she had any 'girlish ideas' about staying with them and to make her go with him to their new home. When my Mother came downstairs she told my Grandparents that she wanted to stay with her family just as my Father had anticipated. My Grandparents had been highly embarrassed at what my Father had told them because they had not expected that from my Mother but they did as my Father had asked them to do and were firm with her. They told my Mother that she was a married woman now with a home of her own that she must go to and after giving my Parents a cup of tea and a slice of left over wedding cake my Grandparents sent my Parents off to the rooms that a friend of my Mother's family, called Ralph Coombe, had found for them at 26 Wallbutton Road in Brockley, S.E.4.

My Mother knew that she had lost her place in her Parent's home and she did not want to stay with them anymore than she wanted to go with my Father but she had spent her savings buying things for their new home so she decided to go with my Father and make herself at home in the new place. She thought that my Father would soon clear off and leave her and that when he went she could have the place to herself and buy herself a dog for company but once they moved into the new place they found that they enjoyed their freedom from their Parents and began to get on with each other.

My Parents had three small dark rooms that they rented from a man called Mr. Middleton and his family who lived upstairs. It was unusual for a couple to get ground floor accommodation as tenants usually lived upstairs in any spare rooms but the rooms downstairs were damp and so the landlord and his family had taken all the rooms upstairs for themselves, rented three of the rooms at the back of the ground floor to my Parents and kept chickens in the other two rooms downstairs at the front of the house. My Parents had painted and wallpapered their rooms quite expertly and had found themselves some sparse furniture but they had no idea of comfort and were too prepared to make do with what they had got even if that meant damp walls, an outside toilet, no

hot water and bare floor boards which was not what they had lived like in their parent's homes. My Father liked to do carpentry and my Mother liked sewing so they could have been good at homemaking together but they had no intention of striving for anything better and were quite happy with their home as it was. One Sunday morning while my Parents were shopping in Petticoat Lane Market they saw a Corgi puppy for sale on a market stall. He was the last puppy for sale in what had been a whole litter of puppies in a dirty cardboard box and he was a very poor, dirty and neglected animal. My Father bought him for my Mother because they felt sorry for him and because the Queen always had corgi dogs. They called the dog Buster and he soon became fiercely protective towards my Mother which she liked.

Soon after my Parents got married and moved into their new home they decided to try to adopt a baby. My Mother had been told very firmly never to have children of her own and my Father was quite happy to abide by that decision, so they applied to adopt a baby and the Welfare Department at Catford began the adoption procedure for them. Months went past and at various interviews my Parents were encouraged to think positively that they would be having a child to the point that one of the women Welfare Workers took my Mother into her confidence and told her quite enthusiastically that they had an unmarried Mother with a baby boy who had never shown any interest in the baby and that since the Welfare Department had every intention of taking the baby away from her they thought the child would suit my Parents admirably.

Even with such good news my Parents had not expected such a long wait or to be asked so many questions as they felt that they had a right to a child without all that prying. Finally during one of the interviews my Father had an outburst of temper in which he accused the Welfare Authorities of 'haggling about' over nothing and that while they were doing that a child was living in a Children's Home without any family life when he could be living with him and my Mother. The Welfare Worker became mildly suspicious and she asked my Parents if they had ever seen inside a Children's Home. She said very tactfully that my Father was talking about 'rescuing' a child from a Children's Home as if Children's Homes were concentration camps when actually they were bright happy places with lots of love, toys and games. The Welfare Worker said that many of the children were very happy there particularly if it was the first place in their lives that they had been shown any kindness. She said that family life held terrifying memories for some of the children who would need a lot of understanding in a new family and she said that some of those children might want to go back to the home from time to time to see Matron and their friends. The Welfare Worker told my Parents that it would not do any harm for them to go along to see the children at Ladywell Children's Home near Catford and see for themselves how happy the children were so that they could ask themselves if they could provide as much care and happiness for one of the children away from the Home as they got inside it.

Until then everything had been going very well indeed for my Parents and although they had found it necessary to tell a lot of white lies to cover up the truth they had got on very well in the discussions with the Social Workers because my Parents both had a way of talking earnestly and very persuasively in a way that led people to believe them. My

Father could also be very charming towards women so that he could get round them for whatever he wanted to know or have and for a time the women in the Welfare Department were no exception to being taken in by my Father's smooth talking ways. Then only a matter of days after my Father's outburst, my Parents suddenly found two of the Welfare Workers on their doorstep who had come to see my Parents personally to explain that they had been rejected as prospective adoptive Parents. Due to some gross clerical error my Parents had never had a home visit from the Welfare Department and the two Welfare Workers had no idea how my Parents case had ever progressed so far without it. When they arrived to speak to my Parents they had a good look around their home and used their bad housing conditions as an excuse to reject them although they made it quite clear that it was actually for far more serious reasons.

My Parents had lied to the Welfare Department and wasted a lot of their time apart from the fact that they might nearly have been given a child by mistake and so the two Welfare Workers who called felt justified in giving my Parents a good telling off. One of the Welfare Workers told my Parents to take a good look around their home and she asked them where the hot water was for them to bath the baby that they were both supposed to want so desperately because they had not got a bathroom for themselves and a stand up wash in the washing up bowl at the kitchen sink was neither very nice or enough. The Welfare Worker also asked my Parents where the baby's room was because she could see that there was not one and she said that a cot in my Parent's room would just not do because a baby was going to grow into a child and she asked my Parents if they had even considered that a baby would not stay as a baby forever. Finally the two Welfare Workers told my Parents that they should think about getting somewhere decent for themselves to live before they thought of bringing a child out of a warm, cosy Children's Home and into a cold, damp slum and when the two Welfare Workers heard and smelt the Chickens running loose in the two rooms at the front of the house they went away horrified.

Although my Parents accepted that they had been rejected for adoption they did not give up easily. They applied to foster a child and when they were rejected for that as well they applied to be Aunty and Uncle to a child in Ladywell Children's Home and to have the child to stay at their home for weekends but the same Department dealt with all their applications and they were rejected each time. Finally, months after they had first applied to adopt a child they came away from the Welfare Department with the final decision that they could be allowed to visit Ladywell Children's Home on Sunday afternoons from 2-4pm but they were told not to turn up every Sunday. My Parents were told that they could play with the children in the nursery playroom as long as my Parents were under strict supervision the whole time and on the understanding that neither of my Parents were allowed to be left alone with the children at any time at all or make any attempt to take the children out of the home and that included even taking them into the garden.

My Parents felt insulted at the Welfare Department's decision and they went home full of bitter hatred towards them. My Father said that it was not as if they had ever intended to keep the child if they got one because although my Mother wanted a baby to keep, my

Father was looking for an older boy who he did not intend to keep. My Father said that he just wanted to get the child for long enough until he could make the boy realize that he could do nothing right to please my Father and then he would have taken 'the snivelling wretch' back to the Welfare Department and told them that whoever had the child before my Parents had ruined him and that my Parents could not teach the boy to be clean or anything. My Father told my Mother that she was not to let the Welfare People get away with treating her like that and he persuaded my Mother that they must go ahead and have a baby of their own and if it was hideously deformed like they had been warned that it could be, then so much the better because it would teach the Welfare Department that they should have given them a proper baby of their own in the first place. My Mother was not keen on the idea of having a baby but my Father persuaded her to have one of her own and get her revenge on the Welfare Department and out of that bitter and sadistic decision, I was born.

Three weeks before I was due to be born my Mother had misgivings about the whole thing and she walked down Jerningham Road to see her lady doctor, Dr. Mitchell, in her surgery at New Cross. My Mother told Dr. Mitchell that she was afraid that there might be something hideously wrong with the baby she was having and Dr. Mitchell talked my Mother out of her fears, although whether she told her what she did because the birth was imminent and she did not want my Mother to be frightened or whether my Mother had not told the Doctor all the facts, nobody knew. Dr. Mitchell told my Mother that her fears were groundless and that my Grandmother who had been horrified to find out that my Mother was pregnant because my Parents had only been allowed to marry on the solemn promise that there would not be any children was simply frightening my Mother with old wives tales. My Mother listened to Dr. Mitchell and believed her but far from taking the Doctor's advice as words of comfort to ease her mind in the face of the inevitable and forthcoming birth, my Mother later took what Dr. Mitchell had said as a licence to have as many more children as she wanted to with no thought for the more serious consequences.

On the 7th of February 1955 my Father was away from work with a slightly sprained ankle and at about 6pm my Father's G.P., Dr. Galvan, called at my Parent's home to look at my Father's foot. My Mother was out at the time taking her dog, Buster, for his evening walk. It was a mild February day and my Mother had even gone out without a coat on but she had only got as far as the bottom of the road when she had to return home to spend a penny because she thought she was having an accident. When my Mother got home Dr. Galvan was looking at my Father's foot and he took one look at my Mother and told her that she was not having an accident, her waters had broken and she was having her baby. Dr. Galvan said that my Mother was in labour and that she must call out her Midwife and so when Dr. Galvan had gone my Father strapped up his ankle and got on his bicycle and cycled down to Deptford to an Anglican Order of Nuns called the Nursing Sisters of St. John the Divine who were Midwives and two of the Nuns collected their delivery bags and got on their bicycles and cycled back with my Father to my Parent's home. The Nuns put my Mother to bed and at about a quarter past three in the afternoon of Tuesday 8th February 1955, I was born.

It was the night of the full moon. There were two local parks and many gardens that had trees where owls were heard hooting at night but that night all nature gathered in the trees around our house. Blackbirds, robins and nightingales sang as if spring had arrived and all night long many owls hooted excitedly "mothers here, mothers here" as a female responded "nearly here, nearly here" as if to tell them it was going to be hours yet. As I made my first cry my Mother swore the ragged family of rats who lived in our yard cheered.

In the time before I was born my Mother had looked out of the bedroom window to the dirty backyard of the house and had looked at the awful mess it was in. The landlord had let my Parents rent an extra room on the ground floor of the house because some of his Chickens had died and he only needed one room to keep the rest in. My Parents had cleaned the room out, decorated it and turned it into the bedroom that my Mother was in and they had made their previous bedroom into a tiny sitting room but the Landlord would still not let my Parents use the garden of the house. Outside my Mother's bedroom window were piles of dirty wood, junk and rubbish where rats nested and the Landlord had not even allowed my Parents into the garden to clean it up a bit. The Garden was a dirty wilderness and in the hours before my birth my Mother had looked out of the window and thought miserably that it was an awful place to be born in. Then at the very second that I was born, at exactly the same moment, it began to snow. It was the middle of a bitterly cold winter and although it had snowed once before very heavily in January it had cleared up and turned quite mild so another fall of snow came quite unexpectedly and took everyone by surprise. As far as my Parents could find out it only fell on the hill that they lived on and nowhere else but then they lived on Telegraph Hill which was one of the hills around London where beacons had been lit to send messages to London like the one that had been lit centuries before to tell London that the Battle of Waterloo had been won and because the hill was high up and cold it was not unusual to find that when it snowed there was still snow on that hill long after it had thawed everywhere else. My Mother said that as I was born the snow began to fall so quickly and thickly that in a matter of seconds everything outside the garden was covered in thick white snow and looked absolutely beautiful. My Mother said that it was like something out of a dream and one of the Midwives went over to the window to look at the snow. She was a Swiss Nurse who had come to England to gain her midwifery qualification and to work with the Nuns to see if she had a vocation with them before being sent to Africa as a Missionary by the Anglican Church in Switzerland. Being Swiss she was used to beautiful snow scenes but she said that in all the snow she had ever seen, and Switzerland was full of it, she had never seen snow quite like that. She said that those huge flakes of snow were falling so quickly and so beautifully as if they had a job to do in spreading a thick and pure white cloak over everything on the Earth that was dirty and not nice as if it was not good enough for the baby to see.

The other Midwife with my Mother was the Reverend Mother of the Order and she told the Swiss Midwife to 'Never mind the snow' but to come and look at the baby. She said that in all the hundreds of babies that she had delivered she had never seen a baby quite like it. Normally when a baby is born it's head is wet and the hair is stuck to it but I was born with my head and hair completely dry. My hair was jet black and every hair was exactly the same length all over my head. On the end of every one of the hundreds of fine jet black hairs was a blob of gingery gold that shone so brightly that it lit the room more brightly than the huge fire burning in the fireplace to keep the room warm. My hair was full of static electricity and stood on end like a crew cut with the effect that the gold on the end of my hair made it look as if I had something on my head. My Mother said that it looked like a crown and the Swiss Midwife said it looked like a halo but the Reverend Mother was adamant that she knew what it was and she told them that it was a 'Corona', like the rays of light that shine in the darkness when the moon totally eclipses

the sun. Apparently it lasted for four days and then the blobs of gold and the static electricity just disappeared. Until then my hair remained full of static electricity and did not flatten even when I was laid down because it just stood on end again when I was picked up and no amount of washing removed the gold until it vanished quite suddenly on the fourth day after I was born.

A few minutes after I was born the Reverend Mother picked me up to get a proper look at my head and held me up so that we were face to face. I had full control of my head and neck which was unknown in a baby and with the dignity of a Queen I lifted my head and looked right down my nose at the Reverend Mother with a look that said "Who are you who dare to hold me?". The Reverend Mother was a middle aged woman who was very sensible and practical, she did not approve of my Mother having a baby and she had hardly spoken to her. She was a complete stranger to our family and knew nothing of our family prophecy but when I lifted my head and looked at her she said that she was struck with such a feeling of fear and excitement for the future that made her almost afraid to hold me in her hands that she turned to my Mother who was lying on the bed after just having given birth to me and told her excitedly to "Take very great care of this child, because one day she will be crowned, either on Earth or in Heaven, and from the look of her I would say that this one will belong to Heaven". Although the Reverend Mother did not realize what she had said, it was the worst possible thing that she could ever have said to my Mother because my Mother was livid about it and hated the way the Reverend Mother fussed over me and the way the Swiss Midwife promised to watch over me for the rest of her life. My Mother became even more determined than ever that she was still one of the prophesied children who would be crowned and because she thought I was a threat to that she said that she wished she had never had me. The Swiss Midwife, Elizabeth Hani, kept in touch with my Parents and persistently visited me until eventually my Parents asked her to be one of my Godmothers when I was christened at St. Catherine's Church of England at Telegraph Hill in Brockley, on the 24th of April 1955. My Parents let her be the Godmother who gave the Vicar my names* and my Mother insisted that I must be called 'Anne' meaning Grace and 'Stephanie' meaning a crown or garland so that if I was the other one of the two little girls, then I would be 'Anne' the one who would suffer and die.

* while my other Godmother Lilian Miles from the Ministry of Defence held me, and my father's neighbour from Blythe Vale Derek Riddiford held my Baptism certificate,