

## MY LIFE by Elsie Pix

I was born on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1912 at 2ct 2 Hodgson Street Sheffield to Ernest and Annie Godley (nee Pattison) and christened Elsie at St Silas Church Broomhall Street. I already had an older brother Ernest who was 3 years old. My brother Clifford was born 2 years later. Our home was in a yard which had 10 houses in it. They were known as back to back houses. We lived in a corner house, which had the advantage of having a living room and a separate kitchen. The kitchen accommodated the sink and setpot. The setpot had a small fire underneath in which water was heated to fill the zinc wash tub. It was used also to boil the whites with addition of washing soda. Many children from large families were put in the setpot for their weekly bath when the washing was finished. Also in the kitchen there was just room for a mangle and a chair. The kitchen had a window and two doors, one, the main entrance leading outside to the yard, and the other into the living area. The centre piece of the living area was the table, and at the side of this against the right hand wall was a sideboard. This had a marble clock in the centre, and a lustre at each side which was considered posh. The sideboard also had two mirrors at the back and two cupboards at the front. A dining chair was placed at each side of the sideboard, ready to be brought forward to the table for meals. All our meals were cooked on a cooking range fired by coal, which was just to the front of the table on the left hand wall. To the left upon entering the room was the window which overlooked the yard. In front of this was the sofa, and to the left in the recess by the chimney breast was mother's rocking chair. The other recess contained a floor to ceiling cupboard. The remaining wall space at the back of the room was taken up by a dresser with cupboards. To the left of the dresser was a door, with steps leading down to the cellar where the coal was kept. On the right, another door took you upstairs. Oh, I nearly forgot, father's armchair was positioned at the side of the table. The floor was cover with oilcloth and there was a hand pegged rug in front of the fire. Although there was not a lot of room it was very cosy. Upstairs on the first floor there was a bedroom with more stairs leading to the attic. There was a bedroom suite in my parents' room, and in the attic a double bed for my brothers, and a single bed in the alcove by the chimney breast for myself. The attic was also furnished by a set of drawers, and by the window a very large trunk in which the bedding was kept. That attic was our playroom when the weather was bad.

Outdoor games were seasonal, shuttlecock for the girls, spinning tops and marbles were the main boys' games, and for all skipping. In the summer we spent a lot of time in the parks which were not far away. Weston Park with the museum was the nearest. Further afield were the Botanical Gardens and Endcliffe Woods. If we could somehow acquire a halfpenny for the tram fare for one way, either there or back home, that was a bonus for visits to Endcliffe. We were used to walking everywhere, so it didn't matter. If we felt like going to the parks we just went. Hide and seek was another popular game and we generally took the mickey out of the seeker.

We all went to St Silas Church School, which was just across the road in Hodgson Street. It was a segregated school, and a very old school even then. I hated school because Mrs Best the headmistress was a tyrant, always ready with the cane. I think I was just eleven when mother took us out of St Silas School. We never knew why although Ernest may have

known. The boys went to St Matthias Boys' School in Summerfield Street, just off Ecclesall Road. I went to Pomona Street Council School which also was just off Ecclesall Road. It was a lovely school, really large, with a field at one side with the River Porter running through. I was really happy there. The school has now changed its name to Porter Croft. Quite a lot of schools have changed their names or been demolished since the 21<sup>st</sup> century came in.

We had a happy childhood, and were well cared for and well fed. It is only as I get much older and wiser I have pondered how my mother managed to cope, having a sick husband and very little money. My mother never spent any money on herself.

When I was around fourteen years old we moved to Walkley, to a lovely stone built 3 bedroom semi detached house, 42 Duncombe Street. It was so good to have a lovely bedroom just for me, plus a garden and a greenhouse for my father who enjoyed gardening. This was a life saver for my father when Cammell Laird Steel Works closed down, and he was made redundant.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1935 I married Tom Hall at St Mary's Church Walkley. We were lucky to be able to rent a house at 54 Freedom Road at Walkley tram terminus. It was the same type of house as Duncombe Street, and the rent was 10s-6d (approx. 52p) per week. We only stayed there for four years before moving to 4 Kinnaird Place, Shiregreen, a two bedroom council house with a bathroom, which was the main attraction. We moved in on Friday the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939, and on Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup> September the start of the Second World War was declared. There was I on that Sunday, by myself, not knowing anyone in an area I did not know, and the sirens went. Tom was working and I was scared, but fortunately it was only a test.

Tom was the senior electrician at Travis and Marr in Division Street, so was exempt from call up for the forces, so he volunteered for the anti-aircraft situated at Shirecliff. I think he did two nights a week. They were kitted out with a full uniform and he became a Lance Corporal. He also had to do fire watching at his work place. At home we were given a galvanised air-raid shelter which we had to erect ourselves in the garden. I hated having to go into the shelter because it was cold and damp, and I was really scared of spiders. We put Trevor in the zinc bath which we had brought with us from Walkley. It came in handy because he was well wrapped up and nice and snug in it. I should have said that when we moved house from Walkley to Shiregreen I was pregnant with Trevor; Wendy followed three years later.

After they both started at Hartley Brook Primary School I got a part time job there supervising reception classes at dinner time. I really enjoyed my time there with the children. It was for around two hours a day, five days a week for 10s 6d (approx. 52 pence), with half pay in school holidays, and I held the job for around 17.5 years. If I could have stayed on for 18 years I would have qualified for a small pension. However, I had to give it up for Tom who was ill with MS, and by then could not be left unattended. He was diagnosed with this some time in his late thirties or early forties.

During the war years life was difficult with blackouts and shortages. We depended upon word passed on of a shop having some commodity in stock which was in short supply. At

which point you got moving and dashed off to join the inevitable queue. Also, I had to visit my parents once a week. They lived on the Wybourn estate, and with two buses to catch and two small children to tow it was rather trying, but when you are young you cope.

Going back to my childhood, my mother, as a result of measles, was left with poor vision as a child, and was registered as a blind person, but she must have had enough vision to take herself out shopping. I remember going with her to the Blind Institute, which was in Holly Street, off West Street, on an afternoon for a cup of tea and a bun. It must have been a social outing, and before I started school. A new building for blind people was built in Mappin Street, again off West Street, after the First World War, which was a boon to them as there were many social occasions to which they were transported. It gave blind people a life and my mother loved going; it was the high light of her week. Going back again to my younger days and my mother, when I look back we were cosseted. The three of us children had good food and we did not go short of much. We were always well dressed and had something on birthdays and at Christmas. We missed out on comics and I do not remember having many sweets, although our neighbour's children Beatrice and Bertram Clark always had comics which we acquired later on.

Mother got herself two cleaning jobs, for a Mrs Statton of Clinton Close and Mrs Exley of Upper Hanover Street, both being in the vicinity of St Silas Church. Both ladies were stalwart churchgoers, hence we became good churchgoers – was it a coincidence? My brothers were members of the choir and I became a Girl Guide. Also when we became of age we were confirmed, which was a very special occasion. I had a lovely silk dress, especially made for me by our neighbour Nellie Boocock and I wore a veil made by one of the church ladies. Many many years later I made my veil into a handkerchief. Mrs Exley also had a pastry shop and mother did an extra job there on Saturday evening when the shop closed. They had a bakehouse where they did all their own baking, and it was mother's job to go and clean out the bakehouse. We always waited anxiously for her coming home, as she was given any pastries left over to bring home. One special treat was a cream horn, a cornet shaped type of flaky pastry, filled with jam and topped with cream. Yum, yum! I remember the two ladies mentioned above were very kind to my mother Grandmother Pattison was a big part of my youth. She did any patching, darning or sewing required, as those were tasks mother could not do because of her poor vision, although she coped with everything else such as cooking, washing and cleaning. Our house was spotless. Grandma took me over when she thought I was old enough and taught me to sew patch and darn, which was a necessity in those days. I cannot say I appreciated all this at the time, but it came in very handy in my married life. I was also initiated into ironing, which I hated. No electric irons, no ironing boards. My worst hate was ironing my brothers' shirts, a real chore. I rebelled and refused to iron the tail ends, and if they didn't like it they could do their own shirts (I won).

Grandma also brought my school days to an early end. My birthday being in February meant I could not officially leave school until Easter, but, as Grandma thought all females should go into domestic service, I left school at Christmas and started at one of Grandma's old places where she had been going to well into her seventies, and was now on friendly visiting terms. I cannot remember the lady's name, she lived in Peveril Road (almost across from Janet and

Keith Pix's house). I went twice a week and my pay was 3s 6d (approx 17p) including my dinner. I know I had to blacklead the fireplace, a job I had never done at home. I was asked if I liked black leading to which I replied no, it dirties your hands too much. Needless to say this information was passed on to Grandma - imagine the outcome! I wasn't allowed to forget this for a long time as it was passed around the family by Grandma, but the job did not last either, as I refused to go. I got myself a job at a laundry at Sharrow for three days a week. I forget the wage, 6 shillings (30p) or so, but the job only lasted two weeks. I heard of a job as an errand girl wanted at James Deakin & Sons in Matilda Street and was set on at 10s 6d (approx 52p) a week, which was considered good. You got a pound a year rise of a guinea (£1.05). As people left to get married you move up and I finished up as warehouse clerk until the firm went into administration when I was 23. I enjoyed working there, it was a good firm to work for. Grandma lived only about 10 minutes walk from our house, and when I got to know she went to the Hippodrome theatre, I would trot along to see her in the hope of being taken with her.. I got lucky twice, price 4d (2p) in the "Gods". I think my love of the theatre stems from that, because when Tom and I were courting every Monday night we went to the Empire theatre in Charles Street, just off The Moor; I loved it. The big bands were all the rage then, Roy Fox, Henry Hall, Billy Cotton, Edmundo Ros and Geraldo. Also top shows tested the provinces before moving back on to London. There were some very good Variety shows as well with star acts who came on after the interval. I did not care much for acrobats, jugglers or ventriloquists, but one had to suffer them to see the stars of the show.

Back again to my parents. Mother never seemed to go out socially, I expect there was no money to spare. Father belonged to a fishing club run from a local pub the Milton Arms. He only went on Sunday nights, I imagine just time to pay his subs. and have a pint. The pubs closed at 10pm and this was his only pleasure. Grandma sometimes went with him and Auntie Ada and Uncle George also came. I remember one Sunday Grandma came and made my mother get changed and go out, and she stayed with us. She said to mother that "Liza Turner has got her eyes on your Ernest, get yourself off." I did not understand at the time, but it has stuck in my memory. Grandma was very fond of my father, she was always there when he was ill. Mother paid into two what were termed Sick and Divide Clubs, and when my father was off work sick she drew a small amount of money each week from the clubs as I presume that if you did not work in those days you did not get any money. There were rules attached, for example the person off sick had to be indoors for 9pm as a sick visitor could knock on your every night to check. The man who came visiting became a friend, and he would stay talking for an hour or so. The sick clubs were run from two local pubs, and I used to go to pay in when I was 12 or so.

I had to go to night school which was held at Springfield School in Cavendish Street.. None of my friends went to night school; I objected but no use. I went to learn dressmaking which wasn't my idea, so I asked if I could do more subjects, shorthand and dancing – cost for the three courses 2s 6d (approx. 12p), which was a lot of money. I had to finish the dress I was making, but chickened out of shorthand as it got a bit difficult, but I regretted this later on in life. I didn't become a seamstress either, although my mother bought a Singer sewing machine from a friend and went to the Rag and Tag market and bought material for me to

make myself two dresses. You could cheaply buy enough material to make a dress for around 3s or 4s (15p to 20p).

Transcribed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2011