

## Brothers and Sisters



*Puppies!*

I had a very happy childhood, and as one of five siblings there was always someone to play with. The only blot on the landscape was that my mother was ill all the time.

After Rene was born, my mother suffered with her health and was in and out of hospital. I don't ever remember her well. I used to go and sit on her bed and talk to her.

We all had to help at home which, hard though it was at the time, stood us in good stead in later

years. We learned to darn clothes and could cook and grow and prepare vegetables.

There were no supermarkets in those days. We had a regular order from Temple's Stores which was delivered, and we collected our own meat from the local butchers. Most vegetables were home grown, and we always had eggs, bacon from our own pigs, and rabbits. We also had the occasional hare which had been shot 'by mistake'.

Ruth, the eldest, was born in December 1920. Ruth was studious. She loved reading and was a talented artist. Because my mother was unwell, Ruth helped nurse her and run the household.



*Ruth and Rod*



Rod, as the eldest boy, had to help on the farm from a young age. He was very daring, and didn't seem to have much of a care for self-preservation. We had a very steep hill and always went round the side of it, as it was too dangerous to drive down. Rod took the tractor to the top of the hill and sat revving, then span down the slope at speed. He was quite crazy like that.



*Rod*

During the war there was a big crater on the farm left by a bomb, which was a long deep trench. Rod got a ladder and went down into it. It was a great big hole. He had no idea what was in the bottom of it. It could have been full of gas. He had no fear.

Because my mother's health was gradually getting worse, my elder sister Ruth stayed at home to look after her, giving up her art classes and her ambition to go to art college.

Around about the same time my brother Rod, who was fourteen, came home to help run the farm. Father had had a stroke or heart attack and couldn't drive for about six weeks. He was out hoeing in the fields with the farm workers when he collapsed. It was lucky he wasn't alone, so they could get the

doctor to him. In later life my brother bitterly resented having to leave education early and miss his schooling. Father gradually recovered and was later able to resume farming.

Marjorie, who was always known as Dot, was the middle child, and as is often the case with middle children, she seemed to be the odd one out. Rene, the youngest, was a proper tomboy. She came bird nesting with me sometimes.

Many things changed in 1939. War was declared in September. Air raids were expected but did not start until the next year.

Because our cowshed had a white asbestos roof we were told to colour it in case it was used as a landmark for bombers looking for the aerodrome, which was only two miles away across the valley. Paint was in short supply, so we used a mixture of potassium permanganate and water.

We sprayed it on with a stirrup pump. These pumps were issued to put out fires and were fairly efficient with a stand on the floor and the suction tube in a bucket of water.

At that time I was given a very bright blazer to wear by Ruth's fiancé Jack, because clothes were in short supply. I decided that dunking it in the brown solution of potassium permanganate was an ideal way to dull down the colour. However it ate through the cloth and the coat came out of the bucket in pieces.

Jack was a photographer during the war. He used to take photos of funerals for the families of overseas airmen who couldn't attend them. Another job was to process reconnaissance photos from bomber planes that were involved in airstrikes. When bombs were dropped a photo was automatically taken from a camera attached to the firing device, and the image would show whether the target had been successfully hit. The only time Jack fired a gun during the war was when he was removing reconnaissance film. The artillery mechanic had said it was safe to remove the film, but had made a



*Rene*



mistake and a barrage of shells went flying through the air. Luckily no-one was hurt! Rene used to like taking photos. As it was difficult to get film during the war, she would cadge some from Jack.



*Ruth's husband Jack (left) with a friend*

My mother died in November 1939. I was walking back from school when Rod met me to tell me the news. Although I knew she was ill, somehow you don't expect people to die, so it was a shock. She was buried on December 4th, my fourteenth birthday. This was unavoidable as Dot's birthday was on the 3rd, and the body could not be left any longer.

After my mother died, Ruth continued to run the house until she married Jack in 1942. Until she left home she had the help of Mrs Kilner and another woman called Mrs Marshall, who had small podgy hands but could catch wasps in flight and kill them in one movement without being stung.

When Ruth married Jack it was the turn of Dot to take over the running of the house. She had often been left out, being the middle one of five, but now could show what she was made of.



*My Grandmother, Tony, Ruth, Carol, Rene and Dot*

After the war when Jack was demobbed from the 609 Squadron. Ruth moved to Leeds. There were three children from their marriage, two girls, Carol and Mary, and one boy, Tony. Jack lived to the good old age of 90 and died in 2003. Ruth pursued her love of art by taking lessons in the 1960s, and was still painting when she died in 2006, at the age of 86.

Rod emigrated to Canada. He had wanted to do this for some time and eventually went in 1947. He did some tough jobs, including working in a warehouse and oil prospecting, then ran his own holiday chalet business. He finally ended up working for a Christmas tree firm looking after 32,000 acres and shipping over one million trees a year all over Canada and the USA. He died of a heart attack, leaving his second wife Ellen and three daughters. Dot married Frank in 1945. Frank was an engineer and had come to Biggin Hill after spending much of the war in Africa. While in



north Africa he was caught by an explosion and injured. As he lay on the ground a doctor examined him and said he would never see again. Luckily he regained his eyesight, but after that time nothing ever bothered him. If something went wrong he wouldn't worry. When I once asked him why this was, he said "I can see!" This made him easy going and content.

After living in the bungalow for a long time, Dot and Frank also moved to Canada. At this time Dot had a daughter and two more were born in Canada. She was not very happy for a long time because she found Edmonton so cold, with snow for about five months each year, and so was very homesick. She was better after leaving Edmonton for Vancouver Island. She unfortunately was ill for several years and eventually died.

Rene married Blair in 1951 and went to live in Northern Ireland farming and had six children, all doing well.



*Dot and Frank's wedding*

