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## V.E. Day Anniversary

With all the celebrations taking place, this sixty year anniversary of the end of World War II has prompted me to look out my own memories which I wrote down ten years ago for my grandchildren.

My parents, Sidney and Rose Gower moved into a brand new council house in Crawford Road in March 1936. I was born two years later, one sister followed during the war, the other when the hostilities were well and truly over. My Mother finally moved into Greenacres in 2000 having spent 64 years in that house. Although I have not lived in Hatfield since the 1960's my formative years were spent there and I have very many vivid memories of my childhood. I still have a close friendship with my 'Gower' cousins who lived opposite and we share many stories of our extended family.

*Pauline Hannigan (nee Gower)*

8<sup>th</sup> May 1945, a day that millions of people throughout the world will always remember. Sixty years on, stories pour out from the memories of service men and women, each recounting where they were when the last 'all clear' siren sounded.

I remember too. This is what it was like for me, a little girl of seven years who had no memory of life without war.

A travelling fun fair was camped on Red Lion field, a grassy meadow at the side of the Red Lion Hotel in Great North Road, Hatfield. Prior to the development of The Ryde and the new road to Hertford, ponies grazed on what is now the hotel car park and a busy cross roads.

My cousins, Jane, Bob and Michael who lived almost opposite my home in Crawford Road called for me and we spent our pennies on the swing boats and tried our luck on the side shows, rolling coppers down a slide hoping they would land on a square marked with a high number. I managed, with extreme good fortune, to throw a hoopla ring right over a wooden block on which sat a beautiful (to my eyes) glass 'diamond' ring. I could not have been more delighted at that moment, for although as young children reared during war years we had all that was available, there was very little of anything and luxuries such as small toys and trinkets were a rare treat.

Our money was soon spent and we straggled across the road and started over the railway bridge. Suddenly people seemed to be everywhere. I remember standing and staring. Mum, with my little sister Mavis in a green pushchair was there with Auntie Ethel and her baby David in a pram. They were laughing and joking and actually bopping up and down on the pavement! They were chatting, shaking hands and hugging everyone around - I couldn't believe my eyes. Even total strangers seemed to be joining in this odd behaviour.

"What's the matter with everyone?" We wanted to know. Jane the eldest, immediately realised and understood what had just been declared. The war was over.

It seemed to take for ever to get from the bridge to Ground Lane and on to Crawford Road. Our mothers stopped to shake hands again and again with drivers and conductors at the bus garage. Then with everyone milling around the parade of shops from Simmonds the baker to the Food Office on the corner of the lane, Maisie Moore's paper shop and George the shoe repairer.

I remember being totally confused by it all. The news certainly seemed to be good but what did it actually mean? I wanted to know. Jane looked wistful as she gazed into empty shop windows.

"It will mean Dollimore's will always have oranges," she told me "...and bananas and grapes." She went on. "And Tingeys will always have currants - not just at Christmas, and we'll be able to have as much sugar and tea and butter and cheese as we want." This prediction was not strictly accurate as it was several years before food ceased to be rationed and lack of money prevented a rash of indulgence even then.

The boys were more interested in the difference we would notice by not being constantly under attack from Hitler. Hatfield had received more than a fair share of demolition from enemy aircraft and flying bombs. We had all spent large chunks of our young lives sheltering underground and listening for the whine of the V2 rockets. Life would never be the same again.

"There won't be any search lights across the sky at night." Said someone. Now that was something I would miss. The bright beams scanning the sky made even the darkest night lighter, and I was afraid of the dark. "Never mind," said Mum, "they will light the gas lamps in the street so we'll have plenty of light."

"They will take down all the barrage balloons over London." I heard. My heart sank. How awful for the beautiful silver elephants to disappear from the skies above London. "How will I ever know we've got there?" I thought. We often shopped at Wood Green or Finsbury Park. I seem to remember the balloons coming into view as we approached Wood Green.

A truly Victorian lady, Miss Tapp, was leaning over her gate. She lived in one of the Salisbury Estate bungalows in Ground Lane. A tiny fragile lady she always wore deepest black, high necked blouses and ankle length skirts, buttoned boots and a bonnet. Nobody ever knew her age, she seemed to me to be at least a hundred. Miss Tapp also joined in the greetings to one and all.

We eventually crossed over the hump back railway bridge and turned into Crawford Road to a sight I will never forget. The inhabitants of every house had turned out into the street. Neighbours linked arms and young and old joined together singing the wartime songs we all knew so well. 'White cliffs of Dover', and 'We'll meet again'. Outside the two terraces of six council houses the road widens, a grass verge was never in place just there so somebody decided it was the perfect site for the Crawford Road beacon. Folks scurried in and out of houses with all manner of combustible articles and as dusk fell the bonfire rose to an enormous height. It seemed to fill the road from kerb to kerb. The singing got louder as wind-up gramophones were brought into service. We all danced round the fire singing 'Knees up Mother Brown' and then we danced the Conga. A clanging of bells almost stopped the fun. Word had spread to the Fire Station in Batterdale that there was a house fire in Crawford Road. Firemen leapt off the tender, rushing towards our fire with their hoses. We children were most indignant that they should spoil our fun, but they had their job to do and made a gesture, damping down the perimeter of the fire but not the heart of it. They soon left and rivulets of molten tar ran into the gutter for many hours that night.

The joy and relief of the adults who really understood and had experienced the hell of the war for six long years spread to even the youngest child. Most of us had never seen our parents behave in such a crazy way before and this party was fantastic! What a lovely day it had been for me I thought, as I felt the ring on my finger. It was different. I looked down, and horror of horrors! I had lost my 'diamond'. Just an ugly spider claw gaped open on the band on my finger. My lovely day was ruined and I let out a pitiful wail. Mum (and several other Mums) came running to me imagining I had suffered a major injury. I sobbed out the details of my loss and all but my Mum resumed their part in the festivities taking place in the street. Mum consoled me best she could and said she was sure she would be able to find something in her button tin that would fill the space left by my lost gem.

In the excitement of the events in the following days my loss was soon just a memory as we decorated the houses and the entire street with flags and bunting and prepared for the great street party that followed a few days later.