
# An Interview with Patricia Anne Rickwood

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Conducted by Nadine Muller

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# INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

**I = Interviewer**
R = Respondent / Interviewee
[ ] = Clarification note

**I: So today is the 22nd May 2017. Can you tell me your full name, please?**

R: Patricia Anne Rickwood.

**I: Where do you live at the moment?**

R: I live in Brixham in Devon.

**I: Thank you. Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood, Anne? Where you were born, where you grew up … What it was like?**

R: Well, I was born, I believe, in a nursing home in Sidcup in Kent because that's what they did when you were born in those days. But my parental home was in Eltham in south-east London. My mother had lived there since she was six months old. She never left because my father died, and so she went on living with her parents. So that's where I spent my childhood. In this semi-detached house on the Progress Estate in south-east London.

**I: Could you tell me something about your parents, Anne? When did they meet?**

R: Well, I know that Mum and Dad met when they both started working at the Woolwich Equitable Building Society, as it was then called, in 1938 because there's a staff magazine from that time that shows them both as new members of staff in March, I think, 1938. So they worked together. Mum was a secretary in the ... I can't remember her department. Dad was also a clerk there. He'd just not long left school I think.

**I: Where was your mother from? Where had she grown up?**

R: So, she grew up in the same house that was my childhood home. She was born actually in the next street, in a road called Granby Road in Eltham, south-east London. Then, when she was six months old, they moved to the house, this semi-detached house around the corner, and then that was where she lived all the time. The houses had been built for workers at the Woolwich Arsenal. My grandfather, her father, was a carpenter who worked at the Woolwich Arsenal, which was a munitions factory in those days. So that was how they came to have this house, which they rented from what was called the

Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society. It was fairly new. I think it was built in 1917, so I think almost all their time, for nearly 100 years, that house was occupied by my family.

**I: What was your mother's name, Anne?**

R: Patricia Starr Vicary. I don't know where the Starr comes from at all. Star with two Rs. I have no idea why they called her that, but she hated it because there's a Christmas carol, “We Three Kings”, which has “star of wonder, star of night” in, and she always felt that she was being teased when that was sung. She hated that, but that was her name, yes. My grandfather was from Cornwall I think and my grandmother from Kent.

**I: When was your mother born?**

R: 1918, in March, March the 2nd, just before the end of the First World War.

**I: So she was 20 when she met your father at work?**

R: She was indeed, yes. It was, I think, her second job. She worked in a canteen that was something to do with the actual barracks in Woolwich, which is near Eltham, at the time. One thing about Mum was that Granddad, being a carpenter, one of the things he did was when Mum was about twelve, he went down to Cornwall and for his sister he was building a cafe. They were living in a very damp place, and my mother got rheumatic fever. So, she missed a lot of schooling when she was about twelve, and they told her that she must never work in London. They actually told her she must never have children. So, she had to find a local job. She obviously didn't worry about them not having children. It's quite amusing, really, that when Mum eventually died, they said she'd always have a weak heart because of the rheumatic fever. When she eventually died at the age of 93, she was blind, deaf, and immobile, but the one thing that was not weak about her was her heart.

**I: Did she ever tell you anything about their courtship when they met at work? Where did it go from there?**

R: Not a lot, but I know they used to go to dances. I think there was a pub up the top of the road. This road was called Arsenal Road because it was to do with the Woolwich Arsenal, the munitions factory. At the top of the road, there was a pub called the Welcome Inn. I think they used to have dances because I know that Mum had some rather beautiful dresses. They used to dress very formally for these things. Not all that long ago, still in her lifetime, I remember taking some of these dresses to a theatrical costumier to pass them on to them because they were full length dresses made of silk and taffeta and stuff. She used to dress up like this on a Saturday night and go dancing with Dad. But Dad was in the Territorial Army before the war. He went to a school called the Roan School where they had a cadet force, I think. So, I think he must have joined up there while he was still at school.

So, he was actually pretty much in the Army all the time they knew each other, so I don't think there was an awful lot of time for a social life. In fact, one of the funny stories that I found recently, I eventually borrowed my father's log books back from the museum that my mother had given them to in the 60s, without ever showing them to me. Looking at what my father was doing in 1943, September, he didn't seem to be at home at all. So quite how I come to be here at all, I really don't know. They were only married for two and a half years and I don't think they really had very much time together in that time. Certainly, my father's relatives who are still alive, they were very young at the time and they hardly knew him because they said as soon as they were old enough to get to know him, he'd gone away to fight.

**I: So the war broke out a year off your parents meeting?**

R: Really, yes. About eighteen months, yes. They married in '42. Mum's birthday was March 2nd and they married on March 7th.[1] Dad had started out in, I think, a regiment called the Royal West Kent but, like quite a lot of other people that I've met since, I think people in the 40s felt that the war wasn't really going anywhere and quite a few people decided to join up with the Glider Pilot Regiment when it was formed, which was actually the week before Mum and Dad married, in February 1942. So Dad had joined the Glider Pilot Regiment, so he was off training, learning to fly pretty much as soon as they married.

**I: Did they ever tell you anything about their wedding day?**

R: I have photographs of that, yes. Because it was in the war, of course, the things that I know are that it was quite hard to get ... You had coupons for everything you bought, so getting coupons to make a wedding dress and bridesmaids dresses was not easy. I do actually have Mum's wedding dress still. I'm trying to keep just the things that I think might be of interest in the future. It came from a shop called Marshall & Snellgrove. It's in the original box. She was incredibly thin. I used to be able to get into some of her dresses, but never that one. She bought that dress, but I think the bridesmaids' dresses, there were three bridesmaids I think, a friend and my father's sister, older sister I think were bridesmaids. There might have been a third one. Then a tiny one was my father's young sister who was only about eight at the time. The other thing I know that made it difficult, apart from the dresses, was the cake. I think they couldn't have white icing.

They had to have a chocolate cake because you couldn't get a white iced cake in those days. They just had the reception at home, at the house where her parents lived. They were married in St Luke's Church, Eltham Park, which is just around the corner from the house. I think it was quite cold. I think my father was in uniform. I don't know who the best man was. I've got a picture, but I don't know his name. But yes, it was quite a small affair because it being in the middle of the war by then.

**I: What happened then once they got married?**

R: So they had a very short honeymoon in a place called Cotford Hall in Bournemouth. It's by the sea, obviously, Bournemouth, but they couldn't get anywhere near the beach because all the beaches were covered with barbed wire in case of invasion. But I have some photos of where they spent their honeymoon. Some years ago, in the 80s, I did take Mum back and we stayed there at this Cotford Hall the night before she was going to fly from Hurn Airport at Southampton. So she has been back to see it once, but it was only a very, very tiny honeymoon, only just about four days I think. After that she never had an independent home. When Dad was home from leave, he would go to the house in Eltham to stay there or he'd go and visit his own parents who were over in Charlton, which is another little town in south London, about three miles away. I think he got on very well with my mother's father, so he quite liked coming to the house, but how much time they spent there I have no idea.

Occasionally I think they did try to get a few days in other places. I remember Mum telling me about small trip they made to Marlow in Buckinghamshire, but it was very difficult for Dad. He never had very much time off and he had to try and fit in Mum and his own parents as well. So in the two and a half years they had, I don't suppose they had very much time together really.

[1] See Fig. 1.

**I: Did your mum ever tell you what it was like for her day-to-day during those two years?**

R: Not really. The only knowledge I really have about their relationship, my mum idolised my dad terrifically. One of the sadnesses to me is that I've never met anyone really who knew him. I've met a few people who knew him a bit and, with these log books that I borrowed back, I found the names of people he'd trained with. I wish I'd been able to find these people sooner because I'm sure they're probably now all very old or dead. But it would have been lovely just to find out, to talk to someone who could tell me anything about what my dad was like. But to my mum he was absolutely like a saint. I suppose that's the way it goes when someone is no longer with you, they become more and more idolised. Certainly, one of the quite surprising things that happened to me after my mum went finally into care – because I discovered that she was blind and it wasn't safe for her to live alone anymore – I was clearing this house in which she had lived for ninety years. The last thing I found almost was a box of letters and they were all in pencil on the sort of paper you see, carbon paper, when you wanted to make a copy, very thin paper, letters from my father to Mum.

It was the first time I'd ever seen his handwriting. It was quite a surprise to be standing by the recycling bin in the front garden and realising I was looking at Dad's handwriting for the first time. I also have the last two letters that Mum wrote to him that were sent back when he died. The tone of them both is just how much they love each other. They're incredibly repetitive about just how they love and miss each other and how much they're looking forward to when the war will be over. Then once I'd come on the scene, how much my father was going to enjoy looking after me. All very terribly sentimental by modern standards, but they don't give a lot of information. They're just very love letters. They wrote every day to each other, but much the same thing.

So that's one thing, I have no picture of any of the flaws in him or anything like that. Of course, as I said, even his younger brother and sister who are still alive, they can't tell me really anything because they were too young to know him, so that's a big gap.

**I: Did you glean anything from the letters that he wrote to your mother?**

R: Only that he was obviously incredibly fond of her. They were both so fond of each other and they just longed to be together. They were making plans, what they were going to do after. As I said, my mother had bought various things to make a home that they were hoping to have once the war was over, china and cutlery. She'd done a lot of embroidery of the sort of things they had in those days like table cloths and table napkins and tray cloths and things. Mum was evacuated. She went on working for the Woolwich Building Society after she married. One interesting little thing I discovered was that she had a letter from them actually saying that in exceptional circumstances they would allow her to go back and work there even though she was married, but only until hostilities ended. It's quite an interesting statement on what life was like in those days, that women were not expected to work once they married.

But she went back to work and the office was moved down to a really quite dangerous place, right in the path of the Battle of Britain, down in Westerham in Kent. Mum lived in a little hut. I know that once she became pregnant with me, they all worried about her walking back through the ice in the winter of 1943 to get down to this hut. She finally left work in February 1944, much earlier before I was born than nowadays one would. But yes, so she worked and most of the time after they married, Dad was first of all doing six months training learning to fly a plane, then another six months learning to fly a glider. So that was his year of 1943 after they married.

**I: What happened then?**

R: So they prepared for D-Day, which was the first operation, no I don't think it was very first operation for the glider pilots, they'd done something down in Sicily I think, possibly North Africa. But the first one that my dad was involved and most of the people I've met since were involved in was D-Day. Dad had done night flying, which they hadn't all done. So I discovered, only quite recently, again when somebody pointed out to me that there was a museum in Normandy by the Pegasus Bridge where they landed that gave you information about all the glider pilots. I found a line about my dad which told you who his co-pilot was, what his pay load was, what he was carrying in his glider. I knew that he was one of fifty who took off at 1:28 in the morning on the 6th June because he could fly at night. The vast majority of the invasion took place later in the day because I suppose about 250 of them who hadn't done night flying and they went in the afternoon, but Dad went in the morning.

All his log says is just Operation Tonga, which is what it was called and it's written in red because you wrote the night flying in read and it just put two hours. That's all I know. I don't know how he got back. But someone has recently, from Canada, sent me a letter. They were all given a letter that said they had to be given the opportunity to get back to England as quickly as possible because they might be needed again. But I don't know actually how he got back because of course with a glider you don't take off again, you just leave them there. So that was his first operation. I also know that just before they went on that operation, that was on the 6th June, on the 2nd June they were all asked to write a letter, which was the one that was going to be sent to their family if they didn't come back. This is the letter that I then found when I was going through the box of Mum's things. It's the letter that enclosed the last two letters that she wrote to Dad, that arrived after he died.

So he wrote his letter on the 2nd June and then he did his flying on the 6th June, came back, and I was born the next day, about 24 hours after he landed over there. I know he came and saw me before he'd even gone and taken his uniform off and washed, I understand. He went to the nursing home because in those days you stayed in the nursing home a while. I think Mum stayed in for about a fortnight. I was two weeks early, I believe. She stayed in for about two weeks and so that's where Dad first saw me.[2]

**I: Did your mum ever tell you anything about his reaction when he first saw you?**

R: No, not really. Again, I've only really seen it once I was on the scene all the letters were about ... he called me “Little Pink Rosebud”. So Mum always thought that pink roses were my thing and she always tried to put them on cards that she gave me and gave me roses. We used to use them in flower arrangements and things like that. But no, funny, Mum never really talked to me about him much at all, not that I remember. I think life was very hard. Of course, she lived with her mother and father and they were quite difficult and rather emotional. Obviously, they all got very upset when Dad didn't come back. I think Mum found it quite hard to just keep everything together. For example, one thing that was really quite difficult was in the late 40s the health service I think was introduced and I understand that something was sent round, a form they had to fill out in order that women, they would get an old age pension.

When Mum got to the age of 60, we discovered she'd never actually done this because obviously she was preoccupied with other things. So the only way Mum could get any sort of old age pension was by me paying the back contributions that she hadn't paid because otherwise she wouldn't have had things like the bus pass and the things that

[2] See Fig. 2.

go with the old age pension. So I think she must have found life quite a struggle. I don't remember conversations with Mum very much at all I'm afraid, when I was young. It was a funny childhood. I mean I would have done it very differently. Mum, in her later years, when anyone asked her why she never married, again, she always got very cross because she said my dad was the only one for her. Even when she was 90, she got really cross, so when she was in the care home with carers and they asked her why she'd never married. But really, Dad would not have wanted her to be like that. I think she more or less gave up once he died I think. I mean she looked after me. She put everything into looking after me, but she was really a martyr in the sense that she didn't have a life of her own. I don't think Dad would have wanted that at all.

Personally, I feel in many ways, had she gone back to work, which she was urged to do, possibly even found someone and married again. Life would have been very different. But she was terribly afraid. I suppose it must have been very difficult. It was a very different life in those days from now. She was so grateful to her parents for continuing to give her a home with me. She didn't want me to be a nuisance to them. I mean I'm not really complaining. I had all my meals in my bedroom because she thought I would annoy them. She cooked my meals on a gas ring in the bedroom. This actually caused me to have quite a few eating problems when I was young. It wasn't until I started to meet people and go out with them that I realised eating could actually be quite a social thing. I had terrible eating problems.

Then on a Sunday we used to have Sunday roast that I was, I suppose, allowed to attend, but of course I was so hung up and I hated what they gave me to eat, but I wasn't allowed to leave it. I had to sit there in front of this food until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I've never eaten a Sunday roast from choice since, I don't think. It was a shame. The impression I got that she was so anxious that she might get thrown out of the home and then she wouldn't know how to live because she got, I think, a pension of about £1 a week and a shilling for me. My dad died as a staff sergeant. The next stage up he would have become an officer. They were going to do that, but he didn't live long enough. Had he become an officer, her pension position would have been so different. It was a big struggle. It was a struggle partly financially and partly dealing with these rather hysterical parents.

**I: Can I take you back to what you know about your father's death?**

R: Yes. So, I told you about D-Day, which was his first operation. Then he came home and saw me and was around for a couple of months. There's a photograph of him holding me at the age of three months. I was baptised at the end of August. It wasn't a bank holiday in those days. I think it was the beginning of August that had the bank holiday. So, it was the end of August I was baptised. On the day of my baptism he got a telegram to ask him to go back. He thought it was just in connection with promoting him to being an officer, but in fact, it was to prepare for Arnhem, the Battle of Arnhem, which is the film *A Bridge Too Far*. So, from what I know, he took off from an airfield called Keevil in Wiltshire. I know who is co-pilot was. In his glider, he also had a medical officer and another person, we're not sure who that was. He made the landing, went over to ... Unfortunately, he was on the second day.

The first day of Arnhem was the 17th September. He went on the second day so of course they were expecting them by then. They were pretty much expecting them even on the first day. From what we know, he landed his glider perfectly and the other three got out. They were starting to take the jeeps and tanks and things out of the back of the glider and went to look for Dad and he was dead beside the glider, shot, as far as we know, by a sniper. We know that because the first thing that happened to Mum was that she got a telegram saying he was missing, presumed dead, I think is what they said, in about

October she got that. She'd written these two letters to him on the 25th and 26th September that came back. So she got the telegram in about October, but it wasn't until the following May that she got final confirmation that he was definitely dead. I believe she got that on the actual day of the end of the war in 1945 when everyone was celebrating.

I have two letters that I found when I borrowed the log books back from the museum of army flying, where Mum had given them. One is from his co-pilot and one is from the medical officer. It was quite a coincidence because it turned out that the medical officer was the brother of someone who worked with my mother's sister so really quite coincidental. But these two people both wrote to Mum describing that, what I've described about how they found him shot by a sniper. They realised he was dead and there was nothing they could do. Quite a sad bit about that, to me, is quite recently I've discovered that the co-pilot, who lived on until the 90s, he obviously died quite a while ago now, but he wrote an autobiography, which is in the Imperial War Museum. He obviously wanted to make good impression and in that he says that my dad was concussed on the way down and he had to take over the controls of the glider and land it. Although that is, from what they all said at the time, that wasn't true and in fact Dad landed the glider perfectly. All the other people in the glider survived.

As I said, he hasn't got a grave. By the War Graves Commission, we were given a grave number, but it just says, “known unto God”, it doesn't have his name on. My mum tried really, really hard, that's one of the things she was doing after the war, along with looking after me and dealing with Granny and Granddad. There were quite a few letters she wrote to the War Office saying, "Couldn't they possibly find my dad's body?" But he didn't seem to be wearing an identity disk. One of the things that people have said is that the gliders were burnt by the Germans. I don't know how true this is, but if so and he was lying beside the glider, he would have been burnt as well. I don't give up hope that he might be found. It would be lovely for one of these bodies that they now find, there would still be the chance for me providing some DNA to identify him, but I don't really have much hope of it. I've not ever found anyone who can tell me anymore than what I've just told you.

**I: So you remember that after your father died and you were living with your grandmother and your mother and your grandfather, you said that you remember meal times weren't much fun. What else do you remember?**

R: My early life? Well I wasn't very fit, I'm afraid. I've since discovered that possibly that was to do with being born in the war because in later life I've had both cataracts and crowns on my teeth. Apparently, there's a connection and it's all to do with a lack of calcium in the war. I know Mum tried really hard to be really fit and healthy for me, but there was a limit to vitamins and things you could have. As far as I know, I was not good at walking. When I first went to school when I was five, I couldn't actually go upstairs without help. I think I had rickets, which is something that affects the bones in the legs, which is caused by not enough calcium. I believe I was born with infantile jaundice because my dad said what a lovely bronzed colour I was when he first saw me. That was a reaction I did get, but that wasn't significant. Infantile jaundice is not a serious thing. The fact that I wasn't very good at walking was quite a disadvantage and I wasn't athletic at all.

Unfortunately, Mum sent me to a school that had a boarding section because she thought she might go back to work and might need me to board. I never actually did. But they were very keen on sport and not a bit keen on academic things and I was very good at academic things and very bad at sport. I used to fall over a lot and every time I fell over I got poisonous wounds. I was a pretty sickly child I'm afraid. I turned a corner when I reached puberty and I've never looked back. Of course, Mum was terribly protective.

For example, in my later life one of my main hobbies was sailing, but I never learned to swim because when I was at the age where Mum would have learned to swim, it was when they had a polio epidemic. All the swimming pools were closed. Mum, with her rheumatic fever, she couldn't take me swimming. She really cosseted me.

I mean when you see pictures of me as a little child, I'm always muffled up in plenty of clothes, with a hat and everything because she was so afraid that I was ... I mean, you can understand it. I was just so precious, but it was a terrible ... I found it a terrible burden really. I made up my mind when I was very young, really quite young, that I was never going to have children, which I didn't have, because I didn't ever want to be in a position of treating someone the way I had been treated, which was a daft thing because of course you needn't have done that. But yes, I was very, very protected and cosseted and wrapped up.

**I: How do you remember your mother from those days, the day to day life?**

R: Gosh. She tried really hard. I must have been a real pain actually because obviously, as I said, we didn't have much money so we didn't go on holiday, but she did try to take me for day trips to the seaside, but I was always sick on coaches. She must have had a terrible time. She kept going, every year we'd go for a day to the sea somewhere with her well provided with polythene bags and things. She did try to, within her very limited possibilities, to give me a good time. I mean looking back, I remember more in retrospect in way, thinking what it was actually like when I was there, but I mean one of the things that really surprised me was, when I cleared her belongings from the house, she had a savings book. She'd started off with about £200 and she made this last until I was sixteen. There would be little bits of money taken out every so often for trips and things, but I do owe her a lot.

I think the biggest regret, in my mind, is that I couldn't bring myself to say how much I owe. Right at the end when she was dying she said, "You've influenced so many people so well. You've had such a good influence on people," and I now know that she wanted me to say, "And it's all because of all the sacrifices you made for me,", but I didn't say it at the time and I shall always remember that. But yes, she did, she gave up, but that was her way of doing things. That's how I remember her, giving up her own life so that I could have everything, as much as she could provide for me although we had parcels of second hand clothes from the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association. In school trips, I was the only one who was wearing my school uniform coat in the photographs. All the others had ordinary coats to wear at weekends, but I had to go on trips in my school uniform coat. But she tried so hard. Yes, she really did.

Her way of looking after me was to give up her own life, which is the way I remember it now, which is very sad really. I do feel Dad would not have wanted her to be like that. She had so much potential. She could have done so much herself, but she just saw her role as bringing me up.

**I: So how did your mum make do? Did she have a widow's pension? Did she go back to take any work?**

R: Well, one of the things that was also quite sad in a way was that she didn't do any work until I went to university when I was eighteen. At that point, she was still young enough and fit enough, she could have then gone back to work. But just at that very point was when her own mother, my grandmother, started to be dependent. So, she had me dependent from '44 to '62 and then she looked after her mother until she was 103, so that was another 23 years she looked after her own mother. So that was the story of her life, looking after other people. She used to take me to the Post Office. As I said, if Dad

had had an officers pension, it would all have been paid into a bank account, but her pension was paid in cash once a week. She had to take me to the Post Office to prove I was still there and she was looking after me. She'd get this pound week and a shilling for me.

That's why she was very active in being enthusiastic about the War Widows' [Association] because it was only through them, in the 70s, that she got a decent pension. For the later part of her life, she was really quite well off because it was a very good pension. But one of her sadnesses was that she knew that German war widows got an awful lot more money than British ones did. It really was quite scandalous that all the time that she was bringing me up until I left home in 1962, she didn't get a decent pension until the 70s. I wasn't conscious except, as I said, for things like not having as many coats as other people. I wasn't that conscious of it, but it must have been the most terrific struggle. They only lived in a rented house. Obviously, my grandmother didn't work and my grandfather retired. He died quite young in the smog in 1952.

One thing that I'm glad in a way that I didn't have perhaps the childhood that people have nowadays because it has meant that I'm hugely grateful for what I have had since because I know what it's like to be really poor. We were never short of food really. I mean granny was very good at managing. I mean that was the way that they did things in those days. We'd have this piece of meat on Sunday and then it would be made to last all the rest of the week in various forms. So, I don't expect we ate very healthily. I don't remember a huge amount of vegetables and I think there was quite a lot of fat everywhere because I hated it, but no, I mean she made me eat scrambled egg every day. We weren't short of food, but we didn't have a washing machine. They never had a television. I bought them a television when I went to university. No, later than that, when I started my first job and finally moved into my own accommodation about 1967.

So, I was never brought up with a television. I never saw any television programmes. We never had a telephone. I remember I was one of the few people who knew how to use a public telephone because there was a bus strike and we were all trying to get home from school and I was the only one who was able to phone people up and explain the problem we had because the other people that I was at school with had domestic telephones, but we didn't have one. I remember we listened to the Coronation in 1953 on an amazing radio that you had to go and collect batteries and accumulators from a shop. They were terribly heavy, but that was what I remember. I remember the radio with this Sunday lunch. We always had the radio on. So the radio was there. We had enough food, but we didn't have any of the things that you would think of as luxuries now really.

When I emptied the house, they'd saved things that we would throw nowadays just in case they might be useful, like gloves with no fingers and torn tights and things. So yes, they had to be very, very careful. As I said, we couldn't afford to go on holiday, just a day trip in London although we lived about ten miles away from London. I mean London was again like a foreign place, you only went there very occasionally.

**I: So it sounds like you were aware that the other children at school might be going on holidays. You said they were wearing non-uniform coats.**

R: Yes, that was the thing. Yes, I do get the feeling that Mum was very worried about how I would feel with the other children. I can remember two things there. One is that she always wanted me to have as many pens and things as they had because that was ... I mean it sounds daft now when everybody has all kinds of gaming devices and that, but in those days, the measure of how well off you were was how many pens you had. She always wanted me to have as many pens and geometry sets and everything so the others had so I could do my work properly. She helped me with my homework, I

remember that. The other thing, we didn't have electricity. We didn't even have things like a record player. We had the electricity put in in 1959, which was the year I did my O Levels. I remember sitting with my mum. The floorboards were all up while they were putting this electricity in.

I sat on one bit where there was a floorboard and Mum sat on another bit and she tested my Latin. I always remember doing my Latin revision while they were putting the electricity into the house. So yes, that was another thing obviously that we were much later than most other people in that. There was a little story that Mum told me that I was teased at school because I hadn't got a dad. She says that I said to the other girls, because it was a girls' school, "Oh, but my dad has gone to heaven so he can look after me better." I do believe that actually he always has because I've led a charmed life. He's looked after me. I've left many jobs without having another one to go to and yet I have never had a day's unemployment. He's watched out for me I know.

**I: Were you or your mum aware of other children around you whose dads had died in the war or were there other war widows that your mother was aware of in your immediate community?**

R: Not really, no. I think Mum actually was a bit bitter. I've probably given that impression a little bit. When people died in subsequent wars, of course there was much more counselling and the bodies were brought back to England and things. I think that made her feel a bit bitter because yes, there was absolutely no support, no help at all. As I said, until the War Widows' Association got going in the 70s, there really wasn't any support at all. I now know someone because there's quite a famous person who was the leader of the D Squadron that my dad was in at Arnhem who was Captain Ogilvie. But he and my dad somehow knew each other. His daughter was born thirteen months before me. He and my dad were talking and my dad said that his wife was about to have a baby and this Captain Ogilvie said that my dad's wife must get in touch with his wife. Apparently, they did and there were a lot of letters.

I have now become friends with the daughter of Captain Ogilvie who now lives in Canada and we see each other regularly. She comes over to England. But Mum wrote letters to this woman, my friend's mother. But there was nobody in the vicinity, to my knowledge, at all, no. She went to church and that. Something I do remember her saying was that people in the street would cross over to avoid speaking to her because they didn't want to have to say they felt sorry for her. I do remember that now you've reminded me. Yes, it wasn't until much, much later, when it got to 2002, I realised Mum was getting a bit older and I ought to try and find out a bit more about the things that she'd never really talked about much. So I got involved with the Glider Pilot Regimental Association and started to meet veterans and realised that these were people that that's what my dad would be like if he'd lived.

I think also, I mean my mum did belong to this association and that was where she felt her spiritual home was kind of thing. But again, it was only the veterans who survived that she knew. She didn't know anyone. My dad's best friend, she was very friendly with him. He was taken prisoner at Arnhem and badly wounded, but he did survive and he lived until 2013. Mum was very friendly with him, but no, no one in the vicinity at all. She did have problems with the other side of the family I know. That's one of the things I remember, but I wouldn't want to malign anyone. She didn't have support really from my father's family. There was a bit of competition there over me. I won't go on about it because it's all water under the bridge. I'm sure that there's a lot of things that could have been done better.

**I: Did you get to see your grandparents when you were little, your paternal grandparents?**

R: That was quite a problem. I'll tell you that, but I don't want to criticise anyone. I don't really now feel I have any family because Mum didn't keep in touch. She didn't want to be in touch with them. While they're not ill disposed to me at all now, I don't really know them because we never really met. Sadly, Mum was a loner, very much. I mean there was a lack of other people around, I must admit. My impression is that there was me and me who were against the world. It was sad. I wish she hadn't been quite so bitter. I think when you're bitter, it's only really yourself that you damage. She could have been so much happier. I suppose it's very hard. I mean they were upset about their son's death, their brother's death so there was pain on both sides and not a lot of toleration. I'd always be more inclined to be tolerant, but that's from now. When life was so hard, probably all Mum could think of was that she wasn't getting any support and in fact she was just getting actual opposition almost. I mean she tried hard to give me ... for instance she sent me on school trips.

Clearly, she was very proud of the fact that the second school trip they did from my school went to Germany. I know that my father's family couldn't believe that she was going to let me go to Germany, which was the country that had killed their son. I know that my paternal grandmother wanted to see me before she died and I actually, when I was a teenager, had to arrange to go and see her without telling Mum because she wouldn't have liked that.

**I: Did you feel different at school? I know you said your mother made a big effort to make sure that you didn't.**

R: I suppose I did a little bit, yes, probably. I mean the sort of things she did, the second school I went to when I was just in the sixth form in fact, she made a point of saying that I mustn't have free school meals because she didn't want me to go in a different queue and stand out from the rest. But yes, I suppose I felt a bit lonely too I suppose, yes. I didn't find it that easy to make friends I suppose. I don't have any friends left from that time. University is the first time that I've got friends still from. I wouldn't complain. I mean I did very, very well. Mum gave up an enormous amount. I was the first person in the family to go to university. I have been very, very lucky really because I had a very good education and I have achieved a lot since. Yes, to be absolutely honest, I would hate Mum to know that I've said this, but I don't remember my childhood being happy at all, no, not really.

**I: You said she helped you with your homework, your Latin, so you were good at school?**

R: Afraid so, yes. As I said, they didn't like me because I was very good at work and very bad at sport. I did quite well. It's amazing the different prejudices that you wouldn't have probably nowadays, but I know the first school that Mum sent me to, which was one that had the boarding facilities that she thought she might need if she went back to work, that one actually closed when I'd done my O' Levels so I then transferred to a much bigger school. I didn't transfer schools at eleven because I wasn't very healthy and everything would have involved a train journey, which Mum didn't feel I was really up to. Because I had eating problems when I was young, she used to not leave me at school, but she used to collect me and take me to a restaurant in town, I remember that, for my lunches when I was young. Anyway, then in the sixth form I went to another bigger school where I did go on the train because by then I was much fitter.

I went in to do Latin because I wanted to read English at university and you had to have Latin for that in those days. I remember the Latin teacher looking down her nose at me and saying, "What did I get for O' Level?" and I said, "85%," and she said, "Oh, I suppose it was a different board." I sound so miserable, I'm not miserable. I'm a very happy person, but that wasn't a happy experience either, unfortunately, because they were prejudiced. If you hadn't been to their school all through, they didn't think you could be any good. In fact, just to finish off that bit, when the others were applying for Oxford and Cambridge, they didn't let me try for Oxford and Cambridge because they were afraid I would let them down because I hadn't been in the school all through like the others had. In those days, there was something called a state scholarship, which was quite a prestigious thing to get. In the end, all the people who tried for Oxford and Cambridge didn't get in and I was the only one who got a state scholarship.

I remember going to the deputy head on the day I heard that I'd got this state scholarship and telling her. Just for a moment she looked absolutely gobsmacked. She got over it quite quickly, but she was obviously completely surprised that this ugly duckling had actually done so well. Yes, I can't say there was really anything about my school days that were particularly happy, no, but I got by. Mum was so encouraging. I mean she made sure I did the work, but I enjoyed doing work. Another thing I do remember that was lovely was she really worked with me so that by the time I went to school at the age of five, I was quite advanced, which was actually a slight disadvantage because in kindergarten I know I jumped a year in kindergarten because I was so bright, which meant I was a year young all the way through. Then I had to wait a year at the very end to catch up.

But yes, she was rather proud of the fact that I could spell miscellaneous before I went to school. She did all the things that parents should do like read books with me, but it wasn't an exciting ... I couldn't do any risky things. When you see fathers throwing their children in the air and that sort of thing, all those things that would have probably been quite good for me physically, I didn't get to do. That was where I missed having a dad, someone to rough me up a bit.

**I: Do you think your mum was particularly protective because you were the last remaining thing from your father?**

R: Absolutely. I mean one of the things ... every birthday card she ever gave me, it always said it was from Daddy and Mummy. She never wanted to do anything with anyone else except with me, even in a very advanced age. She never did anything like joining groups. When she no longer had to stay at home to look after anybody, she never did anything social. She never wanted to do anything except with me. She would write things to other people saying from both of us, as though I was like the substitute for my father. I did rather feel that I'm afraid. I mean as I say, had he lived, you don't know what would have happened. He might have become quite horrible and they might have got divorced, but he remained in her mind the absolute paragon of virtue that he was when she met him. He stayed like that until she was 93. I was all that was left of him, yes, afraid so.

**I: So how did she feel when you went to university? Tell me about that.**

R: Life was quite bad really. University wasn't so bad, but it was when I came back and wanted to not live at home anymore. As I said, I really began to feel the pressure a bit. Once I got out in the world a bit more, once I went to university and I met more people ... I went to a London university, she used to come up and meet me and do my washing, which was very nice of her. She used to collect all this washing and take it home and do it and bring it back, even though they didn't have a washing machine or anything. But she was brilliant. She didn't seem to mind that because she felt that this was all improving

me. But once I started to lead a more independent live, once I knew what it was like to get away and I realised more what pressure there was, I was fairly determined to leave home and go and share a flat. I do remember she told me that she'd got a terminal illness and I remember going to the doctor and he said, "No, she hasn't. She's trying to blackmail you. You must get away for your own sanity."

I remember when I left home, I'd bought them the television and I said to her that I would always come home at weekends. By then I'd got a boyfriend and he said, "You're going to regret this," and boy, I regretted it. Every fortnight, more or less, I would go home. The trouble was, I went back to being the person that she ... It's a bit like my dad was in her mind. Not necessarily the way he really was, but the way she'd idolised him. I became like that too I suppose, the little girl she brought up. By then I was deputy head of a school and I used to have to go back to my flat on a Sunday night and make a monumental adjustment away from this pathetic little creature that I'd been treated like on the Sunday, to being the person who could go in there and command a class the next day. It was a bit tough, but I'm not complaining, as I said.

Her life, I mean it must have been terrible, absolutely terrible to have only been married for two and a half years and to have so many problems, a lack of support and lack of money and all that. I don't blame her at all, but yes, it wasn't easy.

**I: Was she proud when you got your scholarship?**

R: Oh yes, she was terribly proud of me, but of course she didn't like some of the relationships I formed so she wasn't very nice to my face. One of the things I found hard as I grew older was that it was positively embarrassing the way she would talk about me to other people. This friend, the daughter of Captain Ogilvie in Canada, she said she always, in a way, until she met me, she hated me, because she knew, through the letters from my mother to her mother, that I was an absolute incredibly intelligent and clever and perfect person and there was this poor lady, who wasn't particularly academic and not very good at anything, comparatively. My mother was like this. She boasted about me most dreadfully to everybody in the most embarrassing way, but she wasn't, for much of my adult life, terribly kind to me and my face.

The glider pilots and the War Widows' [Association] were the two main things in her life and one quite nice thing that happened really was that because she'd given these various things of my father's to the Museum of Army Flying. I don't know quite why she never let me see them first. I think she was disillusioned with me or something perhaps because it was 1968 when she gave them away, which was when I'd just started my first job and maybe she just thought I wasn't going to be interested. Perhaps in those days I might not even have been that interested, but it would have been so nice to have seen them first. But because she gave quite a lot of stuff to The Museum of Army Flying in a place called Middle Wallop near Salisbury, they obviously corresponded a lot. Eventually they set up a little part of that museum, which is called Arnhem the Price. It's a little room exactly like this, a little room with a gas light in and that we had in my youth.

The model is based on the picture of my mum when she was young and dressed wearing my mother's dress that she wore on her honeymoon. My mother is sitting there looking at the telegram that said my father wasn't coming back. There's a front door which has got number 64, which was the number we lived at, with two 1940s milk bottles standing outside. They set all this up in the 80s and that was why we happened to be down in that area, which is why I took her to the hotel where she'd been for her honeymoon that time because they invited us to go and meet all the people who had been involved in setting up this display. It's still there. But again, at first there was the most embarrassing bit about me and my career in international education, but I think they've now actually

changed that a bit. I'm pleased that they've actually made Mum as more of a representative of all war widows, and I think that's good. I'm glad they did that.

Then she did, in 2002, which was the 60th anniversary of the Glider Pilot Regiment and their marriage, she wanted to again do something in memory of Dad for the glider pilots. She asked them the association, what they would like and there's a window in Salisbury Cathedral that represents the Glider Pilot Regiment, but it didn't say anything about what it was so people passing by wouldn't have known. So, they said would she have plaque put there to explain what this window was. So, Mum paid for that and we went down and there was a little dedication, a little unveiling of it and so on. As I said, for my 50th birthday she gave me a silver replica of my father's wings, which had to be specially made because it was the king's crown that was on the wings when my father was in the regiment whereas nowadays it's the queen's crown so it was specially made with the king's crown on. Then for my 60th birthday Mum gave me the gold Pegasus, which is again specially made, which is the emblem of the glider pilots. So, you can see, those are the things that meant most to her all her life.

**I: Where did you go to university? What did you read?**

R: I went to Bedford College, the University of London. It doesn't exist anymore. It merged with Royal Holloway and they've dropped the name and everything now. I read English. I didn't work terribly hard, I only got a 2.2. I liked the sun and it was a lovely summer the year of my finals. I wanted to go and sit in the garden. I know that there were two subjects I could have done an hour's more work on and got an upper second, but I only got a lower second. I then went into secondary school English teaching for fifteen years. I got involved with international education. My second job was in the International School of London. I got very interested in the international baccalaureate so when I decided I wanted to leave that job I went and did a Master's on the internal baccalaureate. By then I was deputy head and I intended to go back, not to that school, but to another school as a deputy head, but in fact, when I finished my Master's I asked the IB people, the international baccalaureate people, what particular subject they needed research on.

They didn't actually support me in any way, but I did research on the subject that they wanted research on. So, I turned up when I'd finished this, in about July 1982 just to tell them that I'd finished and everything. They said, "You don't happen to be free, do you?" Everyone had left and they'd got a mound of printout of results and nobody knew what to do with them. So that was the start of my career with the International Baccalaureate, which I did then for five years. I finished up working for the international exams at the University of London, which became Edexcel. That was a horrible experience. When you're taken over it usually is. People around me were dying of stress and I thought, "No, that's not how to end your career." So, I took early retirement and opened my own after school tuition centre, which I did for quite a few years, but now I don't do anything at all. Well I do a lot of voluntary work, but that was my career. It was a very good career.

I had a very, very interesting career and met lots of wonderful people and became brave in the end. I mean one of the things that contributed to my not liking my school days very much was this fact that they really did try to put you down. I mean that's not a criticism of my mum, that's a criticism of what was then the education system. There was no sense of encouraging you. If they could find a possibility of putting you down, they would. I remember that really sticks with you. It's influenced the way I've run my own teaching career all my life because even when I did my Master's fifteen years later, I remember sitting in a seminar and thinking, "There's no point in my saying anything because nothing I've got to say will be worth listening to," because that was how I was treated in my own school, but that's nothing to do with Mum.

**I: This is your story as well. I'd like to hear more. What was your philosophy then based on what you'd experienced, this put down pedagogy? What was your idea of ...?**

R: I mean when I taught kids, if ever they said anything, I'd ask them what they thought say on a poem or a piece of literature or something. If they were way off and it was quite ridiculous, I would never say, "That's stupid. What a daft idea." I'd say, "Well that's one way of looking at it. Have you thought of looking at it this way as well perhaps?" Always try to find something good in what they had come up with, never put them down. I always remember, I've got quite a few godchildren even though I have no children and I always remember once, with one of my godsons, who is now a very successful professor at Oxford, I said something sarcastic to him when he was about nine and he was mortified.

I remember you never use sarcasm with children because they don't understand. I've never forgotten that. That was one mistake I made. He loves me and he's forgiven me, but you've got to be so careful how you treat children because you could wound them forever. So I always tried to be really positive. When I was in the international school, I mean a lot of the people I taught were actually, you would think, quite privileged financially, but they were emotionally so deprived. They had everything they needed in their room, televisions and computers and everything in their room at home, but nobody to talk to. Nobody wanted to listen to them. I would, being me, always stick around listening to their worries as they were moving up in life when they were teenagers. I've done that quite a lot. You realise that you've got to let people develop as they want to be. You've got to listen to people and let them talk to you. I think I was quite a good listener.

I used to go on holiday, I always remember once I went on a trip ... that was again, even when I was quite independent my mother still encouraged me to go on holidays and that. I remember going to Norway and getting stuck with someone who told me the story of their life. I think I'm the sort of person perhaps that- you wouldn't think so from all this chat- people feel quite reasonably comfortable talking to me because I hope I don't judge them. I've suffered so much. I mean even my life at church, I was brought up in the church, but again, you just always got the feeling when you were young that you were being judged and that's not right.

**I: We haven't really talked much about that, what role the church played with your mother.**

R: Yes. I mean the church was very important to her. I don't think it supported her much. It was very different, but she remembered very much the person who conducted their marriage. That wasn't actually quite true that she wasn't supported much. There was a curate. He was rather sweet. I think he was called Ken Daniels. I always remember I had chicken pox and he came to the house and came round the side of the house ringing a bell saying, "Unclean, unclean", like you would with lepers, to try and cheer me up. I was feeling a bit miserable because I'd got chicken pox in very hot weather. I think that was the thing, Mum found the priest helpful, but of course again, it was very, very different from what life is now.

When you go to a church now you've got children running all around and they sit in corners where they can do their drawing and that, but when she took me to church when I was small, I know she took a book. She wasn't allowed to take me up to communion. Nowadays everybody goes and they get their blessing and that, but not then, no. I had to sit in the pew and be very, very quiet while she went up. But I did do a lot. I went to Sunday school and I became a Sunday school teacher. I knew an awful lot about the bible and that. I got 90% I think for O Level scripture, largely because of being a Sunday

school teacher. Then I went through a period of disillusionment, as one does, when I got to university, but then I came back to it because the person I was living with was heavily within church music.

It's been quite a part all through my life, yes. I don't try and convert people, I'm no good at that. I know you're meant to, but I'm no good. Like my neighbour, she doesn't believe in anything. We're great friends, but I don't try and push it at all with her because I know people are entitled to their own views. But no, I do believe that my dad is looking at me and looking after me.

**I: So it was I think when you already had your first job, you were in your first job, that the War Widows' Association slowly, but surely started in the early 1970s.**

R: That's right, yes.

**I: Do you remember how your mother reacted, heard of it, got involved?**

R: I went into my second job in '72 and all I remember is that there was a lady called Jill Gee. Whether she got involved because of her connection with this SSAFA organisation, I'm not sure. I don't know how Mum discovered even that, but I just remember that we did get these parcels of clothes, second hand clothes that were sent by SSAFA so there must have been some sort of support out there, but it wasn't close. I mean there weren't real people to talk to, but somehow or other, maybe the War Office or whatever, the government, did send people details of organisations that might help and maybe Mum did get in touch. Also I think, yes, she got in touch to see if I could get a grant at some point with SSAFA I remember. I remember a little bit about that.

So how she knew this lady Mrs Jill Gee, but she came from the north of England. I think she met her when she came to London, but she and my mum did have conversations and that was how Mum knew that the war widows were getting started. She always wore her little chrysanthemum badge and her glider pilot wings together. Whatever she was wearing, she wore them everywhere she went.

**I: Did she get involved with the Association?**

R: No. She wrote both the magazine of the glider pilots and *Courage*, the magazine of the War Widows' [Association], she wrote them letters which have been published and which I have seen and possibly still have copies of, but again, it was always describing something about my dad and the past. There's one letter I've seen where she wrote, I don't think I'm going to remember the story completely, but it was something about going to a service and the priest in the pulpit was giving the sermon and I said to Mum, "Was that God up there?" She wrote that letter to somebody and I've seen that published. She wasn't a face to face person really and she wasn't a committee person or anything. Everything she did was really by correspondence. She had lovely handwriting. That's how I suddenly realised, really later than I should have done, that she was going blind, when it went from, in June I think 2007 or '06, she used to keep a diary and she wrote beautiful neat writing in her diary.

Then suddenly, from June that year I think, gradually the writing got bigger and then it was going sideways over the page and then it was back over the writing she'd already written on. It wasn't cataracts which I had, it must have been macular degeneration. She did actually lose her sight very rapidly really over a period of six months. But before that she had the most beautiful handwriting. They did want her to go back to work. She was very skilled in her field. She'd not had much education because of her illness, but she was very good at shorthand and typing, which nowadays of course it's not any

advantage, but she was very proud of the certificate she had of speed. She was very fast at taking shorthand and very fast at touch typing.

She used to do that, not for the War Widows' [Association], but for one of the little voluntary jobs she did which was typing, before the age of computers, she used to type all the address labels for the Glider Pilot Regiment so they could send out things. They would send her a roll of sticky labels which she had to feed through the typewriter. She always wanted to volunteer to do things, but only if she could do them at home. She didn't want to go and communicate much.

**I: Do you remember when the 1979 tax on the War Widows' Pensions got lifted finally by Margaret Thatcher?**

R: Oh yes, that was very important to Mum. She was so proud of it. There was something about, I won't probably get this quite right, but the widows pension was meant to be disallowed for council tax purposes. She was always battling with the local authority to make sure because when the first bill came through, they didn't allow for this. She would always write letters firmly saying, "Look, this is what's been done for us by the War Widows' Association. You can't include this in my council tax allocation." She was very keen to get everything that she thought she was entitled to. I think she did perhaps feel a bit that the country owed her a living in a way, which is understandable perhaps because she'd given up so much. I mean that's one of the things of course that I find quite hard to understand is that they really believed they were making a difference. I mean I was a terrific pacifist really. I always said if there was a war I wouldn't fight and I always thought that if everybody refused to fight there couldn't be wars, which is pretty naive.

But I couldn't quite tune in to the thing that Mum really believed, they were fighting for queen and country. She was a terrific royalist as well. She used to keep, in a frame on the wall, the letter that King George VI, it was not original, a copy of the letter that was sent about the country sending its sympathy for her sacrifice. I'm afraid I didn't like this very much because I thought that was a bit easy to say. But she stuck that up on the wall with my dad's medals all pinned round it. Since she died, I took the medals off. I couldn't bring myself to throw the thing actually away although I don't like it so I have kept it, but it's not on show. I did have my dad's medals re-ribboned and I have occasionally worn them. One of the things I've done is the Glider Pilot Regiment crosses for the Field of Remembrance at Westminster. When I go there I wear Dad's medals on the right-hand side.

**I: Did your mother go to remembrance events?**

R: She did, oh yes. For quite a while she went to the War Widows' [Association] one on the Saturday. I never went to that because I was always working I think and I couldn't really get away. But she went to that regularly and she also went to the opening of the Field of Remembrance before I took it on. The crosses used to be done by someone else and then I took it on in 2003. But yes, she went to that. There were pictures of here when the Queen Mother used to go 'round to look at that. The very first thing she tried to do with me, which was when she discovered I was car sick- it just shows how important it was to her- she got a taxi all the way from, I mean we couldn't even afford the bus fare from Eltham to London, but because of me not being very strong, I was only three, she got a taxi all the way from Eltham to London, but they had to stop on Blackheath for me to be sick.

But there used to be a commemorative service at St Martin-in-the-Fields. She went to that regularly, yes. I mean as long as I could keep her going, I took her down to Middle

Wallop, which as I said was what she felt was her spiritual home really and we used to go there on Remembrance Sunday. She had a friend down there who used to serve coffee because we used to have about a two-hour drive and then we'd get there in time for this lady to give us coffee, a Dutch lady who married an Englishman. Then we'd go to the little local church. Of course, now it's all much quieter because when I used to take Mum there was about three or four rows or glider pilot veterans. I think the last time I went a couple of years ago, I was the only representative of the Glider Pilot Regiment there. But yes, she was big on remembrance. She did go once to the rehearsal for the thing in the Albert Hall.

There was one quite nice thing, when she was in care, for the last two and a half years, when I realised she couldn't see, she went into this care home. Although the carers annoyed her if they asked why she'd never remarried, they were kind because they used to know that it was important to her. They used to go and sit with her for the two-minute silence on the 11th November, which was nice.

**I: You said that your paternal grandparents were outraged when you went on a school trip to Germany. Have you been since? Has your mother been?**

R: Mum never went abroad. Mum never had a driving licence. She never had a passport. She never went back to see where Dad died. I think the War Graves Commission, they put us in touch with a family who were asked to look after this grave that we were given the number of that said, “Known unto God”. When I was seventeen, apart from my two school trips when I was twelve and fourteen, the first thing I did independently was to go over and stay with this Dutch family. They took me to see this grave and so on. The woman came to England for the Coronation. That was before obviously. She had come to England and she came and visited us in 1953. We did keep in touch with them for a long time. Even when I sailed to Holland, I actually met her in about the 80s. Then since I retired, since 2002, I have gone every year to the Arnhem Pilgrimage. I have been a few times to D-Day, but not many, but for Arnhem I go every year.[3]

Now last year was the first year when there wasn't a formal glider pilot pilgrimage so we made our own arrangements, but a group of us, about ten, but without any veterans still went. But yes, I mean when I first went in 2002, it was an emotional experience to see the bridge, although it's not the same bridge, it's been reconstructed. Also, to see this rather beautiful, quite wealthy area of Oosterbeek, it's such a peaceful place with beautiful woods, to think that that was where Dad ended his life. But Mum never wanted to go back and never went there. When granny finally died I said, "Come on, it's time you did a bit of travelling." Being a loner, she said she'd like a desert island so I discovered this little island called Herm, which is near Guernsey and I took her there. The first time we went on the boat, she wasn't that keen on that. That was in 1988 this year that they opened the little section in the museum and we went to Cotford Hall. We did all that at the same time.

We did that for a few years, until 1992. She would fly to Guernsey and we'd take a short boat trip over and she'd stay on this ... She loved that. But that was the furthest so she never needed a passport. Sadly, in 1992, she became asthmatic. When she found breathing difficult, she was a bit scared and she didn't want to travel so after that we only went to places in England. The other important bit that was important to her, as well as the remembrance thing, there's a place in the National Memorial Arboretum and she heard about that from somebody in the 90s. I remember I took her there when it was just a field, nothing there at all, in about '94. By then she did get in touch with my father's

[3] See Fig. 3.

family and with my uncle, my father's brother, I think together they contributed to buying a tree. It was planted in '98 and we got the certificate.

Then we were going on these little holidays and I realised she was getting frailer and frailer. She was able to hear less. She couldn't talk to me in the car. She couldn't hear anything I was saying if I was driving her. In 2003, she said she'd like to go to Norfolk, she'd not been up there so I realised that I could get her across to the Arboretum from there. I got in touch and said, "Could you make sure the plaque is on the tree so that Mum can see it because I don't expect she'll make more than the one trip." So, we did manage that. They were so kind. They were wonderful. They made so much of an effort for her. They told her what kind of tree it was and gave her a bit of the leaf. It was lovely. It's a great big Lombardy poplar in a road called Yeomanry Avenue, which is the one that commemorates the Battle of Arnhem.

A really exciting thing, a great big tree, when Mum saw it, it was about ten feet high, it's now about 30 feet high, when Dad's best friend died, his daughter wanted to have a tree for her dad there. They are not planting any more trees for individuals so she asked my permission, which I gave obviously, for a plaque to be put for her dad beside my dad's tree. So, we've got now the two plaques, one commemorating Dad and one commemorating his best friend Bill. The lovely thing was that the glider pilots decided to have a glider pilot memorial up there, which is a huge stone that was brought over from the area of Arnhem, absolutely vast. It came on a low loader or something arranged by the Army. When I went up there for the opening of that, dedication or whatever of that, it turns out that they've put it right by my dad's tree. We were all sitting in the seats that they'd put out for us for the dedication and there was Dad's tree so that was really very nice as well.

I mean I've tried to keep in touch and I did quite a lot of work for the glider pilots in recent years. I became membership secretary. They closed down last Christmas. They took the vote from the veterans and the veterans agreed they should close. In some ways, you'd like it to go on until the last man's standing, but in other ways, there was about 150 left of them still alive. I was the membership secretary. There's a piece on the wall there that is what they presented to us for the final annual general meeting and out in the hall is a certificate I got. I got the Colonel Commandant's Commendation for my work for the glider pilots. I shall keep going to Arnhem because it's the last place Dad ever was, but I just would love to have known him, known something about him for real, rather than the idealised version from Mum.

**I: What was his full name?**

R: Gordon Albert Rickwood. I believe it was to do with General Gordon. I'm not quite sure if that's why he was called Gordon, but it could be. So, he was born in Burma because granddad, his father, paternal grandfather was in the Army. He was a bandsman. He was very good. He played the trombone. They were out in Burma so Dad was born there in 1920 and his sister was born there in 1922. She's still alive, but sadly she's very immobile and she has dementia. I don't know that she remembers Dad. She certainly wouldn't remember me I don't think. She still talks to her brother. Granny and Granddad Rickwood came back from Burma and quite a bit later they had two more children and that's why there's quite a gap now. So, my uncle was born in 1929 I think my aunt in 1936. So, she's not even ten years older than me. I still speak to her and try and keep in touch. I did take them to see this tree, but also the war affected them too. They're very nervous.

Uncle Basil has never driven a car. He worked for the Woolwich too. He wouldn't do any training to update his skills. He took early retirement when they wanted him to learn a

computer. I feel sorry for him in a way because I was a baby in the war so I don't remember it, but he was a child. I think the war affected him. It's affected me because Dad wasn't even there, but it's affected him because he remembers what it was like being a child when the bombs were coming over.

**I: How did your mum find it when you took her back to her honeymoon destination?**

R: I think she liked it, yes. She wasn't an emotional person really. That was one of the things I suppose, she wasn't someone I would ever tell what I really felt and I think she perhaps felt the same for me. There was a kind of restraint really. So yes, I mean she was very grateful that all these things had happened. I think she probably felt quite sad that it was all so late on. It would have been so nice if there had been more. I mean nowadays the war widows, as you said, feel part of a group right from the start when it really matters, but in a way, she'd found her own way for so many years that I think that came all a bit too late, but she was always very appreciative.

**I: Even when you went there together, she still wouldn't share anything with you?**

R: Oh no. I remember when I was a kid, we didn't have any sex education or anything at school in my day and I remember asking her something about this. She was too embarrassed to tell me anything about it. It was only from friends I discovered all the things one needs to know. She was very reserved, but I mean that was how they were in those days. Yes, I mean she was always very unsympathetic to people who were emotional because I think she'd learned that it wasn't a good idea- I'm afraid I've learned that too- it's not a good idea to show people your weaknesses. I tend to be a bit the same, don't let people see how they can hurt you. It can make you hard. I hope it hasn't made me hard, but I think it made her a bit hard. I try to remember. I try to say to myself, "Don't be too hard."

**I: You said you weren't a particularly athletic child and you said you were a bit sickly and you didn't enjoy meal times, has that changed?**

R: Absolutely. The other person who she went to for support, apart from the church, was the GP because the same GP family carried on ... The one who delivered me was the father and his son went on as a GP and they were the ones that looked after us all through my childhood and teenage years. I remember the younger one, the son, saying to Mum, "You don't have to force children to eat. They'll never starve. But she'll never enjoy eating," absolutely untrue. As soon as I got taken out by guys and that and discovered that eating could actually be quite nice and a social activity, I changed completely. So now I go back to this little island of Herm because it has wonderful gourmet meals. I mean I have never been ill really. I never miss a day's work I don't think. I had German measles in 1973 when I was in my second job. That was a bit nasty because it's not very nice as an adult, but I think I had a week off because of that.

But apart from that, no, I've travelled all over the world and never had altitude sickness, never been seasick. I've sailed for 30 years and almost every crew person who has ever sailed with me has been seasick, but I haven't. Somehow or other I turned a corner. I've been very lucky. I've got arthritis in my knee now and I wish I could walk better because I love walking, but apart from that, I try really hard to keep my brain going, to stave off the dementia so I do a lot of mental things, like being treasurer and that. I've never been one to do many athletic things. I tried Pilates, and when it got a bit more advanced and you were expected to put your toes over your head, I couldn't do that. But I do aqua aerobics, as I said, and I love walking. I mean, I'm fine really, yes, very healthy, lucky. I take Glucosamine and Chondroitin for my knee, self-prescribed, but not on any medication, no. No health problems. I've got a lousy annuity because of it.

**I: So you said you made your mind up quite early that you never wanted children, you never had children. You never got married?**

R: No. I lived with somebody for many years, but we didn't marry.

**I: Is there anything else you'd like to share, that we've not talked about, Anne? Do you feel like you've skipped over something you feel like you haven't had a chance to talk about?**

R: Well, no. I hope I've conveyed the right impression about Mum. I owe her so much, I really do, and I really wish I had said to her that I did. I was too proud. It was awful that I didn't say it, but she sacrificed everything for me to give me this education. It's true. I managed to get a very good career because of the education that she was so determined I would have. I just wish she hadn't sacrificed her own life so much. I have no idea what it would be like to have a father. I can't imagine being in a family with a father. I don't have any models to ... I don't compare myself, really. I think Mum always felt uncomfortable in families that were all complete. There was one woman that I used to call aunty, she was a bit jealous because they used to sit in church, father one end, mother the other and the children in between. She resented that sort of thing a bit. She deserved to be happier.

Very, very sad for her really, but I don't know what difference it made to me because I can't imagine, but it must have made the most monumental difference to her life, not having a husband, not having a home, the sort of things that people expect. They expect to get married and move into their own home away from their parents and choose all they want. That was the sort of thing she was really looking forward to, choosing curtains and carpets and things that matched and all that. That just all went. When I look back and think, I knew someone for a very long time, how awful it must have been to just have two and a half years with someone and then for it just to end, terrible. I don't think people should ever forget. That's why I do want to try and support the veterans and so on while I can.

**I: Did you ever get the sense that your mother blamed anyone for your father's death or was she angry? I know you said she was bitter.**

R: I don't know really. No, I mean she never seemed to think that the war was a bad thing. She seemed to think it was inevitable. As I said, she was incredibly patriotic. I think that was one of the things she probably didn't like about me because I was a bit of a rebel. She was such a one to follow authority. If someone up there said you've got to do it, you've got to do it. That was something she used to say to me, "I couldn't have treated my mother the way you've treated me," like leaving home and that sort of thing. I mean for instance I think she would have done better if she and me had gone off somewhere. However poor we were, she lived somewhere on her own with me, but I mean she realised that Granny went all to pieces when granddad died so she felt an obligation to them. That's how she thought life should be, the obligation of the young to the older ones.

She probably didn't forgive me for, I don't know, not giving up my life to look after her in the way she'd given up to look after her mother, but I didn't feel that was something I would be ... I didn't think it would be any good for either of us really. I don't think she would have had very good care if I'd looked after her. I think she had much better care the way I arranged it for her. No, I think that's it ... .

**I: Thank you. Thank you so much, Anne.**

Fig. 1: Two photographs of Anne's mother, Patricia Starr Rickwood (née Vicary). Anne's father carried these two photographs of his wife with him. The image on the right was taken on their wedding day, 7th March 1942.

Fig. 2: Left: The only photograph of Anne with both her mother and father. Right: Anne with her father. 1944.

# A Poignant Visit

IN THE CANADIAN MILITARY CEMETERY at Groesbeek near Nijmegen stands an impressive monument to those soldiers who fell during the fighting in that area, but who have no known graves. Among those are some fifty five Glider Pilots.

One of those Glider Pilots was Staff Sergeant Gordon Rickwood. His death was not officially confirmed until about nine months after it occurred, and Pat, his widow spent all that time hoping that she would be notified he was still alive. During this time she made many enquiries of her own, and eventually had a reply from a soldier who had been a passenger in 'Ricky's' glider who told her that her husband had been killed on the Landing Zone. The whole story is graphically told in the Museum of Army Flying, where there is a photo of him at his daughter Anne's christening, taken shortly before he took off for Arnhem.

This year Anne was among those in the G.P.R.A. party to Arnhem, and she took time out from the Association programme to visit Groesbeek for the first time. Nick and Freda Nicholls accompanied her, as did Rose Eastman, whose late husband, Ron, had created the marvellous Museum tableau telling the story. Luuk Buist, Cokkie, and Franz Stek also joined this special pilgrimage.

Sadly, Pat is not up to travelling such a distance these days, indeed, she has never been to Groesbeek to see her husband's name on the memorial, but flowers from her garden were laid in tribute.

**RWGN**

*Anne Rickwood sees her father's name on the Groesbeek Memorial for the first time.*

Fig. 3: "A Poignant Visit", *The Eagle*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (December 2002)