History. Memories. Heritage.

An Interview with Maggie Goren

5 June 2017

Conducted by Nadine Muller

The War Widows' Association of Great Britain

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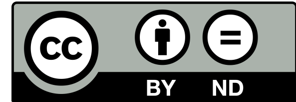

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

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

I: So, today is the 5th June 2017. Could you tell me your full name, please?

R: My full name is Ina Margaret Goren. Called, Maggie, sorry.

I: It is all right.

R: [Laughter.]

I: How old are you, Maggie?

R: I am 79.

I: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood, and where you grew up?

R: I was born in London. I grew up in Hertfordshire, and, let me see, I was born in 1937, so it was just before the second World War. We were outside the evacuation area, although my father worked in White Hall, alongside Mr Churchill and in 1944 we were evacuated for one year. My parents took us down to Cornwall with my grandparents to look after us when the doodlebugs started coming over because they could drop just about anywhere. So, he [my father] had dug a shelter underneath the garage but, unfortunately, one night with the children, three of us, on bunk beds set against the wall and my mother and father slept on a lilo on the floor and my mother flung out her arm in a dream and found that she was in water. Leapt up on the lilo and promptly fell into the water, it had risen through the clay. [Laughter.]

So, that was the end of that bunker, shelter, whatever you like to call it. So, then we went off to Cornwall where I had an absolutely brilliant time. Well, sort of. I loved the countryside, so it was lovely. Loved the seaside, so it was lovely. And I can honestly say, although my son doesn't believe this, that I knew about a war being on but at that age, age 7, it doesn't affect you. It is just a happening. All right, separated from the parents. I think they came down twice in that year. But, basically, you are not aware. How can you be aware of what's going on? I met various uncles who were in the forces and so on. But, there you go. So that was my youth – childhood, really, not youth. [Laughter.]

I: What did you get up to in Cornwall, then?

R: Well, I can tell you that there were no buses. There were very few cars on the road in 1944 so we three children walked to school which was a school that was housing all the evacuees in the area. So, I don't know how many there were in the one class. I think we were all in the one class, as I remember it. We walked two and a half miles to school and then we walked two and a half miles home and we didn't think anything off it at all. Rather different from today. So, oh yes, something really wonderful happened, which was sad in a way. There was a convoy that had got as far as off the North Coast of Cornwall then, obviously heading for port somewhere, and one of the ships was torpedoed and it lost, well, I don't know about loss of life but there was certainly a loss of the contents, which was food for Great Britain in those days, from America, which happened to land up on our beach.

About a mile away the beach was, a very long, sandy beach, and these crates of food, which were all wrapped in oiled wrapping. All perfectly dry. There was powdered egg, which was the only egg we could get in those days. There was sugar. There was chewing gum galore, which I was not allowed to have any chewing gum. But … so whether that was meant for the US forces in Britain, I don't know. What else was there? Egg, sugar, chewing gum, chocolate! Loads of chocolate, and it was amazing how that beach suddenly was full of people dragging stuff out of these broken up cardboard boxes that had floated to the shore and were absolutely intact. So, I don't quite remember why we were down there. And, I'm sure it was at dead of night, when the coast guards weren't around [laughter], but it was a bit like that story Whiskey Galore. A story of Compton Mackenzie, when probably whiskey that was going out of Scotland towards the United States the ship was wrecked, and they made a film of it, didn't they? So, it was a bit like that. So, you couldn't forget that.

I: Did you get anything of the precious cargo?

R: Oh, yes. Not the chewing gum, but we certainly had chocolate and egg powder and sugar. Not very much. I was with my grandparents, they were very, you know, they probably thought it wasn't quite the right thing to do. But, then, if we didn't have it who else would have it, you know? So, that was one happening. As children we used to collect the eggs from the barns from the chickens. So we had fresh eggs, we didn't need powdered egg. Then we lived on the back side of the farmhouse. The farmer very kindly had arranged with my parents that we should live there. We had a bedroom above, we had a living room below. My grandmother had to cook on a paraffin oil stove.

I can remember, on one occasion, there was a door into the kitchen of the main farmhouse where they had a Dutch oven, which is a coal or wood-fired oven, where the farmer's wife did all the cooking and she knocked on our door and said would we like some apple pie and ambrosia? Ambrosia was the name for cream, which was not real cream. And in came this apple pie which was as tough as old boots but the cream was absolutely delicious. It was homemade farm cream. She said to us, "Now, my dears," she said, "that's ambrosia. We don't have real cream here. That's ambrosia." Well, we knew no better [laughter]. So, it was a wonderful time. Enjoyed it. [Laughter]. Then got back to … VE Day must have happened down there. And then we got back to London and Victory over Japan took place, and that was more or less the end of the War for me as a child.

I: So, whilst you were in Cornwall, do you know anything about what your parents' lives looked like in London?

R: Not really. My father was working at the Home Office ... or the War Office I think then, because he was a civil servant, working in Whitehall. He did talk about various people that were in and out of the underground bunkers below Whitehall, where the War Office

had all its planning departments and whatever. The one thing he did tell me was he was an ARP Warden, that's Air Raid Precautions Warden. After his work he would have days where he would stay there at night and would go up on the roof and they'd watch bombs falling and their job was to get people safely to shelters, or as he once told me, to pick up parts, body parts, when people didn't quite make it to the shelter, or a building got a direct hit. And as he was a pacifist, he was always prepared to go and work as a Medical Orderly on the front line. He offered his services but he had a reserved occupation in Whitehall.

But, obviously, he would have been a Doctor if he had had the chance of an education, which he didn't because of his father being killed in the First World War. So basically, he helped as much as he could. I think my mother was a secretary somewhere. So that's what they did. They came down to visit us twice in Cornwall, but I don't think … I think we got on with life, we didn't miss them. We were always really glad to see them [laughter] and sad when they went but then we got on with life again. We were only children.

I: Well, you find treasure on the beach, so ... .

R: Absolutely. Oh, it was wonderful, for me. But, there you go.

I: So, this was towards the end of the Second World War –

R: Yes.

I: – your father was working at the War Office, you said he was a pacifist and as you have also already mentioned, he lost his own father in the First World War. Do you want to tell me a little bit about your father and his childhood?

R: Yes.

I: Do you know about it?

R: There were three sons.[1] My father was the third son, and there was one on the way, in 1918, and his father … I don't know when his father went for his military service, or joined up, or was made to join up, or required, rather, to join up. I don't know. But he was in France, he was in the trenches and from the letters you get, you realise that these men did not want their families to know what dreadful circumstances they were in, what a terrible life they were leading. Horrendous situation, really. So they would write letters home and be very … well, you would think they were almost on holiday abroad. It's very sad, I think. I don't know if he wrote to my grandmother. He obviously came home on leave because my grandmother was pregnant in 1917. My father's father, Lance Corporal Matthew Evans, was actually killed in April 1918, and his fourth son was born in May 1918. So my grandmother had four sons to bring up. She had hoped that this little boy who was born in 1918 would be a girl because [with] three sons, she thought perhaps she might get some feminine help from a little girl. I don't know how she felt. Her husband wasn't there. It always chokes me. Her husband wasn't there, this child was born, and I don't think she had much family. She had come from Suffolk. You can't imagine it, really. Then, it turns out to be a boy. Another boy. The fourth boy. So she dressed him in dresses and kept his hair long until he was about three.

Now my father was six when his father was killed, and I do know a story that I put it in a poem somewhere … that all the widows were sent so-called medals. They were base

[1] See Fig. 1.

metal actually but they were in a star shape, and they were sent in a little box … maybe a bit of velvet in it and a ribbon attached, and that was that. And I suppose my grandmother, at that time ... that is what you got. I mean, let's face it, the government was impoverished by that time by the war. So they sent these little medals out. My father, apparently, and I am not sure whether it was a couple of years later, he took this medal out of the box, he threw it across the room, and he stamped on the box. So he was obviously … unforgiving, if you like.

Now, the children had all gone to church. I think it was the thing to do in those days, and I believe he was a choir boy. Maybe his mother required him to go to church after his father was killed. But I can tell you that when he was an adult he didn't go to church. He had lost any faith that he might have developed because he just saw war as carnage, as not the way to achieve anything in life, and especially the First World War, let's face it, was not a war of defence. It was a war … well, set up by a couple of madmen. Well … what was his name? The Kaiser … I have forgotten his name now. So when the Second World War began, he [my father] did register as a pacifist. In fact, his youngest brother, born after the war, also became a pacifist, but he was only seventeen or eighteen. He had to go before a tribunal and my father did the defence for him in that tribunal. So he went into the Pioneer Corps, and so he did his army service in the Pioneer Corps. The other two brothers, one was very pleased to be a Captain in the war. He came up through the ranks, I think. The other one was in the aircraft industry, building gun turrets for aircraft at DeHavillands,[2] I think. Anyway, that is my father's part in a … well, his childhood and part in the Second World War.

I think I would say he was really deeply, affected by the loss of his father, although he was well aware that many families had lost many more of their family members in the First World War. So he was always conscious of that but I think it had an effect on the way he thought and behaved and that trickled down to our generation really. He was a man who found it very difficult to express his emotions. But, he was a man of great principle and there were times in family history where things went wrong and he was always there. But he wasn't a man who could express his emotions and you wonder if that goes back to the time of losing his father ... and his mother, perhaps how she dealt with it. I don't know. I know I was … she was a woman who couldn't express her emotions. Maybe that was all wiped out at the time that happened. It's difficult to imagine these days, isn't it? I mean, there is so much help available today.

There was no help … as you know the other mothers up the road had the same thing happen to them. I do remember, she died in 19 … oh, when was it … 1948, she died. My father said it was the only time he ever saw her weep, shortly before she died. So, I don't know, there were many, many years of not weeping. She was a very strong character. Very strong character. I stayed with her for a bit, when my mother was ill in hospital. I admired her but she wasn't a person that you could get very close to, really. She enjoyed having me, I was her granddaughter. [Laughter.]

I: Do you remember when this was, roughly?

R: This was when I was about eight. So, it would be shortly before she died. Yes.

I: Were you aware, at that age, that your grandfather had died in the war?

R: Oh, yes.

I: Were you aware that she was a war widow?

[2] Respondent correction: Boulton Paul.

R: I wasn't really. Yes, I was aware that her husband had died and that my father was a little boy when his dad had died. I think I would … I wanted her to tell me more, to talk to me but I realised she was private, so you couldn't go there. But, how she lived, I am not quite sure. Because they didn't have the handouts they have got today. One funny story was that the milkman fancied her but I don't think he was prepared to take it further than that with four sons. Perhaps he had a wife, I don't know. [Laughter.]

Oh dear ... But, no, she never remarried, of course. So she had to manage, and I know what her four sons did: they bought the house for her. Because they all had to go out to work very early from the age of fourteen, something like that, and they managed to buy the house for her that she lived in, in Kingsbury, West London. So, yes, I was sad when she died because I thought that lady hasn't had a life. That is what I thought, when I was quite young. So it affected me more than anything else. That was my first real contact with someone, you know, who had been involved with a war, lost their husband. It bothered me. I thought, how could she manage four children, four sons. How did she bring them up? I don't know. And, my parents never talked about it.

I: So, did your dad ever tell you anything about his childhood?

R: Virtually nothing.

I: So, he was equally private, was he?

R: Yes. He was very private. Until, of course, I suppose I can mention at this stage, that he … I tell you he didn't go to church but when I came back from abroad with my family and came to live in the countryside near them because my father wasn't very well at the time, and we went to an Armistice Day service at the church and he came. We had a new, young vicar, and I think he was focussing on, "well, we should think of peace. We should do this, we should do that". And he [my father] had gone there to remember his father and there were other people from the services who were there and they were equally a bit disappointed with the vicar's address. Well, he was only about 27 at the time, and he [my father] wrote to his aunt. She was my grandfather's sister, my grandfather who got killed. He was badly affected by that service and I can read you a bit.

I: So, he wrote this to … ?

R: He wrote this to his aunt. Aunt Lucy, who was really getting on at that time. She may have even been 90, I don't know.

I: She was his dead father's sister …

R: Yes, his dead father's sister. So, he said:

> "I thought of you on Sunday last. We attended the annual Armistice service at our local church and so my thoughts were centred on 1918 and the loss of father, who you knew far better than we as children. There were, of course, many present who had suffered a similar or greater loss, in both wars, and who, I am sure, shared my disquiet after listening to the address by our very young vicar, who displayed a complete lack of comprehension of the feelings of those with a personal experience of what Remembrance Day is all about. I have felt very depressed by the thought that each new generation fails to learn from the experience of the past. And then, yesterday, our daughter Margaret sent up to me a little poem which she had written in memory of her grandfather, who of course she never knew. I am enclosing a copy and I think that you will agree with me that all is not lost and that at least some of the present generation have got it right. I knew vaguely that on a trip to France she had gone out

of her way to visit one or two cemeteries from both wars. But, I had no idea how deeply she felt."

I: So, of course, he is referring to you there, Maggie?

R: He is referring to me there, and –

I: You wrote him a poem … ?

R: I wrote him a poem, because I realised he was upset at this particular service. So, I went home and I went quietly into our front room, and I sat and wrote a poem.

I: How old were you then, when you wrote this?

R: Oh, I had my children then. I was –

I: This was in 1980, was it, this was Remembrance Day 1980?

R: 1980, yes. So, we had come back from Israel in 1977, so I was about 43 when I wrote this poem.

I: Do you want to read it to us?

R: Yes, if you would like me to read it? It's just called …

'Remembrance Sunday 1980'
(To The Memory of My Grandfather Killed in Battle 1918)

"Every year, it is the same:
autumn melting on the pavements,
a mild astonishment that weather
could be so suitably grey.

No mourning in the trees,
but for chance lightning,
act of God,
they drop their leaves naturally.

Every year, it is the same,
the inexplicable sorrow falling
like snow on the old olives
and the green age hawking
among their gnarled roots,
act of God,
until the spring shoots.

Every year it is the same,
cold tears spilling into hearts
from vast seas of graves,
rolling in a deafening quiet
along our numbed nerves,
hurting our foolishness
into self forgetting,
act of faith,
where deeper homage serves.

I walked amongst you once
at Arromanche,
the air so still,
I hardly dared to breath.
It seemed just then a sacrilege
to stare, and turn away,
for part of me is there, in you,
in this day, which is all my days."

I: Your father clearly appreciated it.

R: I believe my mother said she had never seen him cry before but he cried when he read that.

I: He felt that, unlike the vicar, you had captured remembrance.

R: He was surprised that I related in any way to his father and his suffering, I suppose. So he thought it didn't go down from generation to generation.

I: Because, he didn't talk much about it?

R: Because he wouldn't talk about it. So, there we go.

I: But yet it sounds like you have always been keenly aware of how he was affected, of losing his father and being brought up by a war widow?

R: Yes. I think in some way the lack of ability to show emotion affected my brothers as well as myself. I was kind of the apple of his eye because I was the girl. I was the sandwich, between two boys. I kind of thought like him. I had his mental approach to life, you know. But, my elder brother, who was brilliant, actually… and he went to Cambridge and he studied zoology, biology, natural sciences. My father was very disappointed because he couldn't see the point of that… when, if he had that kind of brain, why couldn't he become a doctor? Which is what he had always wanted to do. I think he would have been a very good doctor. But, if you have to go out of school at fourteen and get a job, which was with the Post Office, as a sorter… although he had been offered a scholarship ... I mean, this was just a working-class family. My father was bright and he had been offered a scholarship but my grandmother couldn't afford for him to take it up, she had no money.

I: A scholarship for…?

R: For a secondary school, where he would have gone on, you know… and he left at fourteen. He would have gone on until eighteen, probably perhaps to university. The money wasn't there. She probably said no, you know, the other boys aren't doing it. He was the only one that got offered a scholarship. So she couldn't possibly, you know, favour one child over the other. So, yes, that's what happened. He was upset with my elder brother because he saw him wasting his talents. Actually he [my brother] became a brilliant naturalist. He has been awarded prizes and all sorts. Now lives in North Scotland and I am going to see him shortly. So, yes, he is a lovely guy, but he was deeply affected by my father's attitude, generally. He [my father] was harsh. I think even my own children […] … one of them recognises my father as being very stern and severe. He was a man of great compassion, actually. But, he had difficulty showing this. Hardly surprising. So, yes, I think my elder brother suffered from this. Maybe the younger one too, I don't know.

I: So, after your grandfather died and your grandmother was left a war widow … you don't know any particular details, do you, about what help she may have got, if any? Because, she didn't talk about it … ?

R: There was a pension, but you can find it for yourself what the pension was in 1919, 1920, whenever it was. It was a very small pension. So, all the boys had to … they delivered newspapers, they did all sorts of other jobs before they actually got a job. But they all had to get together and provide some money. But I mean how she managed up to the time … . Well my father was six. He was the third in line. So, the other boys would have been probably eight and ten, something like that. So, you know, for all that period she had had to manage on her own, I think, without anything other than a war widow's pension. I am sure your association would be able to find out what that was.

I: It was minimal.

R: It was absolutely minimal. There were no child benefits and all this sort of thing which people assume today is a right and a necessity. Somehow she survived and I can tell you that all four sons became independent and got on with their lives and achieved… bought their own homes … had good lives. And I think that was partly her strength. She was a bit of a disciplinarian. She had to be. How can you be anything else with four sons? I know. I have got four sons [laughter]. So they didn't grow up believing that somebody owed them a living, no way. I can remember my uncle, that was the second one, Uncle Ernie, he was a great laugh. He wanted to get out from under his mother's shoes, so he went up to what was called the Welsh Harp. I think it is still there in North West London. It wasn't a mile away, hardly that. He had a good time with what you would call the … was it the post-war hippies?

They were all hanging out around the Welsh Harp sleeping rough, swimming, sunbathing, it must have been summer. Because, he told me about it, and oh, the sort of people he met. He said, for example, there was one lad there who used to earn sixpence going to local dances where he would hire himself out to ladies who had nobody to dance with [laughter] ... a bit of a gigolo. Then he would get back and sleep on the bank of the Welsh Harp in the rough. But, yes, he said, oh he was a gigolo and they would be queuing up to get, you know … For a sixpence he could buy his fags out of that and a bottle of beer etc. That was after the Second World War. So, he had to get out from under his mother's feet, and yes, it was tough all round really. But they all made their way, these four lads. One became a car mechanic engineer, had his own garage. One of them did all sorts, owned 21 houses, at the last count. He was a cabinet maker before the war, but then he did all sorts of things. He was a foreman in charge of what went on at Wembley Stadium in the… probably in the 60s, I think. And then the other one become a civil servant, and worked at Colindale Newspaper Museum. My father carried on in the civil service and became a Senior Executive Officer.[3] So they all did okay, thanks to the strength of their mother. But I believe in female strength and what upsets me is that it is not only still going on, it is getting worse! They say, "Oh, there are less wars now." Are there? I don't know. There are more people killed in a more disgusting way. That is my feeling. And it is always the women who have to pick up the pieces.

I: And, of course, your grandmother lost her husband in the First World War only to then see her four sons potentially put in danger by yet another one.

R: Well, certainly two of them were. I can remember the second one, who was building… well, he was the one who had been the cabinet maker but during the war he was working

[3] Respondent correction: Higher Executive Officer.

in the aircraft industry and they were making gun turrets. Many, many years late he was here. Well, he was 80, I think. And he was talking about a fellow worker or a pilot. They used to do tests [of gun turrets] over the Hampshire, sorry, the Southampton waters. One of them came down … and he burst into tears, at the age of 80. You don't realise how these things affect people, you know. So I never saw my father cry. I didn't. My mother did, but not me.

I: Did he ever talk about those days when he first had to go to work at the Post Office? Did he have any stories about that? About his early jobs?

R: I can tell you something funny. He was a Post Office sorter when I was born. So it had that on my birth certificate, and he then took the civil service exam and passed easily and then started his upward grade in the civil service. So he was a little bit … . He never denied being a Post Office sorter, but he didn't actually want it to appear on my birth certificate when I had to present my birth certificate to somebody, so he put a piece of elastoplast, over the piece which said PO Sorter. I knew it said that underneath [laughter]. So he was obviously slightly bothered by this. Proud man [laughter]. But he talked about the days of Mount Pleasant ... I think where he worked as a sorter. Of course it's all done digitally now, they just feed in the envelopes and they read the postcode and that is it. They used to have people sitting there, sorting out all these letters and putting them in the right slot. But he wasn't there long because he was very bright really. A bright man. But at least they made sure that we all had a good education. That's one result of, you know, if you don't get it yourself, you make sure your children have it. So we all went to good schools. In fact, they [my parents] left Hertfordshire, just outside Potters Bar, came into London to ensure that we would all get a good education. After the Second World War, of course. Yes.

I: How do you think your father felt about not having been able to have an education?

R: He was very proud and I think he refused to admit that it made a lot of difference. He rose quite quickly in the civil service. He finished up by being the secretary to the Anglo-Egyptian Resettlement Board in 1956 after the Suez Canal debacle. All the Brits were chucked out of Egypt and he had to… he was the secretary of that Board. He did quite well but, I think, in refusing to admit that education might have helped him. He read … . He would never read any literature, he said to me 'it's not true'. I was a great reader of books because I went to a good school and I was an avid reader. My father said, 'I am not reading that sort of stuff,' whether it was Dickens or Trollope or Jane Austen. 'It is not true', he said. So, he would only read biographies, you see. I think he would resent the fact that somebody thought he hadn't made his way and wasn't clever enough without an education. I remember I once said to him would he like to join our evening class. My husband and I went to a philosophy class every week. For ten years we went to these classes.

He looked at me strangely, as if to say, how dare I suggest that he needed to go to philosophy classes? I mean, I was going for the edification of it, to learn something. So there was something there about his having missed the opportunity but the big thing he felt bad about is he would have liked to have been a doctor. So he was always there in the house to mend people, if something went wrong. You know he would have books on it and so on. But, otherwise, he didn't want anybody to mention that he wasn't … . He wrote beautifully, you know, but he did leave school at fourteen and that was that.

I: You have got a letter here, Maggie, from 1918 …

R: I have, yes.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about that? You have transcribed it, haven't you?

R: I have written it out because it's … [difficult to read in parts].

I: By whom is this? And, to whom?

R: Well, it is from my grandfather on the 14th January 1918 to Auntie Lucy:

> "My Dear Sis.
>
> In answer to, may I say, many of your interesting letters which I have not been able to answer in turn owing to 'fever' of circumstances." [He was in the trenches, at the time.] I think it is just on a month since I have been able to write anything but field cards to anyone. Annie [my grandmother] tells me it's funny to receive so many of these and no letters. But as long as she receives them she knows I am well and does not mind so much. Well, Sis, I was glad to hear you had a good time Xmas. You can guess I would have loved to have been there. You asked me what kind of Xmas I had? Well, considering Fritz tried to gas me for two hours on Xmas we, beside sending the usual fireworks over and considering it froze our marrow on the 23rd, thawed it on the 24th ... (Something, I can't read) us up on the 25th and washed us out on the 26th, painted us with mud all over on the 27th, for all these trifles we had stew for dinner and tea for tea, 1 loaf between10 men but plenty of best cream crackers we call them, 10 of us kept ourselves warm by the heat thrown off 1 candle. A very valuable 1, by the way, as it was the last of the Mohicans. These things represent the dull side of my Xmas day. The bright one, was peculiarly 2 parcels. One from mother with items from Dad, Edie, Jack, and Arnold in all. The other arrived from Jessie, fags, chocolates, cake and John's Christmas pudding. I also received just around that date many letters from kind friends so was not at all forgotten and felt contented and bright. The boys of my section enjoyed the contents as well as myself.
>
> Things are much the same in the New Year … snow for a day or so then thaw and mud and water. OK well one has to see it to realise what it is like. Glad to stay still well and glad to hear from you and all at home same I heard today.
>
> Dear Lucy, I must thank you very much indeed for your kindness to Annie and the boys. This Xmas again I appreciate it far more than anything else I can think of and I'm sure it cheers Annie up ever so much to hear from you because she is so pleased about it when she writes to me and I am glad to say they all are well at home. Herbert [my father] is getting especially fat. [Laughter]. The other boys also get on and Ernie who used to be rather slow is getting quite a nice writer! They all had a good time Xmas, Auntie Lucy, [can't read next words] Dad, Mother, Edie and did very well indeed. You can guess what pleasure it gave me to hear they had done so well. Now, Sis, I must conclude, not because I have nothing to say but have no time. Well, my best wishes for a happy prosperous New Year.
>
> I remain, your loving brother, Arthur Evans, xxxx."

So that was four months before he died ... three or four months before he died. There you go.

I: So, this letter was to his sister?

R: Yes.

I: It sounds like he was in touch with your grandmother, as well?

R: It sounds as though he sent her the field cards and not letters. I don't know why. I think he said more in these letters to his sister. Obviously he didn't want to upset his wife. I mean, he gives a fairly clear description there of what's happening. And, perhaps he didn't say that, he just sent a field card saying ... doing well, getting on all right. Love Matthew ... or whatever. So that's what you imagine. Plus, he was a very nice man, he was a very considerate man, a loving man. So he realised how hard it must be for his wife, obviously, and he didn't want her upset. She had three children, one on the way, when he wrote that to his sister.

I: He sounds very grateful that his sister, clearly, had some involvement with your grandmother. Some contact.

R: Yes, all the time, I imagine. I don't know. I think I met Auntie Lucy once. Another fine lady. A strong lady. And no different from what happened to thousands of others. But it is nice to have that personal recollection and there are some more letters that he wrote to the same sister which I haven't yet, as it were, translated because it is very difficult to read, isn't it? So there you go. So when I heard about the War Widows' Association on the radio, I think it was on Woman's Hour, because I wanted my grandmother's story told for my father's sake and everything, I thought it would be nice, you know, to get in touch and offer what I knew about my grandmother … as a sort of plea to for goodness sakes stop this fighting, gentlemen. Find a better way to do it. But, of course, you can't and we are suffering now, aren't we, with people who have got ideologies which will land up in terrorism, or … it's all so sad, really. I don't think there are many women terrorists. There have been some, the Bader Meinhof group. There were some young women involved in that, but, yes, they were revolutionaries, I suppose. But mostly you don't get them blowing themselves up and knifing people on streets. I shouldn't be saying this really, should I? You can cut it out. As I said to you before, it is the testosterone.

But you know, we live in a world where there is such disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'; countries where people can't make a living because of the climate and everything else. We don't seem to be able to share out what we have got, that is the sad thing, more equitably. And then people are surprised when you get young people, who are the most idealistic age I suppose is between 16-25, that's when you need to put the goodness in, if you are going to put it in at any time. Instead of which they are being fed awful … I don't know. What do you call it? ... People need a sense of identity but if they have to go to the lengths that modern terrorism does just to find an identity, it is a bit sad. What's lacking that young people don't know the difference, you know? All the main religions basically say you shouldn't kill. Women really aren't suitable for fighting because they are the ones who carry the new life in them, and I don't see how you can carry new life and give birth to it and then kill anything, really. That to me, the two things don't go together. But then I think that men and women are biologically different. I get into terrible trouble for this, I really do [laughter]. I have written all sorts of things about it, but yes, just between you and me [laughter] ... you can cut this out. But, yes, there are men you see, who grow up with sensitivity and they don't want to fight. They really don't want to fight. Until they all stop fighting … but, their governments … you can see what's happening you know. You have got something, you don't want to lose it. Somebody hasn't got something and wants to grab it. I think we are very uncivilised. I am not allowed to say that in some situations. In some company, I am not allowed to say that we are uncivilised. But, I think we have got a long way to go yet. Yet there is all this aspiration, there's … I see it, in art and music and literature. There's this aspiration for something better out there. But we are grounded and we are stuck in survival, I suppose, and that involves war. That, I think, mostly involves women getting left behind, you know, with –

I: **Like your grandmother?**

R: Like my grandmother. Like so many people I have met across this life.

I: **It sounds like you have really had a political influence from your father losing his father in the war. You said he was a pacifist?**

R: Oh, yes. Yes, well, he was a man of great compassion. I think, he just wanted something better for his own children. He wanted a better life for his own children. Although it was my mother who was very keen on the education ... and going up in the world. She was always trying to get us a better education. Oh dear. But, yes, that's the way he tried to put it right. But do you know, in the end, he moved out of London, because it was dirty, the pollution was getting greater. When was it? It would be around about the 60s… 50s, 60s. So, he retired at 55, and then he had to wait for his government pension until he was 65. But, he came down to the countryside, where I am now, South Warwickshire. Basically, he restored cottages, he restored his own… bought one, and restored it beautifully. But I can see him always looking, with his arms across the gate, looking across the countryside he loved so much but with that look in his face of… not quite contented.

Something, basically was wrong there, you know. He went for what he could get. He achieved what he wanted, in a way. He got the countryside. He got the beautiful cottage. But there was something eating at him I think, always. I think they were all affected in the family. But he was affected the most I think, of the four boys. Definitely. So, this had a knock-on effect. So if anybody thinks it is all over when, you know, the father dies, or whatever. No, it is not. It goes down through the offspring.

I: **It has an impact over generations?**

R: Has an impact, yes, definitely. I mean, I am a pacifist. But I haven't had to stand up in court, or anything like that. I think the arguments are very difficult. The arguments… if you are attacked, you will defend. We are animals. That is what we do. So I am, kind of, a theoretical pacifist [laughter]. Oh dear.

I: **I know you said, your father didn't talk that much about losing his father. He doesn't sound like someone who shared an awful lot, and all that kind of thing. But, do you ever recall your father talking about his mother? How did he talk about her, at all? Did you get any sense of his feelings for his mother, or how he perceived her?**

R: He was the one who sorted out problems in the family with the other brothers, you know, who fell out with their mother here and there. He was the one who did the sorting out. But he never… well, I was only eight, when my grandmother died. So he might have spoken to my mother about things, about his mother, but I don't think he did a lot. Maybe it was something he shut off in order to get on with life. The fact that he said to my mother, that she [his mother] had never cried ... his mother had never cried until I think my father was at her bedside when she died. I think there was a lot of stiff upper lip. You didn't talk like… I mean, today, I have to talk to my children [laughter]. I don't find it difficult to talk but basically I have been involved with my children. By my parents' standard, that might be considered all a bit too close and that there is not enough gap, and so on. But that is how it is. Because I have always been extremely close to my kids and involved in what they do. But there was a gap between me and my parents.

Especially my father. I remember once my mother telling me, when I was aged eighteen ... could I, when my father came home from work, give him a kiss. I thought, well, I have

never done it before ... I am grown up, how am I supposed to do this? But you know I actually tried it out. I don't think it lasted very long and I am sure he was surprised. I don't know, perhaps he said to my mother: 'You know, I never get a kiss.' But, then he never gave a kiss, so how could he get a kiss? Do you know what I mean? That was one of the strange things that you remember.

I: How did it go down when you tried?

R: Not very well [laughter].

I: A bit awkward?

R: Very awkward. Very awkward. It's like, for example, another effect of his childhood on us was that he decided that we … I think two of us weren't christened … I am not sure whether I was christened but I always say I was ... . But basically, he said we wouldn't go to church until we were old enough to think and know what we were saying because, as he used to say, you know you just repeat stuff by rote. When he was a kid in church, which wasn't very long, perhaps up until he was ten, he used to say, 'Our Father, which art in heaven, Harold be thy name', and things like that, you know, so he said, 'it is all by rote.' So he said, he wanted us to go to a church. It is very strange that. He didn't want us to have no religious background whatsoever but we had to wait until we were fourteen and could think for ourselves and then he demanded that we went to church. Which was very strange. My brothers were already scouts, which was attached to the Scottish church in our area. I wasn't keen to go there so I went into the Church of England and I remember feeling a complete freak. I didn't know when to stand up, sit down, kneel, I had no idea. But, you know, I didn't go back and tell my father that. Because he said we should go to church. So I thought he didn't mind which church it was [laughter].

I: But, he still didn't go, of course?

R: He didn't go. He started to go very occasionally, down in the country here. But, then he was in his sixties. He would just go occasionally. Probably because it is a country church, beautiful church, old, and he could feel something in the stone work, you know, centuries of people praying and so on, I don't know. So, he would occasionally go. But the idea that we should all be packed off to church at the age of fourteen and I am not sure I understood much about it more then at fourteen than I did at four [laughter]. Which resulted in none of us really belonging to anything in the end [laughter]. I tried them all. I tried Catholics, I tried Church of England, I tried… oh, that was very funny. This is off the record really, but when I went to my interview with my secondary school, which was City of London School for Girls, a very good school. I had done quite well in the scholarship we did then, at eleven, and I was given an interview.

My mother was on the upward movement towards, you know, conservatism and everything, nice house. I had to tell her what I had told the head teacher in the interview. She [the head teacher] said, "and what church do you go to?" and at the time I was trying out the Scottish church and I said, 'Oh, we are Pedestrians.' [Laughter] And then, for goodness sake, she asked me what papers we read. I mean, this is not on really, is it? But, she asked me, the headmistress, what papers we read. The school was just off Fleet Street, it was down Whitefriars Street. I had to go through all these paper places and you know they used to print the papers down there. All sorts of papers, and the last hoarding I had seen was for the Daily Worker, so I said we read the Daily Worker. I went home and told my mother. She had a fit. She had an absolute fit. She said, 'You will never get into that school.' [Laughter] then of course I did get a place in the school. Now, either the woman had a sense of humour or, I don't know ... or I was a weird one-off. I don't know. But, anyway, a Pedestrian and we read the Daily Worker.

I: What did your mother say to you other than 'you will never get in'?

R: Oh, she said, "How could you? Where did you get that idea from? We read the Daily Telegraph. We…" You know, I said, "I don't know what paper you read. I don't read it." I was only eleven. [Laughter]. So, that is a story I always tell because I think it is so funny. I don't know how I got into the school. I have no idea.

I: Well, I am sure you were the only pedestrian Daily Worker reader.

R: [Laughter] I was. Oh dear.

I: Maggie, can I take you back to Remembrance?

R: Yes.

I: I know you told me about, that your father was very unhappy about that particular Remembrance service that he went to in 1980, in response to which you wrote that beautiful poem for him, which he clearly was very moved and impressed by, I gather. What was the … Do you remember anything about the attitudes towards Remembrance Sunday, or Remembrance weekend? Did you ever remember your grandmother doing anything for Remembrance? Or your father, apart from going to that service?

R: I don't really. I think they watched the Remembrance Day services on television. I think so. Although, I wasn't there at the time. But, from report, I think they watched that. You see, it was all very private for him. Maybe, he is like me, he starts crying. He would start crying if he… but he had learnt to … you know, tie that all up. Tie it inside himself. So, he was probably afraid of these occasions, and I don't know with my mother. See, we just didn't talk much, as we do today, gosh, we battle on about politics and everything today. But I used to hear him arguing with his youngest brother, who used to … who came down to live in the same place, same area. They would argue politics all the time. Admittedly it was my father who had stood up for him in court, over his pacifism, when he was eighteen. I suppose, you wouldn't be in the army before you were eighteen. But he must have been eighteen, Arthur, at the time. But then they were on different political sides and it always … lunches, always ended up in political arguments. You knew it was going to happen. It was all perfectly hunky dory through the meal, and then suddenly the chat would start.

My uncle was definitely a socialist and my father was progressing towards conservatism, I think. So, there were these terrible arguments. Then sadly, my uncle died, quite young. Well, he was in his fifties. My father, I think, wanted to play the protector to my uncle throughout his life. And my uncle didn't really want to be protected by his older brother. But that sprang back from the war years, I suppose. If he was six when … yes, when Arthur was born. So, a six-year gap. So, he was always the protector. So he had to teach his younger brother a lot, I think. That included politics and arguments and everything ... . which you get in families. But, there you go.

I: It is interesting isn't it, how they both lost their father to the First World War, but it impacts differently, clearly, in political terms, I suppose. That they were –

R: Yes. Absolutely. They were very different characters. My uncle was a very, very emotional man. Now he didn't talk much about his mother although he went to live with his mother with his wife and baby daughter, just after the war when he was demobbed. That was quite difficult. He was a very emotional man. And she [his mother] wasn't, you see, so I imagine there was a little bit of difficulty there. I know there was, because I was

there at one time when it happened. It was always my father who had to sort it out. He [my uncle] knew that he had been dressed up as a girl for the first three years of his life, you know, and he rather resented that ... because, he was a nice blokey, bloke. Yes, I think, things were difficult in the Pioneer Corps. I mean, because they would go on their off days to dances and things like that and it was clearly marked that they were Pioneer Corps and they would be in dance halls with servicemen, and there was a spot of bother here and there. But they did … He was involved with armaments and such … at Kineton. Then he was up in Lancashire, where he met my aunt.

Yes, he never really mentioned much about … well, he had a difficult job. He had a baby born and they had to go to my grandmother's and it was her house and she decided how the child should be brought up, you see? [Laughter] you haven't got out of that, have you, of bringing up children? So, yes, there was a little difficulty there. But, at the end, I think my uncle was extremely upset when his mother died. He felt she had had a very rough deal. He was, yes, he was definitely a socialist. He ... you know, he was all for the underdog and I think he considered his mother to have been an underdog, if you like. Had no chance. So, yes, that's all I can say about … people just didn't communicate, you know, in those days.

I: Do you mark Remembrance? Do you do anything?

R: Well, I sing in the church choir, so I am always there. My son ... I have got musicians in the family because they belonged to the local brass band. One, or other of my sons usually plays the last post at the Remembrance Day service. Although they don't live in the village anymore. Because it is nice to have it played rather than a recording. So last year Dan, my composer son, he played the last post on a flugelhorn. My elder son has got a trumpet, and he plays. I think they are quite, they are quite affected by all this. I can't see any of them being fighters, I don't know what the heck they would do on a battleground. I really don't. I just hope they don't ever have to go there. Well, my eldest is now 45, I think. So, and yes, they have managed to keep peace in Europe, haven't they, for 70 years, is it? Something like that. Apart from previous Yugoslavia. Thank goodness, the United Nations managed to help there, didn't they?

I: Is there anything you would like to say, that we haven't covered? Anything else?

R: [Pause]

I: I should say, in case we can hear this in the background, your cat has joined us.

R: We have lost somebody in a war recently. But, that was Israel. I am married to an Israeli, and –

I: And you lived in Israel?

R: I lived in Israel for four years.

I: When was this, Maggie?

R: 1973-77. So, yes, I experienced the Yom Kippur War, there. Because, we were there in May and the war broke out in October. It was in 2006, the Israeli involvement in Lebanon, where they shouldn't have been and my children's cousin, 21 years of age, just finishing his service, which was three years, I think, two or three years they do there, and he was in a Tank Corps. He was in Lebanon and the Israeli army had been required, or requested by the United Nations to get out of Lebanon at that time. They didn't. My nephew was in a tank that was shot through by a rocket and died. He was 21 and his

mother became a war widow. Not, a war widow, a war mother, if you like, and she was of Latvian origin, Jewish Latvian origin. I got on very well with her when I was there. She really never recovered. She was quite a feisty lady, she was. She became ill about three years later and died shortly after that in her sixties. Her husband followed her, a few years later. So, if people think, you know, war does not have an … and all those men, in that family of course, have been in the army.

My husband was in the army. In fact, when we got there, he immediately went to find his group and he was on the Golan Heights during the Israeli Yom Kippur War. One of his brothers got wounded with shrapnel but went back in again and the last brother was in a special unit because he was an excellent shot. But that entirely altered his life, I think. He would never talk about it. Never talk about it. Something very bad happened, I think. Well, he wasn't wounded, something he probably had to do. So, you know, when you are young like that and you are fired with some kind of patriotism and all the rest of it, you go and do your duty and then you find it's pretty murky ... your duty. So this boy, he got killed, my nephew. I wrote a poem for his … well, on his death. I didn't give it to his parents. I wouldn't have given it to his parents because, for example, the last few verses … . Oh, well I will read it.

Border Badlands (In Memory of "Little' Adam, 1985 - 2006)

"The tank - a scaly,
antediluvian beast,
decked for deceit ~
lumbered into the
still night landscape:

Chinese ink and water,
tranquil, waiting,
stripped to essentials,
moonlit, misted, brushed
in ochre and black,
sky stark at a stroke,
hanging there,
solid back of beast a mere
smudge on grassless terra firma:

turret, gun, infrared eye,
seeking its crippled mate, (The tank went to rescue another tank),
rumbling across deadlines
and hate, it's four man crew
alert in Trojan silence
in the dark underbelly:

they said it could not be
entered through the side
(unlike cold steel, piercing the
flank of one who died for love
in ancient Israel) - its head
and tail
alone where vulnerable:

so through the tail
the rocket came

in no time at all,
no time to clear
the throat of fear
or lose hope,

no time, at all,
for the dispersal
of flesh to a different
configuration of atoms
that cannot be kissed,

no time to hurt even,

as if nothing human
had been, as if grief
did not exist."

I didn't send it to the parents ... that was my reaction to his death. My husband was here at the time. He is living in Israel now, but he was here at the time, and got the phone call one night, and we had to go and arrange his flight back and everything. Because, in Jewish law they … well, normally the ceremony takes place next day, but with those military funerals they can't do it like that. It is quite complicated. They have the military go and talk to the parents and so on and so forth, and then a special funeral is arranged. Well, there was no body, was there. And, of course, they had a coffin and everything, and my sister-in-law, when the coffin came into the kibbutz, she threw herself at the hearse and everything and wanted to see her son. So, I mean, devastating stuff, isn't it?

I: So, war has been a bit of a feature in your life, really, hasn't it? Via your father.

R: Well, I suppose, yes, in a way. I mean, my childhood was throughout the war, yes. I was three when it started, or two, when it started. And, seven or eight … eight when it ended, I think. So, yes, that is quite a chunk of your childhood. But I wasn't unhappy. I hadn't lost my father, had I, you know ...? But, yes, I brought all my children up to be anti-war. So in that way it had an ongoing effect, yes ... in my own way. I don't thrust things down people's throats, although you may not believe it listening to me [laughter].

I: So, how do you feel about your … you said your husband was in the military?

R: Yes, I mean, that is automatic, there. They are Reservists to age 45. Anyway, they do so much service a year, you know, to keep them up to scratch. They keep going every so many months, they go and have another six weeks or something, to keep them up to date. But when that happened [the war] it was completely a surprise. Which is what it was intended to be. I think they had finally, these Arab nations, had got in touch with one another which most of the time they are not. So you had Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Egypt from the South, Jordan from the East and Syria from the North and they closed in … well, everybody was … it was Yom Kippur, the most holy day of the Jewish year. So basically, we were having an evening stroll through a grapefruit orchard and we were sitting under a tree eating a grapefruit when somebody came rushing down the track and said war has broken out. We said, what do you mean? We rushed back to the house and my husband disappeared.

He took his toothbrush, and he kept ringing, trying to find out where his old unit … he hadn't done any … he had been in England for eighteen years.[4] So, this was all new, we

[4] Respondent correction: six years.

had been there six months and he hadn't established where his previous unit was, you know, or done any training or anything. Anyway, he was a captain at that time. So I heard from him after about … how many days? Ten days I think, after they had gone off. I heard that he was in the Golan Heights. He sent me cards, same thing, sent me these little military post cards saying what was happening, more or less. Anything that was not censorable, and I kept those cards and … they appear in a book I wrote about my four years in Israel. *Going Up, Going Down*, it was called, *The Aliyah of an Innocent*. Aliyah being the word for ascending in the Jewish calendar, alphabet I mean, language [laughter]. So, I found them in a drawer with an elastic band around them and I decided to put them in the book.

I: Of course, you don't know if your grandmother kept the cards then, that your grandfather sent?

R: No. I have no idea. Or, if they were scattered, I don't know. It is a shame, isn't it? I know so little about it. I think I got the feeling that she felt she was just one of thousands. Which was true, wasn't it? One of thousands. Some people had lost two sons, or whatever, three sons. Terrible. I think, they felt it was their job then to just pick up and carry on, that is what they felt. It would be … well, they didn't actually have a choice, did they? If you have got three kids, or four kids, you don't have a choice, I suppose. Unless you are a complete wimp, in which case you would probably … I don't know what would happen. No, no, she was a mother. I have got a picture of her out there, by the way, with my grandfather and the three boys which is a very nice picture. So yes, there she was, saying nothing. I don't know about her cards. Nobody ever mentioned any. But she obviously did get them, because the letter says. She probably moved once, or twice, I don't know.

No, today we collect things and one of my brothers who is doing genealogy does all this stuff, finds out about the history. I don't think there was anything left, no, sad to say. That is about it, I think.

Fig. 1: Family photo of Maggie's grandparents with their first three sons. Annie Evans (middle) with husband Lance Corporal Matthew Evans (left), and Ernest Albert Evans (far right), Frederick Arthur Evans (front), and Maggie's father, Herbert Leonard Evans (sitting on his mother's knee). C. 1912.

Fig. 2: Maggie Goren with her grandparents' family photograph. 13 October 2017.