



It was on a Monday wash day somewhere during the hours between dinner-time and early teatime, that I came, or was brought, into the world, the sixth child of the family. My grandmother told me this. She was staying with us to be at hand to help as she had five times before. I suppose today she would be called a Home Help but then an Under Midwife. The best in all the World.

My birth was truly a very happy event since my mother's first baby girl had died and four baby boys had followed and lived. I would think that I was petted a good deal as a daughter was really wanted by my parents.

I had a very happy childhood from when I can remember, which would be from around the age of three. I must have been small, compared to many kids at that age. Older girls of the neighbourhood would lift me and say "Oh isn't she sweet? She is as light as a feather!" "Little and Good" was a popular comment in those days, along with the "Big and Better" for the other group.

We lived in a three storied house in the centre of the town, my father being a member of the Fire Brigade and Motorman for the Merryweather. It was our privilege to be tenants in one of the three houses a few spaces from the Firestation. A bell was fixed in each, which rang to give the alarm when notice of a fire was received. At 7 o'clock each evening too, as a test that it was in working order!

There were about twelve children altogether living in this lane, and we were allowed to play around, providing we went indoors at the sound of the bell, time for all kids to prepare for bed.

The town's Police Station adjoined the Firestation and the General Post Office was situated just opposite so one can imagine the various happenings at times in this district. What fun it was to watch the Brigades do their weekly drills on Monday evenings. The sign of dismissal would see them scamper along to the Inn close by, to indulge in a pint or a noddy of spirit. Cheery words and playful taps on our heads or bottoms were received by us as our Dads passed us. Happy, Happy Days were these.

A big room was rented for meetings, etc., at this Fish Inn. On Quarter Days firemen received their wages for attendances to Fires and pay packets enlarged accordingly.

We looked forward very much to these pay times for, in our case, it meant that Mother could purchase new clothes and shoes for us. I know that this is very wrong for we were more concerned about the bigger wage for the bigger fire. Our childish thoughts did not consider damage or even death, only our new forthcoming smocked pinnys and squeaky boots mattered to us!

These early years were very happy for us. We seemed to get pleasures that lots of children did not. For instance, we could beg rides on the Red Mail Tricycles, hide in the huge baskets that carried parcels, even sit on the running boards of The Merryweather when it halted. No Policeman would ever lock us up!

On some Saturday nights after a drunken brawl that had occurred in the town, a Bobby or perhaps two would wheel the unfortunate offender in a funny thing like a stretcher which was better known to us as a Litter, through the gates of the Station. Nasty swear words and curses could be heard for some time afterwards.

Many years ago a murder was committed in a house in the lane where I was born, parts of a woman's body were found in a copper. I always felt a chill run along my spine when I passed this spot.

While living in this house, my brothers and I were presented with more brothers and a sister - at varied intervals of course. Alas! baby Nancy only lived a few months so I was sadly left a She among the Hes. I feel that I should have been born a boy too, I was so often called a Tom-Boy. Well, to be sure, I always accompanied them to visit the Barber and my locks of hair got a short trim, the boys a short back and sides. We had lovely fun tripping all together to the shop with the coloured pole outside. Mr. MAWBY the Barber, always gave us a few sweets each and as I was the first to be shorn, my sweet allowance was the first to be eaten. As there were five heads to be done, mine being the sixth got and as he said no charge for a pretty girl. Those happy Saturdays!

At the tender age of ten I was allowed to go errands for a Mrs. WALL. She was elderly and got a living by making and repairing corsets. I used to fetch Whale Bones and silk threads for her work. Long narrow parcels I had to take to the Carriers. Their horse drawn carts were parked in the yards of some Hotels in Northampton. I felt very important especially if one parcel was to be collected

for repair. I was allowed to unpick an old corset and take the bent old bones out. These were gladly taken by my brothers to make what they called catapults. I received 6d. per week for this service and usually got a nice Xmas gift of a pair of gloves or a scarf. Another pleasant little job I had was to fetch the medicine from the Dispensary for Mr. and Mrs. Hemmings who kept a small grocery shop in Wood Street. On my way for this errand I had to pass a garden which had a huge mulberry bush quite near the gate and unseen by the occupant of the house. I loved these mushy berries but due to the stains that got on my fingers, I had difficulty to hide from Mrs. Hemmings. She was, fortunately, poor sighted, or she could have thought that I had broken or spilled her medicine. If I was not told to hurry, I would play for a little while in the grounds of the Dispensary or even walk to Becketts Park.

After all "All work and no play makes Bill - Phyl - a dull boy!" I must mention that my pay for the medicine fetching, only amounted to goods in lieu of ready cash. Sometimes the broken sweets from the near empty jars or broken biscuits and which I felt the most rewarding, a few slices from a freshly cooked ham. My dear Grandma who had lost a few of her teeth, could always manage to eat and enjoy this very fat delicacy. I can see her wrinkled old happy face now when I handed to her the greasy little paper bag. You see we pretended that it was a $\frac{1}{4}$ lb of tasty the lean kind. We kept this our little secret. We did not wish that folk could think us too poor to buy the best. I, being a shrewd one, knew that Mrs. Hemmings was pleased to dispose of the waste, and well, we were all happy.

I really was a good one for doing all kinds of work, some for pay and many more for the joy of it. Mind you! I once did a dreadful thing in asking our neighbour for the halfpenny which she had forgotten to give to me. I did so want the first 2 ozs of sweets from ~~a~~ new jar. Mrs. Rowe gave me a cloudy look along with this small coin. I was a bit surprised when I reached home and my mother took my sweets from me and distributed them between my brothers. That was a waste of an errand I thought and a certain person was so quick with information I thought. I have never asked for payment since although I am want to linger a minute or so just in case! People differ so don't you think?

Sunday was the best day of the week for me during my childhood days. We usually had Finnan Haddock for breakfast instead of the weekly bacon fry. Grandma said it was food for the brain and I did wish to be clever. I did not like it though it was salty. Mother always asked at the Market Stall and Mrs. Blundell would sing out:- Lively Fleshy Lundin Addik. Mum usually bought three

and we had to take a chance on the taste, but one could hardly ask for a drink of water during the Church Service if we got thirsty.

I always felt classy in my best Sunday dress and squeaky patent shoes. My brothers wore Corduroy Suits which smelt unpleasant to my way of thinking, but their deep white collars pleased me. I thought that the extra white inclined to make their cheeks look rosy. Actually these collars were made of a sort of plastic which could be cleaned even with a piece of 'indiarubba'. I have heard say that 'That Driver Family' are well turned out. True very true, did not our father quench fires to earn extra money to keep his family well clad, well fed? and above all well behaved?

Sometimes on Sunday we would get an early morning visitor, he never was invited in. Charlie Starlight was his name, he was a tramp, and had eyes that seemed to be fixed upwards. Mother always filled his battered enamel can with tea and gave him slices of toast if there was any left from breakfast. I was a bit afraid of him really, because he looked so unkempt with a long dirty beard. My brothers told me that he had a bird nest behind this and I tried hard to picture a baby robin hiding there. He carried a bundle of clothes or rags tied around his back and all his pockets seemed to bulge with who knows what! Oliver, my brother was sure that the pocket on his right side was filled with his begging money.

As we each had weekly pocket money, I never was sure that I should give Charlie a penny or put it on the plate at church.

Like well brought up children, we attended St. Giles Sunday School and once a month we were taken from the school room to the service at church. I loved the crocodile walk. There was a kind of prayer written on a board at the entrance to the churchyard. I managed to learn it after all the times when I passed. It read like this -

"I am walking through God's Acre
Let me do so, with the reverance due to those
whose bodies resting here
Await the Resurrection."

The children who lived in our neighbourhood were very fond of a game called Stag a Roney. One child closed her eyes, while the rest of the gang ran to hide and many times I hid behind an ancient gravestone. My reverence seemed to be missing on those occasions.

Another of our past-times would be to tie our skipping ropes to a lamp post which provided light to a section of a cul-de-sac called The Riding. We would swing out as far as our rope would stretch and scream with mirth. This game I fear was an annoyance to the folk who lived quite near.

There was a huge building at the corner of this Riding which had three wide rounded steps just the right place for giggling girls to rest on. We would sit there and sing folk songs and tell each other stories. We must have been considered a little entertaining at times, because Miss Rance who lived at The Fish Inn would come along with cakes, biscuits or sweets for us. She never chased us away. Our head gear in those days were woollen Tama-Shanters which I usually used mine for a cushion, remembering my dear Granma saying that sitting on cold steps would result in Rheumatism or worse in later life. I can even believe her now, especially when I feel these twinges myself. She was a wise old lady and chock full of hints.

One chilly October morning, Cecil, my brother, decided to play truant from school, I was always obedient to my elders, so with him, instead of attending school we took our lunches and sat on a seat in the meadow to eat them. It was not very warm and very few people had decided to visit this place so that I wasn't too sorry when I saw in the distance an old gentleman coming towards us, which proved to be our Grandad. Why? Oh why? did he choose this part for his morning walk? With many scoldings we were hurriedly removed from the seat and taken home again. I will never forget my mother's harassed look. She was in the throes of making a pudding or dumplings, I forget which. She just clapped the flour from her hands and shed her coat and hat, took each of ours and hurried along with us to the school. I thought that my mother's wrists were much stronger than Grandad's. I felt very

unhappy that morning, I dreaded the thought of facing my teacher and even more worried about mother's hatpin which threatened to fall from her hat. She had not had the time to pin it securely and she was rather jumpy to say the least. I hope that it stayed put. My teacher made me stand in a corner of the schoolroom for some time but I think that Cecil faired a worse punishment. He was what was known then to be an instigator. Well, it was the first and the last Truant Play.

In those days we were taught to do any kind deed that we could for old people. There was a certain lady who walked with the aid of a walking stick who lived in a cottage between St. Emunds Rd. and Wellingbora Rd. She was always glad if I would creep under her bed to make sure that her cat had not given birth to kittens there. I did not like this job really, but I was so fascinated with the tiny room in which she lived and slept, most of her food was kept in tins at the bottom of the stairs which led to the only other room, an unused bedroom. There was a tiny grate with a little oven at one side. I wondered how she managed to cook the sausages in there, with so little coal and so much ash. Still it seemed warm and cosy. She walked a few steps daily to visit the toilet, a very small hut at the end of a garden lined with a hedge of Micklemass Daisies. Actually there were five or six of these cottages. Mrs. Kelsey was like a Mother Hubbard. I used to wonder why her tongue had a perpetual movement. She was always pleasant in spite of this deformity. Sometimes she would wear a Black Bonnet trimmed with pansies and a black cape with shiny beads on the front. My Granma too, wore a cape and bonnet but hers was trimmed with rows of frilly black lace and a bunch of violets at the side where the long velvet ribbon tie was joined. Gran had a little lavender filled bag sewn inside her cape which was much more pleasant than the mothballed smell that hung around Mrs. Kelsey's cloak.

There was a Studio in Fish St. where an artist worked. We were delighted if he invited us to see his work. My brothers and myself often used to pose for him as did some of the other kids of the lane. He had a neice called Brenda who was a permanen

model for him and at times when she was not able to sit, he would let me instead. We were almost the same in stature so much of the work could be done, especially as all the dresses; etc. fitted me.

This neice was a beautiful girl and was just like a fairy. I simply adored her and made up my mind there and then that if I ever had a baby girl I would choose Brenda for her name. In due course and I was able to carry this out. My Brenda was born on March 18th 1928. How lucky I was!!

By this time I was doing well at school, in spite of the frequent 'unattendances' due to helping to nurse my mother in her confinements (under Granma's supervision of course). Nappy washing, errands, household chores of every assortment, etc., etc. Well in short, all the jobs that my brothers could not do. I would never tire of my Granma's stories of how she did when she was in training. She even told me that she cut out and sewed a pair of drawers for herself with the length of calico laid out on her bedroom floor, just like an oblong double piece. She cut out a long V piece and with a threaded tape through a hem at the top and a fancy stitch at the end of the knee length bottoms. She had scored a real 'Hit'. She made for me a lovely garment of what she called a Bodice or Stay, several layers of flannelette fastened with tapes to be tied at the back. I did not wear this thing for very long because there seemed no time to get another one made for the change. I do believe that my Granma could do almost anything. We just laughed and laughed together about her diligences and ways to save money.

At this time a New Law was made whereby a child who could pass a Special Examination could leave school at the age of thirteen. With a friend named Rose Arnold and myself who had both been in the top class for two years, we entered our names for this. Our Headmistress who was, as she said, confident of our passing, although she had remarked that she would be sorry to lose us. She too, was a lovely person, kind and understanding.

On this particular morning we reached our classrooms and were told to sit one a

eachdesk. There was the clean sheet of foolscap with the Questions and spaces for our answers. I was excited at first and I will never know why I dropped my pen and let it roll down the paper. I came to finding a smelling bottle under my nose and a tumbler of water held near to my face. My own stupid fault. I should have heeded my Granma's advice and not tried to work on an empty stomach. I did not eat my breakfast.

Rose was more fortunate, she passed easily. She trained to become a nurse and after, a Matron in a large hospital. She did not marry. We lost touch with each other as so often happens, but, I learned that she died a few years ago. Well, so much for school and good luck is still with me.

Now I have become a worker, having always been interested in sewing, what could be better than earning and learning at the same time. At the "Brook" Factory I was able to machine pieces of material together which turned out to be ladies' flouncy petticoats and for the sum of one shilling and sixpence, one dozen of these had to be made. Being one of the fast workers my take home package was sixteen shillings per week. Out of this I paid for my transport to and from work. It was usual for me to meet my friend at the town centre. We would ride on a Tramcar from there to The White Elephant Hotel for one halfpenny or for a change we could board another from the Centre to The Abington Hotel. From either stop we only had a short distance to walk to The Brook. Sometimes we would decide to take a packed lunch and eat this on a bench in Abington Park or on one on The Racecourse.

We had lots of fun meeting boyfriends or giving ourselves a treat in the way of a bag of sweets for one penny or an iced cream wafer also the cost of one penny.

During my two years of factory work and all eager for any kind of change, I was asked to help to assist at a Confectioners close to where I lived. This was only for a short time each evening and proved to be very worthwhile. You see I had iced sweets, etc. free and a little pocket money which I was able to save.

The First World War had just begun which made shops to be busy. I learned a

lot about the ways of life then and how some money was made easily to come by. For instance, an Officer would select a purchase, a box of chocolates for his current girl friend but in some way or another not always did the chocolates get eaten or even the box get opened. Later the young lady would ask for a credit note in place of the gift. She could then purchase what she wanted in smaller quantities or even cigarettes. Well, money is lost and money is gained and all is fair in love and war so we all went on our ways of living.

Another highlight of my life happened shortly after. There was no wage attached to this, but Oh! what excitement I experienced. I had joined a Concert Group and became a member of the Chorus in The Mayflower Pageant. We had lovely times at the rehearsals and met lots of nice people.

It was nearing the end of practising and the big day was coming into view so to speak when unfortunately an epidemic of 'Flu' broke out and the leading lady in a Dutch Scene was one of its victims.

Mr. Laurie Toseland, our Producer gave instructions hurriedly for each member of the chorus to learn a part of the lead. To my utter amazement I was the chosen one. I was given extra time to practice, mostly at the home of Mr. Laurie. It was all very exciting and once more I felt important. Indeed some very high Townspeople took parts in This Pageant. Instead of kicking my heels with my former partners I had the pleasure of doing a Dance with a Mr. THOMAS, a pawnbroker. I was able to wear a beautiful dress with umpteen petticoats, a Puck Bonnet and real clogs, all borrowed!! A very special I.P. was I for one week. I could better take the part of the wrinkled old peasant woman at The Well today. There were a number of Scenes but I forget how many people took part. I do remember lending a photograph of some of us to a Mr. Wann, the Dentist. All this happened something like 55 to 60 years ago. I daresay quite a few of the performers have passed on by now. Indeed Mr. B. Lawrence a great singer, passed on this week at the age of 92 years.

Well the First World War was being fought now and many of the town's young men went to serve their country. After the spells of indoor work I decided that I might

benefit by doing an outdoor job. Girls were needed to deliver Telegrams so I put my name to the list and in a short time I was measured and fitted with a uniform:- navy blue serge suite with red trim, brass epaulets and buttons, a leather pouch for the telegrams, high black boots and not forgetting the navy hat. My number was ten and I was told that it was lucky. Really in a way it was because for one thing I was so near to my home, in the same lane in fact, and I could always pop in and join my Granma and Mother in enjoying a nice cup of tea. Of course being so near and knowing most of the P.O. staff I had many privileges.

In the beginning we could use our own bicycles until the Government Issue arrived and we were paid 2/6 per week for its use. I did not care too much for the .P.O cycles. They were big and heavy with wide handlebars. If we rode two abreast in some narrow streets, we got locked together. You see we were allowed in some cases to go in twos on account of the black out, etc. T.8 who was my special friend had a saddle which laced up like a boot. It had to have air pumped into it like a tyre. This sometimes was a great performance and we would laugh ourselves silly while carrying out this little job. Some of our deliveries were sad as you might imagine. On the other hand if the news was good, we was given many a 'tip' especially the telegrams for the Betting Houses and such like.

Of course my motto was 'In for a Penny, In for a Pound' so I joined the P.O. Evening Classes. These classes were held in a room at Campbell School on Monday evenings. It was very interesting learning the morse code, etc. and all about Post Office Work in general. I sat the examination and passed, only to discover that one had to be five ft. tall whereas I was just under two inches too short to be on the staff.

Well life is all ups and downs. I did not mind very much really. I would never have left my home and I understood that one could not be employed in one's hometown so that was that.

My next occupation was Handbag and Wallet making. On account of bombing in.

London. A small firm from Bond Street by the name of Birdsall had evacuated to Northampton to continue working. I loved this very interesting job. We started by making small purses and then on to real leather work. The young lady who was to teach me turned out to be my very best friend. She was as good as any sister could be. We had lots of fun when bags were sent to us to be refurbished. Of course, they were very expensive. Some were very shabby and smelled of stale cosmetics and perfumes. We wondered what kind of stories these would tell of their owners if that could have been possible. By the time that we had worked on them with new linings and fittings etc. one would think that they were really new. My salary then had risen considerably and I was able to increase my savings.

It was during this part of my life, my age being twenty five years that I had been going steady with my 'intended'. He was to me everything that a gentleman could be and well we fell together much better than we could have been put. His Christian name was Percy, his surname Buss. My Christian name Phyllis and surname Driver and in a manner of speaking we were meant to be joined together.

We had a happy courtship in spite of wartime restrictions and once again a stroke of luck was bestowed upon me. My future husband was an up and coming grocer and a colleague of his was leaving the town. I think that with a little string pulling and what have you, we were promised the tenancy of his house. A rare event in those days. Rooms seemed to be all that could be offered. How glad was we when Mr. Beech vacated no. 2 Cedar Rd. and Mr. Buss and Miss Driver were selected to be the new tenants.

From then on life got more and more exciting. There was so much to do. Planning the wedding, collecting bottom drawer gifts, etc. from their storage, furnishing our new home. We worked and had friends working for us like niggers. Mrs. Blundell the Addeh Lady was the owner of the property. She needed a part of the garden to build a garage for herself. As far as we were concerned we only needed the rooms for a love nest and couldn't care less about a garden just at that time. Anyway, because of our

agreeability the dear lady had electricity put through the house and many other commodities besides. Seventeen shillings per week was the charge for the rent, no subletting being allowed on any condition.

It took just a month to get all the necessary formalities fixed for our marriage. January 24.19. We had to put up with a lot of joking from our friends who even attended Church Services to hear our Banns read. We were teased in enquiries should if our first born child be a son, would we name him Willie? Willie Drive a Buss?

I am certain that those were the happiest years of my life. When I found myself to becoming a mother, I began to consider a name for the boy, I rather fancied Aubrey a name of one of my brothers. Believe it or not my second child was born on Aubrey's birthday so in disgust I changed a letter and we named her Audrey.

Brenda was my first baby and my dear, dear Grandma was then beyond the power to carry out any midwifery help for me but she was happy to give me her blessings and prayers.

Needless to say that Brenda was our pride and joy. She had a happy childhood and preferred to play with imaginary toys in spite of our buying nice ones for her. She even had an imaginary dog and would walk with us with one arm outstretched carrying the lead for Danny! At intervals she would stop by the kerb for a second or two very embarrassing to us. Also she would walk with both arms outstretched in front of her muttering occasionally to nothing. An imaginary doll would be with us! She simply adored babies. It was rather a pity that she had to wait for seven years to have a sister. Again my luck remained with me. Brenda proved a very helpful little seven year old and was then capable of doing lots of the tasks that I used to do at twice her age.

She chose The Nursing Profession for a career and trained to be a Nurse, Midwife, and delivered piccannies in an African Hospital, and at this present time is a National Health Visitor, besides caring for a husband and two sons.

Audrey my second daughter got a degree in Art at the school in Northampton and Bristol College. She taught at the Wiggidon Girls School at Leicester and at a school in London. She is the mother of one son and two daughters.

My husband and I are very proud of our five grandchildren. We had a grand get together last Jan. 24th to celebrate our Golden Wedding.

I would like to dedicate this story of my life to my darling grandchildren.

Phyllis L. Buss
nee Phyllis L. Driver