

## 7. Ann Edith Voller

### *Some Early Memories*

*Oft, in the stilly night,  
Ere Slumber's chain has bound me,  
Fond memory brings the light  
Of other days around me.*

Thomas Moore

I have nothing but happy memories of an idyllic childhood in which I was the centre of attention, surrounded by love, comfort and warmth. Although we were not wealthy, life was pleasantly comfortable and I did not lack for material things. I do not think I was spoiled, however. Dad was a firm disciplinarian and, although I can recall one or two physical manifestations at his hands, it was usually sufficient for him to merely raise his voice very slightly and adopt a certain tone. It certainly put the fear of God into others as well, and the conclusion was very soon reached that here was a person who would brook no nonsense and with whom you didn't argue.

We were surrounded too by other young children to whom our garden was a mecca, possibly due to the abundance of toys. These would be augmented by their own contributions, but I was always made to share my possessions willingly. As I also had to look after and respect them I would get very annoyed with children of a more destructive nature; something that would last throughout my life. There is no doubt that as a child I retained a sentimental attachment to things, especially any given as presents or those that I had worked hard and saved up for. This may account for my reluctance to get rid of anything, even now, and my tendency to be a hoarder.

Apparently, I was not a bit shy, but very friendly and outgoing, which could well have been my downfall when, barely two years of age, I managed to escape the confines of the garden at 59, Kingsway, Woking, where we were staying with the Gouldings. All hell broke loose when my absence was discovered and I was nowhere to be found. The police were notified; Uncle Len, who ran a retail tobacco and confectionery business, sent his van drivers out looking, whilst he scoured the neighbourhood in his car; and Dad was summoned from his office in London post-haste. I was eventually found, minus a shoe, walking along quite happily with an elderly gentleman who was desperately questioning everyone in

an attempt to discover where I belonged. The only person who wasn't bothered, it would seem, was me!

I was also, without doubt, the bossiest child on two legs, and would assume leadership of any gathering regardless of the age or status of others present. With the exception of my lifelong friend, Edna Field, who lived with her brother, Reg, at No. 84, all my playmates were boys. They invariably seemed to comply with my wishes and orders - more fools than I - and had an equal penchant for playing with dolls.

Another attraction, of course, was the fact that we were the only family with a car and the chance of a ride was not to be missed. Little figures would hang around hopefully whilst Dad cleaned it on Saturday mornings, only waiting for him to say the word before they all piled in, to be transported down the road to the garage for petrol, oil and tyre inflation.

Outings were frequent events, as were visits to various family members, and we were in the privileged position to enjoy two annual holidays away, at Easter and in the summer. These were always spent at the seaside and we were always accompanied by Gran in her hat.

I have no real recollection of these events prior to those in Devon which were spent at The Clifford Arms Hotel in the village of Chudleigh. This impressive edifice was owned by Jim and Marjorie Budd. Marjorie had been a professional opera singer and had the figure to match and I was most impressed to learn of her friendship with Gert and Doris Walters, and their brother Jack Warner, who were all well known on radio at that time. Her mother, Mrs Hands, also lived with them, plus Carlo, the friendly Great Dane, of whom I was inordinately fond despite his massive size. They welcomed us more as members of the family, to the extent that Christmas 1939 was spent with them. The war had just started and our sojourn there may have had something to do with a desire to escape from the vicinity of London which daily awaited the arrival of the enemy.

Despite the luxury of a car, vehicles did not achieve great speeds and roads were relatively poor. Consequently, our journeys to Chudleigh were always accomplished in two stages with an overnight stop at The Bridge Hotel at Sparkford, where I would share a bedroom with Gran. I can still recall the excitement of it all, and that particularly memorable Christmas, when a dolls pram was strapped to the open boot of our Ford 10 car without me even suspecting. Shrouded in dust covers, it was smuggled in through the back of the hotel to await my total ecstasy when it appeared at the bottom of my bed on Christmas morning. Despite additional gifts of two perfectly beautiful dolls, I spent the entire time tucking up two acquiescent ginger kittens, who obligingly allowed me to transport them around. I can also remember going to church on Christmas Day and finding violets growing in the hedgerows.



Top left: with Grandmother Edith Jane Hepton 1935; top right: with Father July 1935; above: on holiday with Mum, Dad and Gran; right: Pagham, 1936, with Standard saloon car