

Antoni Czapp Memoirs

By Joanna Czapp - 2014

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1. MY EARLY LIFE (August 1925 – September 1939).

1.1 Polchowo

I was born in Polchowo on 21st August, 1925, the youngest of four children. I had two brothers, Jozef and Jan and a sister, Melania and we lived with my family on a farm owned by my father, Jan, on which we had cows, horses, pigs, sheep, chickens and geese. My father also owned other land, most of which was marshland and meadows.

My mother, Cecilia, died of tuberculosis in January 1928 when I was just two and a half years old. I don't remember her but I can remember a little of her funeral. I was in a cot and the family were all getting ready to go to the funeral when one of the men threw a sweet into the cot for me, but I couldn't find it.

At this stage, we were still together as a family for a few months and we were looked after by my mother's cousin Francieska and also a maid who I was quite fond of as I thought she was my mother. It was my mother's wish that my father should marry Francieszka, who had been looking after her and us while she was ill.

I must have been about three years old when my father re-married. We all went to the wedding and had a lovely photograph taken. I was very proud to stand there in my sailor suit. I can remember the lovely horses and carriage which I played on when it stood in the barn. I pretended I was driving the horses. My father, stepmother, my two brothers and sister all went home after the wedding but I was left with my stepmother's stepmother (my step grandmother) who lived in a village several miles away.

When my family returned to the farm, my sister, Melania went to live with an Aunt and only the two brothers remained in the family home. Melania enjoyed living with her Aunt, who treated her like a daughter. Later on, when my stepmother had her own children and required help in the home, Melania had to return.

During the three years I was with my step grandmother, my father and stepmother came to visit on the odd occasion, leaving my two brothers behind who were looked after by relatives. They would stay a few days having arrived by coach and horses. The coach was left in the barn and the horses would be stabled on a bigger farm with other relatives. These relatives were relations of my father. My father would always

pick me up and hug and kiss me but I cannot ever remember my stepmother showing me any affection.

I wanted to have physical contact with my stepmother and tried several times to get as close to her as possible and when I reached her I tried to hug her knees but she pushed me away. After that experience, I would never try to do it again.

Where I lived, the couple treated me well but they were very strict. My step grandmother's brother (my Great Uncle) also lived there and he was very nice to me. He had a bicycle and I polished the bike for him and every Sunday afternoon he would take me on his cross bar and we would go for a ride around the lake which was very close to the German border about a kilometre from where we lived.

As we were riding along the made up road there was a village on the left with lovely houses and I asked Great Uncle if we could go there but he said we couldn't because it was the border with another country. On occasions, I would see the Polish border police pass through our village.

I can remember an incident when my step grandmother hit me. I had been with my neighbour's son who had some four inch nails. I asked if I could have some and he said I could. So he gave me some nails and I went back home happy. On getting in, my step grandmother asked me what I had in my hands and I showed her the nails. She asked me where I had got them and I told her they were from the boy next door who had given them to me. She said you are lying and she took a birch cane from the top of the cupboard in the kitchen, grabbed my arm and holding on to me, and started hitting me on the legs with it. I was wearing short trousers at the time and it was very painful. After a while a woman came in and I thought it would end but she asked what has he been up to and step grandmother answered that I had been lying. "Well then, give him some more," the woman said and the beating continued until eventually she let me go.

From then on I learned it would be better to lie if it meant saving your own skin. I was very aggrieved because neither of them had gone next door to ask the boy if he had given me the nails.

I stayed with my step grandmother until I had to start school when I was about six and then I returned to the family home rather confused as to who everybody was. I only knew that my father was my father, but I had been apart from my siblings for so long that I did not know them. By now, my sister, Melania had already arrived back,

rather reluctantly, to the family home from her Aunt's. My stepmother had a daughter, Maria, followed by a son, Leonard and two years after him another daughter named Agnieszka.

At seven I started school and when I was eight, I had double pneumonia and pleurisy. I was very ill because someone had to sit with me all night. I liked it when some of the boys came to see me in the evening because we could talk about the things boys are interested in. I did not like the old ladies who came and stayed with me because they were talking about my mother dying and going to heaven and that I would go and be with her and I didn't want to hear all that. Opposite my bed was a picture of the Virgin Mary with her son in her arms and I told the old ladies that she will never let me go and she didn't. So I am here now to tell this story.

One morning during my illness I was taken from my bed to the visitor's bedroom which was much nicer and the doctor was asked to come and see if he could do anything. But there was no hope and my brothers and sister were asked to come home from school to see me. I can remember being examined by him for which they had to pull me up by my hands and after the examination I can remember them talking by the heating system about me. I could hear the doctor saying, "Pity the boy, pity the boy." My Aunt got quite angry with him saying, "All you keep saying is pity the boy, pity the boy, can't you do something, doctor?" but he replied that there was nothing he could do. I could hear everything they were saying but wasn't able to speak. Then I must have gone to sleep.

When I woke up I was back in my own room. I slowly began to recuperate, eating pigeon soup with a little biscuit and every morning I had a beaten egg in milk with brandy which I looked forward to.

When I was well enough, I went back to school but had to go back to the first class again because I had missed a lot of schooling. I didn't learn much. I now suspect this was because I had dyslexia but in those days this was not recognised. I was so afraid of my stepmother that I dare not ask her to help me so I struggled at school for the rest of my schooldays. I was ashamed of it and the teachers should have noticed that I was struggling and falling behind but they didn't do anything. My father was told to transfer me to another, bigger school which had seven classes. So when I was about thirteen years old, I travelled by train to this other school. I could have gone to another school but I chose not to because I would have been with the girl next door, Urszula, who sat behind me prompting me at my old school. Also, her school was stricter and I had had enough discipline and wanted an easier life. I used

to take sandwiches with me for my lunch and my stepmother always made delicious sandwiches.

I left school at fourteen because the Second World War started and if it hadn't started, I would have spent two more years at school to make up for the years I missed when I was ill.

1.2 The start of the Second World War (September 1939)

My father came upstairs to our bedroom and said, "Wake up boys! The war has started." I opened the window and saw that Polish soldiers were already in the village. There were lancers on horse back with flags. I think they were the same regiment, the 9th Lancers (9ty pulk ulanow malo Polski) as I joined when I was in Scotland later on.

Initially all was quiet. Then we heard the German aeroplanes above. One of the bombings in Gdynia killed my cousin's husband, who was a captain of a ship.

The water in the river was blocked (diverted to lower ground) so as to flood the fields and prevent the Germans proceeding. There were two bridges across the river in different places. The Polish army blew up one of the bridges to prevent Germans access. They also undid the sluices. The Polish forces didn't have time to blow up the other bridge as they were fleeing from the Germans. It meant that the cows had to be driven a long way round to the fields using the bridge that was left.

Before the war I built a boat out of wooden drains. They were put there in the 1st World War by Russian prisoners of war supervised by Germans. They built drains, bridges and dykes on the marshes. When digging the peat, the drains got exposed. You could wiggle it (the drain) and pull out boards. My boat was 12 foot long and 8 feet wide with a flat bottom, built from these boards. The keel was made out of sheet tin, which I had cut from a big can and nailed it down. As I was slipping the boat into the dyke, I cut myself on the boat and tied a handkerchief around the wound, but it turned septic. When the bridge was exploded, the boat came in handy. My father didn't know that I'd built the boat as I'd kept it on the marshes tied up and nobody saw it.

When the Germans arrived in the village, people went onto a hill to see how the Germans were advancing. The Polish soldiers started shooting. Our wagon was fixed, ready for a quick departure, and we fled to the woods, together with all the

people from the village. It was late September and the harvest was over. The cows were left behind. Everyone spent the night there.

(Most of the Polish soldiers fled to a place called Hel. It was a narrow strip of land that jutted out into the sea and the army was strong enough to withhold the Germans. Unfortunately, their food run out and so had to surrender but managed to hold out for well over a fortnight. The German ships were surrounding the peninsula and we could see these ships.)

It was a warm night and the people in the woods started making up beds for the night. My father came to me and said that my boat would come in handy. I was very surprised that he knew about it. My father didn't appear to be angry but said I would be able to use it now the bridge was bombed. My father told me I was to go back to our house in the village that night, together with my two brothers, in order to put some things into the cellar, but he insisted that we should not lock the door when we left. I was very frightened as we went back to the village. When we got there it was very quiet which added to my anxiety. The cellar was under the kitchen floor with steps leading down to it. The back hallway had stairs going up and stairs that went down. In the cellar was a store of food. There were wooden tubs full of brine for soaking meat, potatoes, carrots, beetroot, and a variety of preserves such as pears and pickled cabbage, all for the winter. My father had asked us to move bedding down into the cellar as well as clothes from other rooms in the house. This we did and together with my brothers, I returned to the woods.

By the time the German patrol had entered the village in the morning, it was empty of people. My father decided to go home with me in the morning and we met the German soldiers. Most of their supplies were pulled by horse drawn wagons. When we got to the yard, we found that the Quartermaster and Paymaster were in our house. The whole village was taken over by the German soldiers. My father could speak fluent German. The Germans were friendly. They stayed the whole day there. The washing up needed doing, so I heated the water and did it. The Germans were there until the evening. As the Polish soldiers had fled, it was all quiet, so the Germans told us and a few other families who had come with us to tell all the families in the woods to return home.

The Germans asked the families if they had bread/food/ham. They started offering food to the Poles. "You can have anything you like", they said, as they were unaware that the families had only been in the woods for the one night.

(The Germans had spies disguised as Polish officers and were very aware as to which political party people were affiliated to. In the next-door village, a school master that our family knew was in a particular political party and was taken away by the Germans to Piasnica (this was a name of a village in the forest). First the prisoners were taken to a concentration camp at Sztudof and it was here that political prisoners were sentenced and then marched back along the main road to Piasnica. Here they would turn into the forest along a straight road, known as the road of death which had graves on either side of it. Polish prisoners were shot and the graves of those killed, were dug by other prisoners.)

The Germans allowed all the families to go back to their homes. In our house the best room was not occupied and they only used one of our rooms. After that more German soldiers were billeted in the village. The normality of village life resumed. The cows had to be taken to the marshes, which was my job. Another farmer's son, who travelled on the same train as me to school and was quite friendly, drove his cows onto the marshes, too. We drove the cows over the river using the one remaining bridge. One day we saw a German aeroplane and us two boys waved to the pilots who waved back. They were friendly, but some did use machine guns and shot people and on one occasion some children tending geese were shot. It all depended on the character of the pilot.

The Germans stayed in the village about a week or two, but I can't remember exactly. I can remember the German SS passing through and their SS markings on their uniforms. They were very military and aggressive and not as friendly as the other German soldiers. Eventually, the Germans moved on to nearby villages or went further on.

Once they had gone, life became nearly normal for a few days. There was no noise of fighting anywhere but a few days later, we saw Polish prisoners walk through the village from Hel and taken to Wejherowo to a prison or some sort of camp. As they passed us they asked for bread and water. By the time we had gone into the houses to get some food, the prisoners had marched past and so we had no time to give them anything. They were prisoners only for a short while as the Germans released them because Poland had capitulated.

Life returned to normal. The Germans moved on. We experienced a couple of months of normal life. Five farmers were taken away from their farms by the Gestapo to work mostly on farms and were replaced by Yugoslavians, put there by the Germans. There were about three families in the village who were German. A

German who lived in the village was chosen to be the Burgomaster. He refused to do the job because he didn't like the way the Germans were removing the Poles from their farms. More German soldiers arrived and stayed for quite a while, in fact, throughout the winter.

Our family had the Paymaster and the Quartermaster. The Paymaster and the Quartermaster lived in our guest room while the other eight soldiers were in the best room. They would leave their boots in the hall and wear slippers in the house. The floor was polished boards and they made sure there were no scratches on the floor by putting newspaper under the legs of the beds. The Germans were getting ready to invade Norway. They lived in peace and quiet among the local Polish population and the Polish went about their jobs and the soldiers lived peacefully together.

The Germans left to invade Norway in 1940 and a few German soldiers were left behind. They stayed in the village for a few months. Ten were billeted in my home. They went after the girls and liked to have parties. One day they borrowed our carriage to go to a neighbouring village and when returning home they ended up in a ditch having broken the shaft. It was mended by a carpenter in the nearby village. When Germans were there, people felt safer, but when they all left people were afraid because the Gestapo would come along and life was dreadful. People would be removed from farms.

2. GERMANY (1942-1943)

The Germans decided in 1942 that they needed forced labour to work in Germany. They made a list of all the young people – girls and boys aged about 16 years. Those chosen had to report to the Labour Exchange in Puck and had to take old clothes and food for two days. My two brothers, Jan and Jozef, my sister Melania and I were all given notice to report to Puck. All four of us went off with my father and when we arrived in Puck there were lots of young people from all the neighbouring villages.

Some men arrived and started sorting us out. My father managed to get a certificate to say he couldn't work the farm on his own so was allowed to keep two of his children but two had to go.

My father came to me and said, *"I have decided that Jozef and you will go and Jan and Melania will stay at home with me. Do you mind?"*

"Whatever you have decided, I think that is a good idea," I answered him.

So Jan, Melania and my father went home. It was early spring time and we were all marched to the railway station and waited for the train and when it came, we were loaded up and off we went.

We arrived near to Gdansk, which was neutral, or rather more German than Polish. We were marched to another Labour Exchange and put into a building. In the late afternoon, German farmers arrived picking the youngsters they wanted. One farmer said he wanted two brothers or two friends, but I said that I didn't want to go with my brother, as we didn't get on. So Jozef went with a farmer and said goodbye to me.

By now it was getting late and there were a few boys and girls left, including myself. Eventually, they closed the Labour Exchange for the night with us youngsters inside, having placed the girls in one room and the boys in another. I slept on floorboards the whole night until the morning. The officials came again, opened the doors and windows and we ate what we had with us. We walked outside waiting for the farmers to come again. After a while, there were only 5 youngsters left. A German farmer came along and wanted all five of us. We followed him to his wagon, which was drawn by horses. I sat with the farmer and another lad and the other three sat in the wagon.

We didn't have far to go as the farm was quite close to the Labour Exchange. It was quite a big farm which had 20 milking cows, 1 bull, 8 horses and between 50 and 60 pigs. Various produce was grown there, such as, rye, wheat for milling, beans, sugar beet, flax and potatoes.

On arriving, we were shown a building, which was to be our living and sleeping quarters and there were two Polish boys there already. There were bunk beds and single beds. Because of all my illnesses, I was given a sheepskin cover. There was an iron stove to keep us warm. One of the lads who had been in the army before the war, sorted us all out and told us to make the beds and keep the place tidy. He was very house-proud and domesticated. There was also a lad there, who was a bit of a "Mummy's boy" and sat in the corner and cried at first.

Only one lad would go to the kitchen to collect the food for all of us and take it back to the sleeping quarters. I didn't miss home and made the best of it all. I remember we had two slices of bread with jam or dripping for breakfast with a cup of coffee. There were outside toilets, which was typical of farms in those days. We had taps in the barn and washed ourselves in a bowl of water.

Attached to the house were farm buildings, such as the cowshed, horses' stables facilities to mix food for the cows as well as pigsties. This was all under the same roof. The barn was separate and was where the corn was kept before being threshed. Another building stored the carriages and had wooden steps leading to boxes up above, where the oats, barley, wheat and beans were stored, after having been threshed and cleaned.

We did our own washing in cold water and were given soap and boot polish. My job was to feed and clean the pigs. Feeding was quite easy because the troughs were separated from the pigs by a flap. To muck out, there was a small door in the wall which you opened and flung the muck out straight onto the muck heap. This muck was taken to the fields as manure.

There were twenty milking cows and the farmer, a German maid, another Polish lady and I milked them. I remember picking a straw through which I would suck the warm milk from the bucket. In the winter, we would milk the cows indoors, but in the summer they were milked in the fields. I would take the milk to the main road in the milk churns by horses and cart. I would ride one of the two horses. I left the full churns on a platform and took the empty ones back to the farm which was less than a kilometre away. The evening milk was put in a cooler, which had water running in and out to keep the milk cool. There were other jobs for me to do, such as hoeing and harrowing which was done with two horses. On my trips to the platform I would often see the vehicles taking prisoners to the concentration camps. I could see the prisoners through the windows and the people inside would sometimes wave to me.

The cow man who was German and worked on the farm would say to me, "*Behave yourself, or you'll find yourself in the concentration camp.*" I didn't take any notice of him as I did what I was told.

There were a couple of occasions when I went home for the week-end. The first was for my sister's (Agnieszka) First Holy Communion and another time was when I went to have a fitting for a suit, which the tailor was making for me. My shirts were made by a seamstress who lived in my village.

We were allowed to go to Church if we wanted to, but there wasn't a Catholic Church near by, just a Lutheran one. While on the farm, I visited the cinema once on a Sunday in Gdansk. I remained on the farm for two years. People who worked on the farm had to wear clothes with a letter P on them but I never wore it. My routine was milk the cows, feed the pigs and work on the land. On Sundays, I still had to feed the pigs and milk the cows but did not have to work on the land.

I remember an episode when the farmer told me to bring the horses back from the meadow where they were resting. I sat on a mare and she was very quick. As she was going very fast I thought I'll never be able to stop her or negotiate the gate when we get back to the farm buildings. I didn't have a saddle so moved myself forward up the horse's neck, clinging on as best I could. She continued to gallop, I managed to negotiate the gate and she galloped into the yard and straight into the stable.

The first year I was on the farm, the mare had lost her foal. The foal was born in the middle of the night and the mare was tied up so the foal went off and got caught up in a basket and couldn't return to its mother. When the farmer found the foal in the morning the mare didn't want to know as the foal had been away from its mother for too long. For two days I had the job of feeding the foal but it died because it was rejected by its mother.

The following year, as the snow was melting the farmer asked me to exercise the mare. I didn't really want to do it but thought someone would tell on me if I didn't. So I rode her, came back, tied her up and then returned to feed the pigs. When I went to get the key for the meal for the pigs, I noticed the mare was restless so I untied her and put her in a box. After feeding the pigs I returned to find the mare lying down and she was giving birth so I pulled the legs of the foal to assist the mother. I got a knife from the kitchen to cut the umbilical cord and then dragged the foal to the head of the mother and eventually the mare licked the foal and accepted it. After a while,

the foal got up and I pushed the foal towards the mother's teats. When the farmer returned, he was so pleased he gave me five Marks.

The German farmer liked me as I was familiar with farm work and was good at it. I could even handle the bull and would lead the cows to be served by the bull.

Later on, some of the Polish boys left and a Russian woman from Kiev arrived with her daughter and friend. I used to go with them hoeing. One Sunday, the Russian lady came to our place and played cards. She started shuffling the cards and told one of the boys his past, present and future. The lady offered to tell me my fortune. I was reluctant but her daughter said she was good at doing it.

The lady told me about my past – that I didn't have a mother and that I had lost her when I was very young. I was the youngest of four children. My father had married again and had three more children. Also that my stepmother was not very nice to me. She said that I wouldn't be here very long and that I would go home –it could be three weeks or three months. You'll have a lovely time when you go home, but you won't be there very long. You'll go away from home again and you'll find yourself in hospital but not wounded. (In fact I caught pneumonia and stayed in hospital for three weeks while my Unit went to Norway). You'll go over the sea far from home. You'll be in big houses and meet ladies as well as a special blonde girl, (Lucy was blonde). Looking back now I can see how right this woman was in all her predictions.

One Sunday I walked to the neighbouring farm to visit my brother Joseph. This was approximately two kilometres away. He worked on a very small farm. Joseph learnt to speak German very well as most of the time he was working with the German farmer's daughter. On my farm, I ate my food in the living accommodation, but Joseph ate his in the kitchen with the German daughter. Joseph was sent back home for the winter before me and then had to join the German army.

About three or four weeks after the fortune telling, I went home as predicted. The Labour Exchange agreed that I could go home to help my father as my brothers had all gone into the German army. I spent about a year at home working on our farm. We had dancing on a Sunday and I had a lovely time. We used to congregate on one of the farms.

3. CONSCRIPTION (1943 -1944)

When I was eighteen, in 1943, I received papers to have a medical in Puck, in order to join the German army. I was allowed home and waited for the call up papers. One day I went to church and the postman said he had the call up papers. After Mass, I went with the postman to the post office to collect the papers. I didn't want to go into the army and resented it greatly. I felt sad at having to leave my father and my home. You knew there would be training and that you would be sent somewhere to war. On the way home from Church, I said to my father that this would be the last time that I would be driving the horses as I have received my call up papers. I felt sad at having to leave my father and my home.

A few days later I had to go and catch the train to Wejherowo. I said goodbye to my sister, Melania, but didn't feel at all sad when saying goodbye to my stepmother. I had no feelings for her. She said to my sister that she didn't understand me – "he thinks he is going on holiday because he showed no emotion towards me. His two brothers had tears in their eyes but Anton didn't." The next time I saw my sister she told me what my stepmother had said. My father took me to the station at Mrzezino. It was a sad journey. My father had been forced to be a soldier in the German army in the First World War and wished he could go in my place and that I could get on with the running of the farm. At the station the train was already there. Somewhere, an accordion and mouth organ were being played.

We were going to war and no one knew where they would be sent after their training. *(Two friends who went a year before me were both killed in Russia).* I was very sad to have to say goodbye to my father and there were tears.

The train consisted of third class carriages and some were sitting while others were standing. At Wejherowo we got out and I was marched from the railway platform to a prison which was a big building in a market place. Some youngsters arrived by coach and horses. We were all assembled and ordinary German soldiers were checking our names.

There were houses overlooking the market square and people opened their windows and talked to us. I thought of running away but thought of my father and the fact that they would interrogate him. Also, if I was caught I would be shot as they would have realised that by wanting to escape I wouldn't make a good German soldier so I would have been killed.

By the time the lists were checked it was getting dusk and we were marched back to the railway station. A goods train was standing on the platform and in each wagon there was straw and hay and bread and cheese on a shelf. There were several of us to a wagon but it was not cramped and we had room to lie down and sleep. In each wagon there was a German soldier in uniform.

The wagons were shut and us boys started singing. We were allowed to sing but not 'Boze Cos Polski' which is a patriotic religious hymn – that was strictly forbidden. We were told to sleep and the train travelled all through the night. We had no idea where it was going. We arrived in a bigish town with a German barracks and a proper square for drill.

After breakfast, we were given a German uniform and a rifle. Our civilian clothes were parcelled up and sent home. There were approximately eighteen to twenty lads to a barrack and there was a rack in the corridor where our rifles were kept. You had to remember which was your rifle. We were given a bed which had a straw filled mattress and blankets. A wardrobe was provided for our uniform and we were shown how to wear it.

We were taken to the exercise yard. Lined up and had to do the drill as well as training on how to use the rifle. We also went out on exercises.

We were there for three months. During our first two to three weeks we were not allowed out. Eventually we were able to get a pass for the week-end but only following an inspection to make sure your shoes were clean and you looked smart. But once in the town I felt awkward as I was not used to being a soldier. I met a lady who gave me and my friend some coupons. We bought ourselves a coffee, walked about for a while and then went back. Throughout the three months we did a lot of training.

Then we were moved to a different place, somewhere else where we did more training with more obstacles. From there we went to Lybek (a transit camp). We only stayed one night in barracks before we were assembled and marched along a lovely wide street. Girls in offices were all waving and we ended up at a railway station where we boarded a train to Minsterlager.

It was there that I had to visit a private dentist because I was having problems with my teeth. Two Polish girls wearing civilian clothes came to the dentist and spoke in

Polish. My Polish was not so good because of my Kaszubski dialect so they didn't talk much especially as I was in a German uniform. They told me that they were in a big camp for Polish girls who worked in an ammunition factory.

At Minsterlager we were in a big barrack and I was allowed home for a week so I got a pass and went by train, through Berlin and Hamburg. While at home, I went to church. I helped my father on the farm but I was sad throughout that week knowing I had to return to an uncertain future.

My father took me back to the station and when I got to Berlin it was the middle of the night and Berlin had just been bombed, so I spent the night on the streets. The following morning I was told I wouldn't be able to go to the camp as the railway had also been bombed. All railway stations had military places so I had to report to one and was given a receipt to say that I had missed the train because of air raids. A railway worker took me to a different railway station in Berlin where I could carry on with my journey. I offered the railway worker a sandwich which my stepmother had given me. He was very pleased and said he would take it back to his children at home.

I eventually managed to catch the train back to Minsterlager where I was stationed. I stayed there for a couple of months not doing very much at all except for a bit of drill and cleaning of equipment. We spent Christmas there. It was a sad Christmas as we didn't celebrate it much and the lunch was poor.

After Christmas, we went back to the railway station and boarded trains. The carriages with the horses were already loaded up. The army wagons, one of which contained a field kitchen, were put onto open topped railway carriages. One horse drew three wagons, one behind the other. The soldiers were in the same goods carriages as the horses. One end was for the horses and the other end was for the soldiers. We didn't know where we were going, travelling through the night. We stopped at one or two stations where there was a long pause and eventually the train moved on again.

We stopped again at another railway station. The field kitchen was in an open topped wagon. There was a large round container where the soup would be made in the middle with an oblong tank on each side of it – one for coffee and one for milk puddings such as milk macaroni or rice puddings and such like.

I thought I would have plenty of time to go for a coffee to the field kitchen so clambered down from my carriage and went to the field kitchen. Suddenly, the train started moving and I spilt the coffee. I was stuck on the field kitchen carriage without my coat and as the wagon was open topped, it was very cold. There was some heat from the boiler on one side of me but I was freezing cold on the other and soon I got very cold.

Eventually, after a long time, we stopped and I found my wagon and climbed back in. Unfortunately, during the night I was sick and started dreaming. In the morning, the officer and the sergeant who were checking to see if everything was fine asked if I had been drinking as they thought I was drunk. I explained what had happened and that I had not been drinking. The train carried on through Germany and Holland until it arrived in Denmark. At Harhus which was a goods station, I could hardly walk. They took little notice of me and I was made to walk while someone else took the wagons and horse. I followed and walked to the transit camp which was near to the docks.

The beds had wooden boards without a mattress. I lay on the bed and covered myself up with my coat. During the night I could hear the soldiers eating and drinking. Early in the morning I had to report sick and the doctor examined me and told me I had pneumonia. A Danish civilian ambulance took me to a Danish hospital. I was made to walk from the ambulance into the hospital and they wouldn't help me because I was a German soldier. Then they wouldn't accept me into the hospital because I was a German soldier so I had to walk back and we drove to another hospital with the same results. Eventually, I was taken to a German military hospital. There were four of us in the ward – a Russian, another German, a German soldier from the Panzer tank division and myself.

A doctor examined me and asked if anyone in my family was ever ill. I told him that my mother had died of pneumonia when I was two and it then had developed into suchota. The doctor wrote all this down and started treating me with tablets.

My company embarked on a ship and went to Norway and I was left behind in the hospital. I had two or three weeks of recuperation and was then discharged from the hospital. I had no money and was shabbily dressed with no belt, no bayonet and no rifle – just the plain uniform.

I returned to the transit camp and was allowed to go into the nearby town. I was issued with three cigarettes a day but as I didn't smoke I would sell my cigarettes to

the Danish people as they were short of cigarettes. With the money I was able to buy food. The hotels were only for soldiers and the meals were free. These hotels were called Soldatenhaim, which means soldier's house. A good meal was also available at the transit camp if you wanted to eat there. I didn't stay at the transit camp as I used to go back to the hospital and the ward sister would find me a bed for the night which was more comfortable than the one back at the camp.

Eventually, I got on a ship and we docked in Oslo in Norway. I disembarked and was told that my unit had gone to Tinnsburg. I spent the night in Oslo and was given a railway ticket in the morning and caught a train. On the journey it snowed and the scenery was beautiful. When I arrived at my destination there were German military soldiers and I asked them where my unit had gone and I was told and had to walk there. Thankfully, it was not a great distance.

On arrival at the unit base I was given a horse which I didn't like, by a not very pleasant sergeant. The soldiers slept in a wooden barrack while the horses were stabled in separate wooden barracks. We spent two to three months there. All the while we were waiting for orders to move on again. We wondered whether they were intending to send us to Russia. Meanwhile, we looked after the equipment and the horses.

Eventually, with the whole company, we were moved to Lillhammer (right up north). It was a very strenuous journey as it was mountainous but it was quite warm as it was early spring time although very windy. In Lillhammer we lived in barracks. During the exercises we were moved much further north. It was raining with sleet and slush. I stayed with the horses. When we returned to the barracks I tended to the horses while the fighting soldiers had a drink to warm them up but I didn't. I also had to do night duty with the horses in the stable by keeping watch.

We stayed here for a while but the British invasion of France meant that the Germans had to rush back to Tinnsberg and Oslo. By now it was summery weather and when we got to the dock, the horses had to be placed in nets and loaded into the hold. I slept with the horses so I could look after them. I had to wear a life jacket all the time. The ship had two barrage balloons attached to it. This was to prevent aeroplanes getting close to bombing the ships. We docked in Harus and got onto a train, which was not a particularly good place to be as planes were attacking the transport quite frequently. We were taken through Holland, Belgium and into France. We went quite a distance into France by train and then unloaded and moved at night

using the horses as transport. We sheltered in orchards, fed the horses during the day and then moved by night.

We had to retreat to Belgium and my horse was very tired. One night the horse got weaker and weaker and after I had reported this the horse just would not budge. The "runner" on his motor bike arrived and I told him that the horse was clapped out and I asked him what I should do. The runner went to the top of the line of men and came back. I was told to leave the horse and jump onto the motorbike and we soon caught up with the column. I got myself onto a cart and we carried on to Holland.

In Belgium, we came across a river and we found a boat owner who was paid to take the company across the river. All the equipment was left behind including the horses. Only the men were taken across the river by boat.

From there we came across another river and because they had to move us in smaller boats we became separated. I found myself with another German lad from Dusseldorf. We found some deserted barracks in the town and we slept there for twenty four hours. We had left our rifles in the guard room overnight but they were still there in the morning.

Some nuns appeared together with civilian people. The nuns asked me and the German lad to tell the people to go because we had rifles. This was because the nuns wanted to keep for themselves anything of value or items which could be useful to them. But I wasn't prepared to do this and went off with the German lad and left them to it. When we left the barracks we saw some German stragglers who were retreating from the front. The German lad and I were told to join them. We were billeted on a farm outside the town of Nannemegen in Holland. We became friendly with the Dutch people. I told them I was Polish and had been made to do forced labour as well as having to join the German army when I was eighteen. They offered me the chance of joining the underground but I didn't want to risk it as I couldn't speak Dutch. I was afraid that if I was caught they would realise I was not a Dutchman and as I couldn't speak German very well I couldn't pretend to be German either.

There were lots of Luftwaffe men in the area using anti-aircraft guns. My job was to dig trenches and chop trees – in fact my brief was to make it difficult for the British. Even the Dutch people were forced into this type of work.

One Sunday morning, I saw one lot of aeroplanes dropping bombs. They were followed by big aeroplanes pulling gliders and dropping paratroopers out of the planes. They were mostly American. About lunchtime my company started dishing out lunch from the field kitchen, but I didn't eat as there was so much commotion and chaos all around. By the evening I went to the railway bridge which crossed the river. There were shots from the American paratroopers and I kept low. By now it was dark and I crossed the railway bridge and went into the centre of the town where there were more German soldiers.

I ended up in a park but I wanted to go still further out of the city but had to retreat back again because of the American paratroopers. I stayed two or three days in the park watching the street to see if anyone was coming. At the end of the street there were civilians and I shot my gun off in their direction, but not to kill. I did it just to frighten them off. That was the only time other than training that I fired my gun throughout the war.

A British armoured car came and in it was a civilian, dressed in a dark uniform like a police uniform with an arm band. He was directing the occupants of the armoured car through but the Germans attacked them with anti-tank guns. The armoured car was blown up and burst into flames. The man managed to get out of the wreckage but was then shot.

Next day we were all called together to cross the river at a different railway bridge. It was midnight. We got half way across the bridge and the Americans started shooting. Lots of men were killed on the bridge. I was falling over the dead bodies and we were told to retreat. It was every man for him self – you were well and truly on your own. Men were throwing rifles into the river. The white flag was held up and we knew we would be taken prisoners by the Americans.

A Luftwaffe bus was left behind and I found some leather boots, a ground sheet, a coat, and a briefcase containing two bars of chocolate. A Polish man came along and grabbed the briefcase with the chocolate.

I came across a Luftwaffe soldier who was dead and went through his pockets and found a wallet with photographs inside. I have the wallet to this day. Also there was a tin opener.

American paratroopers arrived and told us to put our hands up. They grabbed our wrists and looked and asked for watches and rings. They would just take these items but I had neither.

They gathered us into a group and marched us into a meadow. We were told to sit down. Every two hours the guard was changed and we were searched all over again. It was a happy moment to be captured by the Americans.

We stayed in the meadow overnight and moved in the morning - we were marched to a market garden place. There we stayed a couple of nights with nothing to eat or drink. We slept in flowerbeds for plants and just threw the glass aside. Then we were put on American trucks which were driven by black drivers. We drove all day until we came to an open meadow. It was very muddy as it had been raining and was still raining as we unloaded the trucks. We queued up and were given some crackers to eat but nothing to drink. It was so muddy you couldn't lie down but I sat on a satchel and spent the night with a cape around me.

The next day, we were loaded onto the trucks and moved to a town the name of which I can't remember. We stayed there a few days in buildings. Still we had no food or drink.

In Holland we were placed in a camp under British control and were given a meal. We had soup once a day. The camp had no buildings, just wire fencing and guards. The kitchens were in tents. I felt totally worthless as if I was a nobody.

On Sunday, civilians came to stare and view the prisoners of war. They hurled verbal abuse at us. I felt dreadful at the things which were being said to me when in fact I was Polish and had been forced to become a 'German soldier'. In this camp, the British found out who was Polish and who was German and we were separated out into groups, but still in the camp.

From this camp, we were put on a transport into France to Dieppe – another prisoner of war camp. There were soldiers from different nationalities - Polish, German, and Russian – already there. We were given food in the evening, just once a day which consisted mainly of biscuits, cheese and water. The Russian prisoners were in a large tent because they were the first to arrive. As more and more prisoners arrived, the tents ran out so I did not get put in a tent but had to sleep on the ground under an open sky.

By now it was early autumn of 1944. One night, I had enough of sleeping outside so I went into a Russian tent. I slept well but next morning I found I had lice around my neck. Every morning I had to take my shirt off and kill the lice.

We stayed in this camp for a while and sometimes they wanted a few prisoners to go to the dock to unload the ships. If you went to work you got a cup of tea and a piece of bread before leaving the camp. Then you were marched to the docks to do the work which was unloading boxes of food. The boxes were broken on purpose to get at the food. I was caught and brought into the office. I had to take all my possessions out of my pockets and was put into a store to unload bags of sugar which were heavy. I tried to make holes in the bags of sugar to eat the sugar.

When we finished work, everyone was searched to see if they had anything in their pockets and then we were marched back to camp. The evening meal was dished out. You wouldn't go to work the next day as they would choose different people.

In that camp, we had visits from a Polish officer who was in the Polish Forces from England (like a Welfare Officer) and it was such a pleasure to see him. The Polish men surrounded him and wanted to know what was going to happen to them. He always cheered us up. He told us we would be going to England with a chance of joining the Polish Forces. I wanted to go into the Polish Navy but they were full up. They offered me to join the paratroopers or the army and I decided to join the cavalry unit (ulany) but I told them I didn't want to be with horses. I was told I would have armoured vehicles so I joined the 9th Lancers Regiment (9ty Pulk ulanow).

At last the day came when we were going to England. Before our departure, we had to be de-lice. We went through a tent where they puffed DDT powder onto our German uniforms. One evening we marched to the docks to board small ships (7 of them). The ships had brought soldiers from England to Dieppe and the Polish soldiers were taken back to Newhaven. We were given some food on the ship but I just wanted to sleep so went without the food. I found myself a bunk and went to sleep. I slept the entire journey from Dieppe to Newhaven waking once or twice as it was a rough crossing and quite a few men were sick but I wasn't.

4. Scotland (1944 -1948)

When we docked, we were marched straight to the trains which were waiting by the dockside and boarded them. We travelled a short distance to a camp where we were de-loused again. We had to strip completely and place our clothes into a bag. A number was placed on the bag and the clothes went off to be sterilised. Our boots were disinfected and we went to see the doctor who examined us thoroughly. We then had a shower and by the time you had dried yourself, our clothes had been sterilised and we could get dressed.

We were then given some food which was served by two or three English soldiers. The Polish men pounced on the food and I was appalled at their behaviour and I didn't have any food that day. I was utterly ashamed of all the men and was saddened that Polish men could behave in such a way. I actually thought to myself – thank goodness I'm wearing a German uniform – very strange. After the meal, we waited for another transport, but at tea-time a baker arrived with a tray of Chelsea buns and everyone had a bun each and a cup of tea. It tasted delicious as I hadn't eaten for a long time.

We set off for another camp by train in the evening and then arrived and marched to the next camp during the night. We were billeted in wooden barracks with proper army beds and blankets. Each man was interrogated and then we were able to go to bed and sleep. The camp had female army personnel and was a proper army camp. We spent a couple of nights at this camp before we boarded another train and went to Johnston near Glasgow.

At the next camp we slept in buildings and there was no barbed wire surrounding the camp. At this camp we were provided with British uniforms with Poland written on the upper sleeve and an insignia of the regiment on the collar. We were given shaving kits, darning kits and new underwear as well as five shillings as a present from the Queen, the wife of King George VI. Three meals a day were provided and I just walked around the camp as there was no training or exercises at this time. We stayed there about a week and then we were moved to Galashiels. I was billeted in some kind of textile mill. Here we were divided into classes and we did some training such as driving lessons and becoming radio operators. I had been chosen to do the radio operator training, but I asked the corporal if I could join the driving training as I felt I would not be able to cope with learning Morse code. At this camp I studied the

theory of driving for two weeks and then actual driving for three weeks. I took my test and passed first time.

Once again we were moved to Bridge of Allen near Stirling in a camp with Nissen huts. I was in 2nd squadron at this camp with 3rd squadron and 1st squadron were in a different camp. The officers were preparing the regiment for a move to Europe, but no one knew where. We were given vaccinations and I was sent to North Berwick on a special course to become a storm trooper. The course was run by Polish army instructors and the men for the course were picked from two squadrons consisting of two officers, two sergeants plus corporals. We were trained by special instructors to be able to use different weapons, the techniques of de-mining, handling hand grenades and mortar fire as well as sharp shooting exercises. We stayed there training for two to three months.

After the training we returned to Bridge Allen. Within a couple of weeks we were all assembled and told by the officers that the war had ended. All the men felt very let down by the agreement between Churchill and Roosevelt with Stalin and so there were no celebrations and it was a very strange atmosphere. The officer announced that as it was a Saturday the men could do as they wished but they had to be back on parade ready to go to church on the Sunday morning.

From Bridge Allen I was sent to Banff for a few months. While there I was picked at random to go on a cookery course in Aberdeen at an English army cookhouse. Life was enjoyable as there was a dance once a week which was held in a large dance hall with a live band. The course lasted six weeks.

I was sent back to Banff and started work in the cookhouse. I had to be up early to prepare the breakfasts. After a month, I was transferred to the officers Mess as a cook. I mainly baked cakes and pastries so I had to be trained for that. I got paid more because I was in the Officer's Mess. Four weeks later they asked me to go into the Dining Room and help with the waiting so I was trained to do that. I also had to serve in the bar and prepare the canapés. Whenever an officer said have a drink on me, I would thank him, pour it out, but not drink it and then when the next officer wanted a drink I would sell him mine and pocket the money. This was the first time I started saving. The relationship between the officers and their men was very friendly.

From Banff the whole regiment was transported to a very large airfield not far from Banff but I can't remember the name of it. I stayed in the same duties in the Dining

Room in the Officer's Mess, as well as preparing canapés and serving drinks. Here the kitchen was huge, with a dining room next door and in the opposite end was a huge dance floor. Once a week, at a cost of 6d, there would always be a dance, organised by a different regiment.

I managed to get in for nothing as I knew the corporal in charge of the whole kitchen. His name was Bruno and I would ask him if he would let me through from the kitchen into the dancehall. The soldiers taking the money were on the other side of the dancehall and I would slip in unseen by them, although the band noticed but didn't let on.

Another trick was taking a box, stuffing it with newspaper and putting a white cloth over it and at the door I would announce that I was bringing sandwiches for the band. Once in the dancehall, I would stuff the box under the table and enjoy the dance. I would pick the box up at the end of the dance. When I was in Galashiels, I would wait for the band to arrive and then help them unload their instruments and take them into the dancehall and that way, once again, I got in for free.

From here, I was sent to Dunblane to join the Royal Army Transport Corps which was British. I was there for over a year (1946/1947). As there was no Officer's Mess here, I joined the kitchen staff doing cooking. Meanwhile, some of the soldiers went back to Poland or emigrated to Canada. When they were de-mobbed they were given a gratuity in two instalments from the British government. The first one was given to the soldiers straight away and the second came two to three months later. Those men who went to Poland didn't get their second instalment and word soon came back to England that this wasn't happening. So when my friend, Franek, was due to go back to Poland, he filled in a form authorising me to be paid the second instalment of £25. Meanwhile I gave him £15 and a new pair of shoes.

I also asked him to take a parcel from me to my family in Polchowo as Franek was from that area. I packed up raisins, sultanas, vanilla essence, cinnamon, etc. I then received a letter from my sister, Melania, who was about to get married so the parcel couldn't have arrived at a better time.

With all the soldiers departing, the unit got so small that it couldn't carry on any longer and was disbanded. The men that were left joined another unit. At the new place I was no longer in the kitchens but moved army items (boots, gloves and all the stuff for army personnel) from a warehouse onto lorries which were taken to the railway station and loaded onto trains.

It was at this time that I was offered to go on a course to do long shore fishing. I decided to go for a walk and by the time I returned the interviews were over and it was all closed up. I returned to my unit. The headquarters of the Fishing School was in Aberdeen and the school itself was outside Aberdeen in a smallish camp. I went to join the staff as a cook but not to do the course. When the soldiers had finished the course, it was so successful that they decided to do the next course for officers. Once trained, these officers would go on fishing vessels that went as far as Russia – they were used as spies.

5. ENGLAND (1948 to present)

5.1 Stratford upon Avon (1948-1949)

One of the officers asked me if I would like to be de-mobbed as he had some aristocratic friends who had a young man cooking and another doing the waiting and they had aristocratic friends who also needed a cook. I thought about it and agreed so the officer organised an interview. I got a pass and was released from duties and went to London by train, changed stations and caught a train to Stratford-Upon-Avon. At the station I phoned Mrs. Longsdon who was the lady of the house and she told me to walk to the market and then show the address to the taxi driver who would take me to the house.

The house which was called Foxcot was situated just outside the village of Illmington. I arrived and Mrs. Longsdon paid for the taxi. She showed me all around the very large mansion. There was also a small Catholic Church by the side of the house as well as stables housing the riding horses, a coach and accommodation for the coachman above the stables. Mr. Longsdon owned a lot of farmland and had Jersey cows. There were lots of wheat and barley fields. During the war, the house was used as a Boarding School for girls. Mr. Longsdon had been away during the war. Meanwhile the previous Mrs. Longsdon had been entertaining RAF officers from a nearby base at her house. She fell in love with one of the officers and when her husband returned, they divorced and she went to live with the officer. Mr. Longsdon already employed a governess for the two children and he married her and she became the new Mrs. Longsdon. The children were away in boarding school and it was the new Mrs. Longsdon who interviewed me for the job and offered it to me.

I arrived back at my unit and asked to be de-mobbed. I had to travel to Aberdeen, which was the headquarters, to see my captain but he wouldn't release me. I came out of the office and walking towards me was the Welfare Officer. I told him I wasn't allowed to go, so the Welfare Officer walked me back to the Captain's office and declared "*This soldier has a job to go to and wishes to be de-mobbed and you can't stop him*". I then had my paperwork sorted out in order to be released from the army. The man sorting out the discharge papers was named Adam who was in his forties. He asked me where I was going and I told him about my new job. He said that if there was another vacancy at the place I was going to be working then would I let him know. He gave me his name and address and off I went. But in my own mind I thought Adam would not be suitable for that type of work. I went by train with a Polish cadet officer to Johnston in order to be officially de-mobbed. I arrived there

and stayed the night and the next morning was given civilian clothes and the first instalment of my gratuity.

I was given a railway pass and travelled to London and then on to Stratford-Upon-Avon to the big house where my new life as a cook at the posh house with Mr. and Mrs. Longsdon began in 1948. When I arrived I was shown my room which was right at the top of the house. Mrs. Longsdon was very kind and put me at ease as I wasn't sure whether I would be able to cook the variety of meals that would be required. Mrs. Longsdon spent a lot of time with me in the kitchen. In the mornings we would discuss the menu for the rest of the day. She would help me with the preparation of the meals whenever she had any free time. She seemed to enjoy her time with me in the kitchen. Mr. Longsdon was always busy attending to the Estate either visiting his farms or attending to his paperwork with his secretary in the upstairs office and I felt Mrs. Longsdon was lonely.

After a couple of months, a girl called Betty who was a Londoner arrived. She was a year older than me and she came to join us to look after the bees and chickens. She, too, was given a room at the very top of the house and her room was opposite the bathroom. She ate her meals with me in the kitchen. We became very friendly. When we were not on duty we would cycle for miles along the lanes in the surrounding countryside. One day when we were on our own Betty said, "Surely you're not going to stay here for ever as you are a good cook and you should think about your future somewhere else." I agreed with her but said I was quite happy there for the time being.

Our relationship blossomed and we became very close and we would often visit each other in our rooms without Mr. and Mrs. Longsdon being aware. I also spent two to three week-ends at Betty's parents who lived in London. Her father was a civil servant and they lived in a semi-detached house.

A few months after I arrived, Adam, who worked in the Army offices in the Aberdeen headquarters, arrived to wait at the table and clean and polish the furniture, etc. I made some excuse to Adam as to why I hadn't informed him of the vacancy at the House as I was myself surprised to see him when he arrived for his new job. I didn't think he was very good as he was suited to more physical work. I then had to share my room with Adam who snored a lot.

One morning, Mr. Longsdon saw me coming out of Betty's room. As a result they moved Betty to the nearby village. However, I would visit her in the evenings, leaving

through a window of the house and cycling to the village without anyone knowing about it. On my return, I would clamber through the window, unlock the door, put the bicycle away and sneak back upstairs to my room.

Betty decided to leave and get herself a job in Attleborough living on a farm looking after chickens and bees. She was given a cottage for her accommodation. One day a letter arrived from Betty suggesting that she put an advert into the local newspaper for a cook's position for me so I could move to that area. Roundabout that time, Mrs. Longsdon told me that she was going to dismiss Adam as she couldn't work with him and he wasn't suitable for the job. I told her that I felt the same and she said she wished he was more like me.

Not long after Betty's letter which I had replied to agreeing to her suggestion, two letters arrived for me offering me interviews. One was handwritten from a restaurant in Sherringham and the other was a type written letter from Grove House, a Nursing Home in Norwich.

Living above the stables, in the coachman's accommodation, was an ex- sea captain who I had befriended and I took the two letters with me and showed them to the "captain" and asked him for his advice. He suggested I should go to the Nursing Home first for my interview because the letter, having been type written, was more official and, therefore, the job would probably be a safer bet.

I went to see Mrs. Longsdon to ask for a few days off in order to go to Norwich for the interview. She was surprised and said she would have to speak to her husband as the children were returning from boarding school for their half-term break. After I had cooked the evening dinner, Mrs. Longsdon came to the kitchen to make some cocoa and said that Mr. Longsdon would like a word with me.

"I hear from Mrs. Longsdon that you are leaving us", said Mr. Longsdon.

"No", I replied, *"I just want a few days for an interview".*

"You should give us a month's notice", said Mr. Longsdon.

"I will give you a month's notice if I get the job in Norwich, but you didn't mention length of holidays, time of notice, etc when I first joined you", I said.

No sooner had I uttered these words when Mr. Longsdon announced that the next day Adam and I were to go to the Labour Exchange and from there on to the police station at Shipton-on-Stow. The reason for going to the police station was because Poles had to notify the police of their whereabouts.

“And then you can leave the day after that”, Mr. Longsdon finished by saying.

“Thank you very much”, I replied, “that will suit me fine”.

The next day, I prepared breakfast and lunch and in the afternoon I phoned for a Taxi which collected me and Adam and took us to the Labour Exchange. I entered the Labour Exchange and to my great surprise, there in front of the desk stood Mr. Longsdon. He beckoned to me and pointing to the man behind the desk said, *“This gentleman will deal with you”*. Having said that, he went out.

I was asked a few questions, no forms were filled in and there was nothing to sign and so Adam and I went on to the police station. Here, too, there was no paperwork to fill in just a few questions and then the taxi drove us back to the big house. I asked the lady taxi driver if she could take me to the railway station the following morning. That evening, before preparing the evening meal, I said all my goodbyes to the “captain”, the gardener and another family who worked at the farm in a nearby cottage.

The next morning, I prepared the breakfast and afterwards I looked for Mrs. Longsdon to say goodbye but she wasn't around. I had been with the Longsdon's for about fourteen months. So the taxi took me to the nearest railway station and the train took me to London and then on to Norwich.

5.2 Norwich (1949 – present)

I arrived at Thorpe Station and started to walk up Prince of Wales Road and I then stopped a man and asked him which bus would take me to Newmarket Road where Grove House was situated.

“Take the number 90 and ask for the Eagle Garage stop as Grove House is next door”.

I arrived at Grove House which was a Private Surgical Nursing Home and a maid opened the door. I was taken to the waiting room and Matron came in to greet me. Her name was Miss Stradwick. She introduced me to Mrs McKee who was the bone surgeon's wife and it was she who conducted the interview. I was appointed as a relief chef and this I would do twice a week and when chef took his holidays. My other duties were to be in the still room. This was where the cutlery and crockery was washed and the trays prepared for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner. I also had to answer the tannoy system when the patients required someone and I also had to

answer the front door. Seventeen patients was the maximum they could deal with at any one time. At the Longsdon's I had been paid three guineas but at the Grove, they offered me £5 and ten shillings.

Mrs. McKee asked me when I could start and I told her straight away which took her by surprise. She asked if I had left my other employment and I had said that I had. She asked where I was going to sleep and I said I would have to find a B&B or some lodgings somewhere. "*Well*", she said, "*one of the Nursing Sisters has left and you can have her room*". The room was in a separate building where all the nurses stayed and I thought I had landed in heaven.

Mrs. McKee showed me to my room which was in the nurses' block on the first floor. I stayed there for a few days while they spruced up the garden house complete with iron stove.

I started work the very next day and the year was 1949. From the moment I started working there I enjoyed the work very much. I had been there about six to eight weeks when the chef left and I took over his duties. As there was no relief chef now, I offered to have three half days off a week instead of a full day and a half in order to help them out. That way I could prepare things towards the meals in order to help Matron who did the meals.

Meanwhile, I was still conducting my romance with Betty. She would come up from Attleborough to Norwich and I would meet her on my day off. Then I bought myself a brand new 99cc motorbike which was very noisy and I would take myself off to Attleborough to visit Betty. She had her own little cottage which went with the job.

One morning, I was in the still room when a young nurse caught my eye. I looked her up and down and was drawn to her nice legs. Her name was Maureen but everyone called her Middy because her surname was Middleton. In the garden, near to the kitchen, was a boiler house and the night nurse's job was to stoke the boiler. In the evenings, I didn't go out very much but there was a pub next to the Eagle Garage and I might pop in there occasionally for a half pint of beer. During most of my evenings off I would pop into the Nurses' Dining Room where Sister and the duty nurses were writing up the reports and spend the evening with them.

When Middy was on night duty, I would go with her to stoke the boiler. That was where the cuddling and romance started – in the boiler house. I had to tell Betty that our fling was over as I had met a nurse at the Home. Middy, too, had been seeing an

ex-patient who was a farmer's son and she finished with him as well. On our days off, I would take Middy by train to the seaside at Great Yarmouth.

Middy mentioned to her parents that she had a boyfriend who lived at the Nursing Home and that he was foreign. Her mother said she didn't want her getting involved with a black person. Middy said that he wasn't black and that he came from Poland. Then she properly introduced me to them after I had called in to see them on a pretext that Middy had left something at home and needed it at work. On that occasion they didn't invite me in and just handed me what she had asked for (Middy had telephoned beforehand). This was all a ploy so that I could meet them informally. Middy was called Lucy by her parents and relatives. This all started when, as a little girl, she would run around without her shoes on. At that time there was a song about a girl called Lucy who in the song had to put her shoes on and so that was why the nickname stuck.

In January 1951, Lucy and I were married at St. John's Catholic Cathedral in Norwich. My birth certificate was required from Poland by the priest who was going to marry us, as well as notification that when I had left Poland I was a bachelor. Meanwhile, the priest said that the children from the marriage had to be brought up in the Catholic faith as was the custom in those days and so Lucy attended lessons before she was married. Once the documentation arrived we were able to get married. Peter (Moira's husband) was best man and Moira was maid of honour. These were very good friends of Lucy. Moira had lived in the same road as Lucy and they had been friends from an early age. After the wedding, the reception was held in Lucy's parents' home. Matron, a Sister and a few nurses, Uncle Richard, Aunt Louie, Uncle Ernest and Lucy's sister, Margaret and her boyfriend were the guests at the wedding.

After the reception we spent our honeymoon in London travelling there by train. We stayed there for three or four days at the Regent Palace Hotel. When we were checking in we had to fill in the register and Lucy signed her name as Middleton not being used to the name Czapp. The receptionist kept pointing to the book but not saying anything and Lucy got a bit rattled and told her that she had already signed. The receptionist told her that she had signed the wrong name as they had been booked as Mr. and Mrs. Czapp so Lucy explained that they had only just got married and she was not used to using her new surname.

We returned to Norwich after our honeymoon and resumed work. We lived with Lucy's parents to start off with. From the moment I got married, I got a pay rise to £7

and ten shillings a week as I was no longer using their board and lodging. Our salaries were supplemented when a patient left as they would always leave a tip in an envelope for the staff.

Our first son, Anthony, was born in Norwich Maternity Hospital which was part of the West Norwich Hospital on 6th May, 1951. Two years later, David was born on 18th March 1953 at the same hospital and Sharon another two years after that on 25th March, 1955.

5.3 Geoffrey Road (1954-1979)

When David was about a year old, Lucy and I bought Geoffrey Road without a mortgage. We were able to do this because we had lived with Lucy's parents rent free and so were able to save £700. We went to view the house with my father-in-law and I liked it very much. The asking price was £1,150 and I got it reduced to £1,100. This meant there was a shortfall of £400. We were thinking of getting a mortgage when Aunt Elsie, Lucy's Mum's sister, offered to lend us the £400 as she didn't want us taking out a mortgage. But she stipulated that we must not tell anyone where we had got the money from. She told us we could pay back the money as and when we could afford it.

The house was a three bedroom terraced house in a short four house terrace with a front and back entrance with an alley way at the back. There was an outside toilet and a brick built wash house with a slate roof. There was a chimney in the wash house so we could have a copper for washing clothes. You went through the back door and straight into the kitchen and from there into the living room. From the living room you entered the hall with a staircase going up and another door into the front room.

There were three bedrooms upstairs and to enter the smallest bedroom you had to go through the middle bedroom. There was no bathroom. In the kitchen we had a half bath which had a melamine top. The children would have a bath first, then the water would be topped up and Lucy would have her bath followed by me.

At one point, before Sharon was born, Lucy's sister Margaret and her daughter Louise came to live with us in the small bedroom for a few weeks. This was because Margaret didn't get on with her parents.

Two months after having bought the house, the tax office wrote to me asking me to report to their offices. They wanted to know why I didn't have a mortgage. I told them I had saved a lot with my and Lucy's wages. We didn't smoke, didn't drink, didn't gamble and didn't go out. Eventually, he accepted what I said after a lot of questioning and me getting angry with him.

I paid Aunt Elsie £100 each year for three years which left me owing £100. Lucy's Dad retired and as money was tight for them the telephone had to go and they said they wanted to sell the car as well. I asked them how much they wanted for their car and they said £250. I offered £200 and they agreed. I then had to ask Aunt Elsie if she minded waiting for her money which I still owed her. She was happy with that and said I could pay it when I was able to. Thus, I was able to pay my father-in-law £100 straight away followed by another £100 the following year. But the following year when I had saved up the £100 to pay my father-in-law he said he didn't want the money so I was able to pay the final instalment to Aunt Elsie. The entire loan had been interest free.

Sharon was born in the same hospital as her two brothers. While in hospital, Lucy was sterilised the day after Sharon was born because of her asthma. While Lucy was having the operation Sharon had milk expressed from other mothers. When Lucy returned to Geoffrey Road and started breast feeding, Sharon was sick and kept crying. Lucy took Sharon to the doctor and explained that she had plenty of milk but Sharon was being sick. I thought it was because Lucy had had a general anaesthetic and the doctor agreed. So Sharon was put on half fat milk and was fine after that. When she was older Lucy put her on full cream and the same thing happened again so Sharon was brought up on half cream milk.

I was at Grove House for eight and a half years. Because the NHS had been introduced in 1948 there were fewer patients so it was decided to close Grove House. I started looking for a job and got one at Purdi's Restaurant. It was a very classy restaurant near to the Cathedral. I went there before Grove House closed completely. I worked there for a few months and then came the Suez crisis so business dropped. As I was the last person to join I was also the first person to go so was given a week's notice and had to leave.

I signed on at the Labour Exchange and I helped out at the butcher's shop with my father-in-law. I saw an advert for a job at the Norfolk News advert and the hours were 7 pm to 3 am. At the interview, I didn't like it as it looked typical canteen work.

But I took the job and after a couple of weeks I got a rise in salary. I thought it wouldn't be a bad job as I could spend time on my allotment during the day.

A patisserie chef who went from Purdi's to the Royal Hotel as a Head Chef needed staff and asked me to help him out as he was short staffed so I went to work there at lunchtimes. My hours were from 11 am until 3 pm. They had asked me if I could work full time but I said I couldn't so eventually they offered me the same hours but on a permanent basis. I agreed and ended up doing it for eighteen and a half years.

Lucy's Dad became ill with thrombosis. I always went to see him after my hotel shift. I spent half an hour and sometimes an hour with him after my hotel shift. He was in a lot of pain. Then, eventually, he had to go into hospital because he had gangrene and had to have his leg amputated above the knee. I brought the bed down into the front room and that was where he slept. I would help him to dress every morning and then go on to the hotel for my shift. After the hotel work I would call in again. During my one hour break between 10 and 11 pm I would cycle to Bryan Avenue, put my father-in-law to bed and then cycle back to the Norfolk and Norwich News Company. I would finish my shift and cycle home just before 3 am. Eventually, my father-in-law got a wooden leg so had to have his harness fitted each day. I went backwards and forwards like this for about three months. Unfortunately, my father-in-law got kidney complications and went into hospital, where he died.

I managed to obtain an allotment. These were allocated to Colman's employees first and if there were any left you could apply for one. There were thirty allotments altogether and I managed to get one and it took a lot of work to get it sorted out. After a couple of years though I had to give it up as the land was wanted for building bungalows and I was given another one further into the plot. I built a shed and kept rabbits and sold them by word of mouth. I had previously kept rabbits at Geoffrey Road where I had fifty two of them. Then I moved them to the allotment. One time, someone broke in and stole the rabbits so I didn't keep them anymore. Instead, I bought two pigs and kept them in the shed. Then I added another three and had five. When they were old enough, I put them on the trailer and took them to the slaughter house.

I spoke to the butcher who supplied meat for the Royal Hotel and he agreed to pay me £15 for each pig. I used to take the kitchen waste from the Royal Hotel and the Norfolk and Norwich News Company and put it in a box on the back of my bike and take it to the pigs. I used to buy piglets from a friend, fatten them up and sell them to

the butcher. I also grew flowers (pinks, carnations and scavias) on the allotment and sold the flowers to the men at the Norfolk and Norwich News Company.

5.4 Visit to Poland (1966)

In 1966 I went to Poland by car with all the family. My car was a Rover 75 and we drove to Harwich and caught the ferry at midnight to Belgium. Early in the morning we disembarked and started our journey through Belgium. I became tired and we stopped in a small town, parked and I had a little sleep. After eating some rolls, we set off again until we got to Holland. There we stopped at the motorway, had a rest and I had a shave, got some petrol and set off again. We came to the West German border and I suddenly realised I had friends living there. Luckily I had their address with me and after enquiring as to the location of the road we were looking for, we were able to find and visit them. They offered us food and drink and they showed us the way back to the motorway. We drove to another petrol station, filled up with petrol and found some accommodation for the night.

After a lovely breakfast we set off and drove until we got to the East German border. There we had to fill in forms and buy an East German visa. We had to go through a check area where we were questioned about the things we had with us. Eventually we carried on with our journey until we reached the Polish border. Here there were more controls and checks and the Polish guards were very abrupt. I asked about accommodation and was told where to go. The hotel was extremely basic and Lucy wasn't very pleased with it but I was so tired I fell asleep straight away. Lucy remained fully clothed and slept on top of the bed as she thought the bedding wasn't clean. We had Sharon in our room and the boys were in another room.

In the morning we looked round the market and found a baker, bought some bread and found a shop which sold butter and cheese. The cheese was placed on the counter without any paper and when I asked for some, the shopkeeper said she didn't have any. I said I needed to take it back to the car so rather reluctantly she gave me some brown paper. We ate the bread and cheese in the car, re-started our journey and arrived in Poznan. From there we made our way towards Gdansk passing through Sopot, Gdynia, Rimia and Reda. In Reda on the right hand side I pointed out my school to my family. We went on to Polchowo and Jozef and his family who had been waiting by the gate for us, decided to go indoors for a cup of coffee. As I passed their house I tooted the horn and they came running out but we had already passed by. Some neighbours called out my name and I became very emotional. We carried on to Melania's house.

We didn't stay at my family home as that was now Jan's. I felt at home at my sister's but not at my brother's family home. We stayed with my sister for three weeks and visited all the family. While we were there we were invited to a wedding anniversary celebration of my father's sister (my aunt) and her husband. They had eighteen children, three of whom had died. To begin the celebration they had a Mass with a special blessing. The musicians, to start off with, were playing outside as well as the dancing and then as the evening went on, everyone transferred indoors.

While in Poland I thought why am I working for other people? Why don't I get a place of my own and rear pigs. When my father-in-law had died, Uncle Dick thought we might start up a Nursing Home with myself as the cook, Lucy as the nurse and get other staff to work for us, but I wasn't all that keen on the idea. Lucy had seen a place in the newspaper that was going to be sold by auction and I thought it would be ideal to keep pigs.

5.5 The Firs (1969 – present)

As soon as I saw the place which was called The Firs I fell in love with it. We went to the auction with Aunt Ruby as she knew how to bid for properties. There were two other bidders. It started with one, then the second, back to the first one and then Aunt Ruby came in with her bid, there was another bid from the first one and finally Aunt Ruby secured it. It cost £14,000 and you had to pay £500 deposit which I did. Geoffrey Road was sold very quickly for £7,500 but Brian Avenue took longer to sell. That meant we needed a bridging loan from the Bank. Aunt Elsie told me not to get a bridging loan but to go to her son, Michael, who would lend the money to us. I went to see Michael but he didn't want to help out. This was because Michael didn't like me as he didn't like foreigners. It didn't bother me as I knew I could get a bridging loan from the Bank. Aunt Elsie was very ashamed of her son not wanting to help out but she had signed all her money over to her son so that they would not have to pay inheritance tax.

When Brian Avenue was sold I was in the will so Lucy and I got two thirds and Lucy's sister, Margaret, got one third. We were then able to use this money to stop the bridging loan and to pay off the rest of the money owing on the Firs. This meant we did not have a mortgage to worry about.

Once the bidding was over at the auction I went on holiday for two weeks with Lucy and Sharon to Minorca as the holiday had already been booked. My mother-in-law went into a Home near Aunt Elsie and she was booked in for the two weeks. We had

said that if she wasn't happy in the Home then Margaret said she could stay with her. Mother-in-law stayed there for three or four nights and then went to stay with her daughter, Margaret, for the remainder of the time. I had a good holiday and was able to relax. I swam in the sea every day. We joined up with a family who also had a daughter and so Sharon had a friend.

On our return we started the next phase of our lives at the Firs.

* * * * *

Joanna Czapp - 2014