

The 1930s

On April 26th 1930 Dennis, my brother, was born. This was a very important event because now I was no longer an 'only child'. Dennis was born at 74 Bushey Mill Crescent, and I was able to see him soon after his birth. Because he was asleep and I had no previous knowledge of babies I asked "How long is it before babies open their eyes?".



Mum with baby Dennis.



Needle.

Dad bought us a puppy which we named Needle (after one of the dogs at 109 Hunny Hill, Newport, Isle of Wight). Needle was part Greyhound and part Alsatian, but Dad said he was a Heinz dog (Heinz food's slogan was "Heinz - 57 Varieties"). He grew into a sleek dog with Alsatian markings but floppy ears and very large paws. Dad was now calling him "Old flannel foot" because he could pad along quietly like a well known cat burglar and jewel thief of that time. He was a softie with children, but displayed his teeth like a wolf if he was shouted at, or had cigarette smoke blown in his direction. When Dad used fixative on charcoal designs, Needle would inhale methylated spirit solvent which got into the air and he'd become quite intoxicated.

Needle was in his element in water, which is surprising because Dad "taught him to swim" by throwing him in the river. At the Bushey Mill Lane bridge over the River Colne, Needle would attract people who would watch him swim underwater and bring to the bank bricks from an earlier bridge. At home he would escape from the house if he could, and once out he could jump the front gate with ease. Needle would live until 1943 when he lost the strength in his legs.

1930, which had started so well, was also a year of misfortune. The cotton industry was hit by a slump and Dad had a 50% cut in salary. We had to cut down on all spending, and payment of the mortgage on the new house had to be re-negotiated, so that for a number of years only little more than the interest on the loan was paid. Part of the house had to be sub-let to Mr & Mrs Mayes, Len and Maud. They stayed with us

for a few years and their son Lenny was born at our house. In spite of the difficulties those were happy years. Mum and Mrs Mayes became good friends and knew each other by the nicknames Sally and Janey. 'Janey Mayes' is a name my son Mark well remembers.



*Joyce and Vera King,
Me and Joan
Humphreys holding
Dennis, 1930*



Me with my brother Dennis, c1934.



*My Mum and Dad, c1934, by the French
windows at 74 Bushey Mill Crescent.*

One day I was instructed by Mum to go, after school, to Uncle Percy's greengrocery shop, which was at the corner of Leavesden Road and Jubilee Road, where my cousin

Jennifer aged about three would be ready in her pushchair for me to bring home with me, where Aunt Emm would be waiting for her. I hung back after school because I did not want my friends to see me doing what I considered a feminine task. They were waiting for me further down along the road, and oh how wrong I was. Jennifer was pleased to get so much attention, and my friends envied me for having a "little sister" like her.

Although I was a complete failure at sports and games I did well in most subjects, but when time came to sit the examination for secondary school education, the 'Eleven Plus', I failed. Most children were able to try again but I was 12 years old before the next examinations, which disqualified me. So next I attended Alexandra School which is between Ridge Street and Judge Street in North Watford. Unlike my previous school, Callow Land, it was for both boys and girls. Most of the time there I was in Mr Camburn's class and he was a good teacher who expected hard work, but it was the happiest of my school days. I should have left school at 14 years of age but due to high unemployment I was advised to remain at school. I was able to spend most of my time drawing and painting. One day a week I attended the Art School in Queen's Road, Watford.

There was a job vacancy at John Dickenson's paper works at Apsley, and I applied for it. I was successful and worked there for one day, but Dad said that it was so unlikely to have a future, and he advised me not to return. In order to get some experience I spent some time with a textile designer who had worked with Dad at Silver Studios. This was George Willis whose studio was at 12a The Mall, Ealing, London W5. I didn't learn much, and I was paid 10 shillings a week which was not enough to pay my rail fare.

I was now going to evening classes and the Art School was visited by Neville Kilvert Coates, who was the son of the Mayor of Watford at the time. N.K. Coates had just started an advertising art studio in Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, London. I was offered a job at a good wage. I did very little artwork, but a lot of errands had to be run and tea to be made. I was now 15 years old.

I got to know my way around 'The City', which at this time still had horse drawn delivery wagons. It was very noisy because the wheels had steel rims, and all but the main roads were cobbled. New Bridge Street was made of tarred wooden blocks to reduce the noise, but after heavy rain they would swell and produce huge humps. There was always a strong smell of horse manure, and on hot summer days this dried and was blown like dust everywhere. The horses when they stopped were given more bags of food and when they shook their heads pieces of chaff were scattered into the air so that they sparkled in the sunlight.

I enjoyed working. The Fleet Street area was an exciting place. In the courts and side streets there was the roar of printing presses and the smell of hot metal and printing ink. Newspapers tied with string into bundles came clattering down roller chutes into delivery vans. On the 'Street' the newsvendors cried "Starnooz'nstandar!" which meant The Star, Evening News and The Standard. The first editions of the evening papers were on sale before midday.

N.K. Coates was an airbrush artist and a photograph retoucher, and in my spare time I was able to watch his techniques and to teach myself to use the airbrush. Another artist working there was Eric Courtney, who was also a musician who played with many of the top dance bands. The artist who impressed me most was Victor Deane, who did brilliant line illustrations, and who was not much older than me.



*Fred Blackwell,
Uncle Alf King
and Joyce King in
the garden at
Warlingham,
c1930.*

Now that I was working in London I had greater freedom. Sometimes I left work on Friday and spent the weekend at Aunt Lill and Uncle Fred Blackwell's house "The House in the Wood" in Warlingham, Surrey. The only time I met members of the Cross family was on one of these visits.

My future with N.K. Coates looked quite limited, but one of his clients was Albert Joseph Beecher Stow. (He is no known relation to the author Harriet Beecher Stowe). Beecher Stow Studios was an advertising agency which was also in Imperial Buildings. Beecher Stow was losing his only employee, Albert Messino, and he told N.K. Coates that I would be a suitable replacement. For me it was an escape from all the menial tasks I was doing. Now instead of making the tea I would telephone an order and it would be delivered from the ABC Restaurant below our office. I was now able to do design and finished artwork, and to put into practice all I had learned about retouching photographs. I had to work hard to learn how to mark-up copy for typesetting, and how to order line blocks, half tone blocks, Stereos and Electros (both being methods of creating a letterpress printing plate) which newspapers had to get on time. I had to learn fast because Beecher Stow was going on holiday within a few weeks and he intended to leave me in control.

Albert Messino was a little older than me. He agreed to stay with Beecher Stow Studios for a week or two, so he was able to show me what I would be expected to do. He was interested in flying model aircraft and one lunchtime we took a bus to a shop in the Old Kent Road and both bought model kits. My box was a Vernon design and it contained a blueprint, spruce strips, balsa sheets, and cement. To cover the model there was thin silk, and for dope there was 'Banana Oil'. In addition there was a roughly carved propeller and some rubber-elastic to be wound up to power the propeller. When built the model was very heavy and unstable, so my first attempt was not at all successful.



Me with my first model aircraft c1937.

Telephone numbers in those days were easier to remember. I have still not forgotten that the studio was CEN 7993 and that Samuel Jones was CEN 6500. (CEN stood for Central, an Exchange in the City of London, and was the three letters on the dial that became the numbers 236 when dialled.) We did not get a telephone at home in Watford until the late 1940s.

Beecher Stow Studios had one main client, Samuel Jones & Co Ltd whose trade included gummed and coated

paper manufacturing. Their offices were only a few minutes walk away in Bridewell Place and their factory was in Camberwell. Their trademark was a Camberwell Beauty butterfly, and Butterfly Brand stationery was in all the shops then. (After WW2, Samuel Jones remained a client of Beecher Stow, but in later years parts of Samuel Jones were taken over by Wiggins Teap.) The Camberwell Beauty logo can still be seen in tiles over the entrance to a shopping centre in Camberwell, South London, near the site of the factory.

A.J. Beecher Stow was then about 40 years of age. He was a man of rather foreign appearance which was emphasized by his imperial beard. In the 1914-1918 war he had served in the Royal Artillery and he had been awarded the Military Medal and the Croix de Guerre. As a result of gunfire he was slightly deaf, or as he said "pals from Wapping" a reference to a time when he had misheard a request for "towels for washing".

For a small firm, Beecher Stow Studios was very successful, and I was being paid more than I thought possible, and Dad certainly thought I was being overpaid! Advertising is of course all 'feast or famine' and from now would enjoy a boom period until war came. Thanks to my good pay I was able to afford a 9.5mm cine camera. There are not many still photos of the family remaining from the late 1930s, but I have a couple of reels of cine film showing some of our exploits.



Mum, Dennis and Dad in the sea at the Isle of Wight, c1938.



Me and Dennis chopping wood on the Isle of Wight c1938.



Dennis, Mum and Dad on a pier, Isle of Wight, c1938.



Me in a canoe, with Dennis in the back, Isle of Wight c1938



Dad, Mum, Dennis and my Aunt Lill in the garden at Warlingham, 1939.



Mum, Dennis and me on a cliff path on the Isle of Wight, c1938



One of the floats at the 1938 Lord Mayors Show, Ludgate Circus.



Some of the 'fitness' marchers at the 1938 Lord Mayors Show.

From the studio window we would watch the annual Lord Mayors Show and I was able to film the 1938 show as it passed through Ludgate Circus. The theme for that year was "Fitness wins!" because there was a concern over the health of the nation.



Dennis beside the German Ju90 D-ADFJ "Baden" operated by Lufthansa at Croydon Airport, 1939.

War was inevitable. In 1938 and 1939 we went from one crisis to another. On 13th March 1938 Germany invaded and annexed Austria, and this 'Anschluss' met no resistance. On 29th September 1938 the British Prime Minister Chamberlain went to Germany and signed the Munich Pact. He returned waving a piece of paper and saying "Peace in our time" but few people believed him. The agreement gave Hitler the part of Czechoslovakia called The Sudetenland but on the 10th of March 1939 Germany took the remainder. We had by now been issued with gas masks and later with an Anderson Shelter which was buried in the garden. By August we

all knew that if Germany entered Poland, which was more than likely, we would be at war. On 3rd September Britain and France declared war on Germany.

Everyone thought there would be air raids on Britain but not much happened in this time that we called the 'phoney war'. So ended my second decade with the future looking very dangerous!

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