

## **Lucy, Part 1:**

I can vaguely picture brother Jack and I being ill in bed – guess I was about three years old – also Mum and Dad being ill ... with the flu, as I believe there was an epidemic at that time ...

It was Huyton Quarry we first lived after leaving Wigan. It must have been work that brought Dad here, for it was the years of depression and no work, apart from the mines – but really Dad's job was painting and decorating. We moved to Cronton Avenue to be nearer the colliery. The houses belonged to the colliery too, so once in them you had a better chance of keeping your job. Mum used to help the budget by working in the fields picking peas and potatoes and Jack and I would run and help ...

I always seem to be troubled with a persistent cough ... I can recall Mum coming into my room many, many times pouring codliver oil into me. I must have really had gallons of this during my childhood – also Scott's emulsion and plenty of malt. They were always worried that coughing would develop into consumption – TB.

How well I remember going to Whiston Central School. I had a favourite teacher, Mrs Jolley, who was the English mistress. I used to help her and stay behind helping with marking. She also gave me a lot of confidence and I remember being very thrilled at being made the school librarian. When the time came to leave, it was she who asked me to ask my mum if I could go on and be her helper at her home, my duties being to make beds, wash breakfast dishes, clean out the fireplace and lay fire and prepare a meal for Mrs Jolley and Mrs Jolley's brother. ... What I didn't realise at the time was I was being prepared domestically - then came the time I had to leave.

Our Bill had taken ill and it turned out he had scarlet fever and because of Mrs Jolley being a teacher, the doctor advised I might carry the fever and she could even get it and pass it on. Both Jack and I got the scarlet fever – the ambulance came took us both to Delph Lane Isolation Hospital: we spent our Christmas in the hospital and Jack was very ill.

I thought of nursing but training was out because I failed the medical, having a persistent cough! Well, I remember feeling very upset and not wanting to go into the BICC [British Insulated Cables] or Tinklins print works: that meant service. That's - being a servant for the rich families in Huyton – which was so very posh in those so-called good times (for the wealthy). So off I went to the McLeish's ... Yes, sir! No, madam! I was trained by a very, very severe housekeeper. Black and white uniform was a must. From there I went to work in a girls' boarding school ... I remember running away after the housekeeper-cook told me to bring in the shepherd's pie for lunch and found mice had already eaten half. It was either that or nothing, so off I went, running until I reached home and telling them why I'd run. I suppose I was afraid of being brought back.

Dad came to the rescue and he and I hand-in-hand went to the school. ... I do clearly remember Dad laying down his hands on the table and saying he would make it known how a so-called posh school had the staff behind-the-scenes thinking they could get away with thinking they could do what they wanted and so it was taken to higher authorities ... I was later sent for, and they asked me to come back, as a new housekeeper and cook had been taken on – but no fear, I'd had enough, so I was at home again, helping Mum and the lodgers.

... The saddest memory of the 1930s was my dad passing away on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 1937. Our home life was very empty and Mum was very, very sad. Many a time I had to follow her, as she threatened to end it all. That year was very hard, having to adjust to living on ten shillings a week widow's pension. And then our Jack, rather than be out of work, went down the mine - that too broke Mum's heart. So many times I had heard Dad say 'No son of mine will go down the pit' - but Jack went, from what I remember, rather sadly too – for he worked later at the BICC and in those days that work was stopped when you reached 18 years old, so another new life was ahead for us.

**[Part 2: read on ...]**

## Lucy: Part 2

Our life certainly changed when Dad was taken. ....

Mother got a job in school meals in Delph Lane school. She couldn't earn very much because of the pension. Then I applied for an office job in the BICC [British Insulated Cables]. I too worked in the meter shop, but was only working three days and two days off. So to be in regular work I got the office job - even if a little less money, it would be regular.

The first office job was in A.D. [Accessories Division] hammer shop with Mr Hawkins as boss and he was like a father to me. After a while in there I wanted to better myself, so when the occasion came, I applied for secretary to Mr Harper, head boss over A.D., and my friend Florence Nightingale was leaving to be married so she put a good word in for me and I got her job. We made good pals, so much so I was her bridesmaid on 13<sup>th</sup> August, 1938. Lilac taffeta with net overlay as I remember. Her mother and father were very kind to us and we were friends until she died.

Hugh, Florrie's husband, was very keen on flowers and entering competitions so we had a lot in common and would spend hours trying out new creations. Guess I learnt a lot of ideas from him but sadly Florrie wasn't very interested, but I must say he was very clever and went on to judging and won many certificates at Southport Flower Show and now he has shown and judged all over the world and in this country.

By now we are leading up to the war, which was declared on Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939.

What a day! I remember Mum and I crying and wondering ... Everywhere had to be blacked out, no light showing, ration books and gas masks were issued - how does one cope? Hard to believe I lived through a war.

Guess we were very lucky in this area. Bombs were rained over Liverpool and we were on the flight path. We had big searchlights in Tarbock and incendiary bombs were dropped many times. One dropped on Number 34 but luckily there were fire wardens on hand to put it out quickly.

The BICC then was very quickly put on war work. I still remained in the tool room office and from there I got to know Bill. He was the storekeeper in Accessories Division and we would chat casually. In those days there were no tea breaks and we worked from five-to-8 in the morning until 5.30 and Saturday mornings. So Bill and a couple of his pals would make tea off the record and I was invited at a said time in the stores for this unofficial cuppa!

My boss Alf Harper was a bulldog type but his bark was worse than his bite so to speak - he was very good to me and we got on fine. I think he knew what went on but closed his eyes so to speak. When I think of the old-fashioned telephone upright stand and a receiver I had to use as a secretary! I had to be very diplomatic if there was someone Mr Harper didn't want to see. He would shake his head and I had to say he wasn't in when he was. I didn't like that much; guess it was a little white lie, but as a Sunday School teacher it bothered me.

But I loved my time at the BICC. Guess that meeting Bill was the highlight. Indeed when he asked me out I was already seeing someone else. But Bill's quiet and sincere way won and I did have some lovely outings – pictures regularly and over the water to Hoylake and West Kirby, always a meal out and very generous – always the best seats in the shows. No queueing for Bill. Then after about six months I called it off. Nothing serious, I think the difference in our age and I like dancing, going out with the girls and he did not ...

We were still friends though, and I would see him as my job often took me to the stores and he would always chat. He really was known as a confirmed bachelor so I used to get my leg pulled by the crowd who knew I'd been out with him. My mum, who I told about Bill and about the age difference, commented and encouraged me to bring him home and she would see for herself. Well, I made it up with him and invited him home. What attracted me was always his smart appearance, kindness and cleanness. He wasn't a smoker or drinker, smaller than me (hence I took to wearing low heeled shoes) and always a gentleman.

Although it was wartime, it was a happy relationship. He was exempt from war service because of his job and kept getting six months' exemptions although he was a fire

warden until the war ended. We used to go a couple of times a year to a farm in the Lake District named High Arnside and we used to say that whenever we got our new home, that would be the name. It was a lovely spot between Coniston and Ambleside, not far from Skelwith Bridge. Many happy hours we spent there walking.

[Presenter's note: Lucy and Bill were married in June 1944. (Mum's younger brother, also Bill, couldn't be there as he was as stoker on a landing craft for the D-Day landings.) My dad's war-time work included work on the building of one of the giant welders used for the Pipelines Under the Ocean (PLUTO) project to take fuel to the invading allied forces.]

**Lucy Tansey**

**Geoff Tansey**