

# VIDA FIELD

Vida was born in London in October 1932. She was 6 years old when war broke out. She and her sister June were evacuated first to Potten End (for 9 months), then moved to Wheathampstead.

No parents went with the evacuees. For two weeks in August 1939 we went to school prepared to be evacuated that day - so we had a named **label fixed on our jacket** and took with us overnight necessities i.e. toothbrush, flannel, nightie, underwear and a blank postcard in a **haversack**. We said our goodbyes and walked to school in the normal way. Then one day we were herded together and transported to a railway station. Mother had instructed June not to go anywhere without holding my hand (I was 6 years old and she was 10 years old). She probably got separated finding me at the start. We arrived in **Potten End** with East End kids from a different school - some of them awful!

Wheathampstead **villagers** treated us (evacuees) differently and begrudgingly, or not at all, allowed us to buy certain items from the shops. It took a while to be accepted with our **Ration books**. They didn't seem to like sharing what was available.

I went to **St Helen's School** and my sister June to St Albans Grammar. There was a **dug-out air raid** shelter at school and we had to have practice in it when the air raid siren went off. It was really scary for the children.

We loved our new **foster family** – a young married couple with no children as yet. Our new grandad kept **pigs and chickens** and there were four aunties to spoil us.

We had an amazing Christmas with them. All their family was present, singing round **Grandma's piano**. Their only son joined up but lost his life in Singapore, after being a prisoner-of-war for several years.

My mother's sister was living in Wheathampstead House, as my Uncle had a flat with his chauffeur job: he was chauffeur to the owner, a Mr Murphy. They had come from London a few years previously.

My family came to village in **June 1940**. A cottage in Place Farm (demolished in late 70s) became empty and my parents gladly moved to the village to get out of North London. We were born in London and were used to the hustle and bustle of lots of shops and buses and trams, so the **village was a novelty** which we loved and had become used to after our short stay in Potten End.

**Food was rationed.** **Clothes** etc had allocated **coupons**. I cannot recall the allowance but do remember one had to save them up to buy certain things. Furniture too maybe. Fairy hard soap – it was a block of darkish green soap and was popular for hand washing the clothes and softening the hard leather on new shoes at the heel to avoid a blister. Also obtainable was a similar light yellow soap, 'Sunlight' I think that was called. I think both are still available in smaller hardware shops nowadays. I don't recall 'Fairy' lighter green soaps until well after the war. All things were not rationed but often available from '**under the counter**'. No bulk buying was allowed. Toothpaste was often unattainable so we were given salt to dip our brush in. Yuk!.

The government issued **booklets of recipes** - I had one until a few years ago. Needed it for use of **dried egg powder**, which was very popular. **WVS** would organise bottling afternoons at the village senior school - all free ladies would volunteer to bottle seasonal fruits and eggs in large quantities. Bread pudding (not **bread and butter pudding**) was a favourite. We never wasted or fed the birds with bread.

I remember Mother, my sister and I making sweets (peppermint lumps, toffee, honeycomb), to wrap up or put in saved jars to hand out as a Christmas gift to neighbours and children of friends. Shop **sweets were scarce** and on ration of course.

As a real treat at **Christmas** we might have a chicken (or roast pork) obtained through a friend, not the butcher. Always homemade Christmas pudding and Christmas cake, made months previously, when we would have had a stir and made a wish. Exciting times! A Christmas tree was dug up from the garden two days before Christmas Day and brought inside to be decorated on Christmas Eve: after a few days it was replanted for another year.

We **hand-made decorations** - the famous paper chains - which we strung across the room from the four corners. We hammered drawing pins into the walls and ceiling to hold them up (there was no sticky tape or Blue tack available in those days).

We **knitted and sewed** toys to give to the younger relations and friends, we also knitted gloves and mittens, and scarves. Mother would have made a new jumper for us too. On Christmas morning we would find a long hand knitted stocking - stuffed with fruit, nuts and little gifts - at the bottom of our bed. Most Christmases Jack Frost visited - that was great excitement, to see the icicles hanging from the gutters etc. We longed for snow - a Snowman was a priority with coal eyes and carrot nose. We went **Carol singing** year after year,

round the local houses as a bit of fun. Then later with the **Girl Guides**, which ended up as quite a nice little choir. Mrs Cory Wright would invite us in for warm mince pies (she lived on Wheathampstead Hill then). There was strictly just two days holiday from work for the adults.

We were careful with our **coal ration** and made sure we would have enough saved for Christmastime, as one coal fireplace was all the heating we had. I cannot recall shops or streets decorated for Christmas. I expect the pubs were busy and there were plenty of them in the Village.

We had no television, just radio, plus a record player with L.P.s of **Dance music**. My parents would push the furniture back and dance the waltz and show us the steps. We were happy then although there was so little available, it was just accepted .

One Christmas was very special to me - Mother brought my brother home from St Albans maternity hospital. He actually was due on 25th but had arrived 10 days earlier, on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1944.

When I was eleven Joy Fisher (Brewhouse Hill) and I would knock on friends' doors and ask if we could take their baby out in the **pram**. This was always well received and we would be out for ages, with a bottle of juice for the child under the blanket. We were sent shopping as well and so would leave the pram outside a shop if we were doing **shopping** for people at the same time. We weren't paid for these errands, just did it for friends. One day I picked up a pair of men's shoes from the repairers and put them at the end of the pram while I went into another shop for something. When I came back the little boy in the pram was sucking the toe cap of the shoes: he was in a right mess!!

My memories of **VE Day** : "In the evening I danced with my special friend (Joy Fisher) in the High Street, to music supplied by the Collins family. Crowds turned out to join in the celebrations. We were 12 years old."



*Me (Vida) on the left, holding cat and wearing pixie hat and mittens made by my Mum. Cecily Mardell is on the right. The little girl in the middle is Sylvie, an evacuee. She came to the village briefly after being bombed out in London in the blitz. She had been sleeping in bomb shelters for 3 weeks with her mother - a special friend of my family. So they were invited to come and live with my family for a short while. Little Sylvia went to the village school for a few months until they returned to London, her father was away in the RAF.*

**[Vida's memories were written down by Lizzie Holland, who spoke to Vida on several occasions, between 2020 and 2024]**

The photo below is of Vida, aged 92, and was taken when she came along to the exhibition. With her in this photo is Colin Spurr, aged 93, who was the son of Dick Spurr, licensee of the Bull during the war years. See his memories also on this website.

