

It is 20th of April 2025 and this is Amelia and Josie interviewing Maureen Cluett about her experiences of the Second World War and VE day.

What year were you born and where?

I was born in London in the year 1929 on the 13th of August.

Is that where you spent the war?

No, I didn't. I was evacuated to the country, but privately not with a school.

Who were you living with during the war and what occupations were they doing?

I was living with my uncle and his housekeeper until he had to join up and he was a soldier as well and then my mother and my father came down to the house. My father was in the home guard, which was the only thing he did for the war, but otherwise that he didn't do anything else. He was semi retired.

What can you remember about the war?

The thing I most remember is we couldn't have any lights on. So as soon as it was dark, you had to do everything in the dark. We weren't allowed any lights to show after dark, we had black out curtains over the windows and it was very difficult to get about, especially in the country where I was it was almost a case of staying indoors after it was dark.

What was rationing like? Oh, dreadful. Oh, very little to eat, in the country, I was lucky because I there were farmers all round us and we had cheese and milk and eggs extra to the rations, but the meat was nonexistent, hardly anything, and bread was difficult. Oh, no sweets at all. Later on in the war we had a sweet ration, but that was about one small bar of chocolate that would last about a week.

What was school like? Well, the school I went to was a London school\* evacuated to the village that I was living in, and because I lived near the school, I joined in with them. Was schooling different? Oh no, the whole school came and the headmistress came with them and the teachers and it was run as it would have been in London, except that if a teacher went back to London to visit family, sometimes they didn't come back because they'd been killed in an air raid. And that happened to our science teacher.

\*Walworth Central School (Girls) which was evacuated to Hinton St Mary Manor Estate. Maureen lived at the Lodge, an estate building.

Did you have any family members or close friends serving in the forces? Yes, my brother was in the RAF and my sister had to do war work that was suitable for the country. She helped out with supplies, but I was too young for that and I was at school. Was your sister with you in Sturminster Newton? Yeah. So where was she based? She lived with us and then she worked out of Stur on the supplies going through, like food, on the trains. It was called a reserved occupation.

How did it feel not seeing your brother for so many years? Well, I did not see my brother for nearly six years. And what was that like? We had the odd letter from him, they were always full of humour because that's how he was, to make us feel better.

Do you remember the announcement of the end of the war?

Oh, I do remember. It was the day before on the seventh and as I said the house I lived in was very near to the school buildings and my father came as I happened to be walking across, and my father came running out, calling out "the wars over, the war's over", they had just announced it on the BBC. Well, we had a very strict headmistress and she came out of the building and saw me running about shouting the wars over, didn't realize what it was about called me over, said what do you think you're doing shouting like that and running, don't behave like that, and I said, the war's over. Well they were a London school, so it meant so much to them. She went running back into the building. The head mistress I mean, she was so strict and so old school. She ran into the building shouting out the war was over. There were three classes going on in that particular building, and I can see those girls now, because they could all go back home to London and they'd been there for six years some of them and they could go back, it meant so much to them because they could go back home. And we knew that my brother, as far as we knew, was safe, he hadn't been hurt and would be coming home.

Did you take part in any VE celebrations?

Winston Churchill announced that the celebrations would be the following day on the eighth and I lived in the village of Hinton so they didn't do a lot there, but the big party was in Sturminster Newton. It was just incredible. It was full of people, shouting, music, dancing, and then when it got dark, we had lights on. Well that's the first time in six years that there had been lights after dark. So everybody went mad really and the pub was open and stayed open, well it didn't close all night and somebody put up a trestle table and found some, well there was hardly any food, but I can seem to remember bread and cheese and things like that. I can't think of anything else to be honest. But because of course I was still at school I had to be back home by ten o'clock. I wasn't allowed to stay out any longer than that so I stayed until then, a bit later, with friends and then I had to go home but the party went on all night. The thing I remember is there was some soldiers that were on leave and they thought they would be going back to fight again, and when they realized it was over, when they went back they'd be demobbed, come out of the forces, of course they went absolutely crazy. I can see those soldiers now. There were two of them. That was that was it, It was over. It was just it was incredible. The noise and then the singing and the lights. It was unbelievable. After six years of pitch dark and quiet, it was it was the noise, actually.

What was life like after the war ended?

Again, living in the country it wasn't too bad, if you lived in the towns then all the properties were gone, destroyed, no food, hardly any food. It was terrible for them absolutely terrible. I don't know how they did it. I really don't know how they did it. When did you go back to London? I didn't go back to London. I can't remember it was May, wasn't it? and the school did stay because you couldn't go straight back. I mean they went back and saw their families and some never came back but I mean you couldn't sort of go back to normal or anything so they stayed until the end of the term,

which was July, obviously end of school term. So I would just stayed there, went back to school until they went back to London. And then my father knew somebody in the council who was in charge of food distribution, and she needed help and said to my father, if your daughter's not doing anything, will she come and help me in the council offices? so I did I liked it actually and then I'd stayed on and then I worked for the planning officer when I'd learned to do typing and shorthand and all that stuff. I worked for the planning officer. Grandpa returned from the war and he came to the council offices because he knew people there. He didn't come immediately because he was in a ship on his way to Japan, all they got for VE day was extra rum ration on board! They couldn't celebrate because they were on their way to Japan. So he fought for another couple of months, did he? Well, it wasn't really fighting. It was it was just keeping an eye on them, you know, surveillance. Until they, the Japanese, signed as well. And then he came back and because he knew people in the council offices, he came to see them and that was it. And that's how you met. That's how we met. All because of the war, oh gosh, yes, I would never have been in Hinton St. Mary, but for the war I would have been in London. You never know, do you? You never know!