

ROSEMARY CRAWFORD (NEE) FORD
1944 – 1951

Where to start? At the beginning I suppose.

I was born in 1932, the sixth child in a family of 12! We all passed the Scholarship or 11 plus as it later became when positions were no longer given. I came 19th in the whole of Plymouth and District but I had a brother who achieved 13th position! There was no family allowance until after the War started – no birth pill in those days either! We were poor but happy and we lived on the Astor Estate, which Lord and Lady Astor had built for parents with families. We saw them whenever they visited our house to chat when they were in Government. Lady Astor came to Plymouth High School on at least three occasions while I was there. She also came on one of our Sunday School outings to Bere Alston. The older boys were swinging across the river on a thick rope which was suspended on a tree branch and I can vividly recall her insisting on having a go. Her entourage were dismayed to see her launch herself off, then hear her raucous laughter as she landed feet first in about a foot of water! She had little side-buttoned black boots on to match a black dress and coat and a little veiled hat. I can remember the consternation and the “Oh dear, your Ladyship, we must hurry to get you changed into dry clothes.” But everyone there gave her a huge cheer.

When I started School at PEHS (E for Emergency), it was wartime and a lot of children from the three grammar schools were evacuated, and the rest of us were merged together, but some of the Devonport High girls and those from Stoke D were accommodated at Durnford Street under Miss V Sparkes. Our Headmistress was Miss V Turner who was never seen without her black university gown. I remember going as “new girls” with our parents before Term started and feeling quite awed. She referred to us as “little people who would become the cream of Plymouth”. Some clots were thicker than others!

Because it was wartime and everything was rationed, we had to save our clothing coupons for the School uniform which parents had to order from Dingles. Their shop was at No 1 Mannamead Road, off Mutley Plain, and I would walk all the way there and back to fetch the items as they came in stock – ie the tie, scarf and hat, and School blazer. Gym slips and blouses were available as they were standard. Likewise we queued for paint boxes, brushes and even H2B pencils which had to be ordered.

Actually the War was a great leveller because children of the wealthy parents were restricted by the rationing, while those who couldn't afford all but the basic requirements had the excuse of having used their ration allowances. We ate very few sweets, biscuits, no bananas available and we chewed liquorice root, which was like chomping on tree bark and took ages to work the juice out of the 4 for 1 (old) penny sticks.

School dinners cooked on the premises supervised by Miss Hulbert and Miss Lyons were delicious and we all had to drink a bottle of milk during the morning break.

Those who had cars had their travel limited because of petrol rationing but buses were frequent and we also had trams. Everyone walked a lot more in my youth,

especially those who couldn't afford the bus fare every time they needed to go places. I rarely caught the bus to School and in the Winter always had chapped, sore legs from the icy sleet and rain when crossing Freedom Park. School rules were quite strict. If a Prefect caught you chewing in the street in School uniform, or if you weren't wearing your hat you got an Order Mark. Three in one week led to detention. Talking in class or fooling around meant standing outside the door for the lesson. I only did this once and squirmed with embarrassment when staff passed and noticed, with frowns and comments of disapproval.

It was the custom for the whole class to stand to attention when a Mistress entered the room (no men teachers, alas). We had a quite eccentric Religious Education teacher named Miss Davies who was extremely pious and one day asked, as she entered the room, "Girls, girls, if our Lord Jesus Christ was to enter here today, what would you ask him?". There was a long silence and I said that I'd ask Him where would we all sit when we went to heaven for it must surely be full with all the generations that had already ascended. She rebuked me for being frivolous but I was very serious. She did say though that our bodies were like overcoats which were discarded so that our souls were freed for everlasting space. I was a Sunday School teacher when I was only thirteen and taught a class both morning and afternoon, sometimes as many as 40 children, some older than myself! My brothers were all choir boys and we all attended morning and evening prayer. This meant that I went to Church 4 times each Sunday. Most people followed their faith and this was the basis of discipline which is sadly lacking today. We had Samuel's faith and I firmly believed that if I did anything wrong then God, who was watching, would punish me. If we got into any misdemeanour at School, we would be further chastised at home when word got to our parents.

We lived through nights in the air raid shelter, or under the table if the bombing was heavy as soon as the siren went. We heard of friends, family and neighbours being bombed out or killed but never heard of counselling or trauma. It was life. Penicillin wasn't an option until the War ended and we didn't have soft toilet rolls, bath oils or luxuries. Most people bathed only once a week. We had copper boilers, mangles and no central heating. We caught lots of colds but never succumbed to a day in bed and we certainly ate our peck of dirt, thus developing a good immune system.

As my parents were poor, we didn't have the regular trips that the majority did, so I enjoyed School trips. The first one that I went on was to see a documentary on the war effort and the making of bombs in the munitions factories. When one of the actors lifted a torpedo and looked to hurl it towards us, I screamed and dived under my seat. Quelle embarrassment!!!

As children we improvised a lot and made our own fun. We played hopscotch, rounders and skipping in the road with the other children. We had a very heavy and long rope and one end was fastened to the lamp post and it was hard work turning the other end. Also if you didn't jump clear, you got a nasty lash on your legs!

I very much enjoyed my School days and never wanted to leave Plymouth High, feeling very privileged to attend there. I passed my School Certificate with Matriculation but had to get a job because my parents were far from well off. I earned twenty three shillings a week when I worked in a wholesale chemist during

stocktaking. My mother claimed a pound a week and I wonder how that would go down with today's youth? I usually walked to work to save the 3d bus fare and I again wonder who would walk from Mirador Place to Royal Parade today without a grumble? I took the Civil Service Exam and worked for the Telephone Manager's Office (now BT) until I married.

Last year we celebrated our 50th Wedding Anniversary, despite my husband having malignant cancer when our three children were young. All our friends and families worried with us and there were times when I thought that we weren't destined to be "a little old man and a little old lady". However, he is fitter than most of us and indeed has outlived several of our contemporaries.

We are extremely proud of our three children who lead busy, sharing and caring lives. Our two daughters went into teaching careers and our son is an architect..

I was and still am very proud and privileged to have attended PHS and enjoy being an "old girl". It would be great if we could have some input from you on life there today.

I will leave you with my husband's definition of a Plymouth High School girl. We were not even engaged then and he was walking home when, for some reason that I can't remember, we started arguing. I let go of his hand and strode haughtily ahead. My anger turned to wry amusement when I heard him call, "If you stick your nose any higher in the air you will scratch it on the telegraph wires". I didn't deign a response so he added, "You are a typical Plymouth High School snob who struts around the city thinking that you spell fart with a capital P aitch". Although such a rude word was not acceptable in those days, I was convulsed with unstoppable giggles as I pictured Miss Turner's "cream of Plymouth" looking it up in their dictionaries under P! Needless to say that a strong sense of humour has been our mainstay throughout 50 years of marriage!

THE FAMILY TREE

When Francis took himself a wife
And settled down to married life,
His cup of happiness was full
And Ruby, she was wonderful.
They clung to each other through good and ill
And since they never had "The Pill"
It wasn't long before they knew
That their first little one was due.
I bet Frank never dreamed that he
Would propagate a family tree
That would provide the world with hordes
Of healthy, intellectual Fords!

His firstborn, Ben, when he was wed
Told Peg, his bride, that he would dread
To have responsibility
For such a mega family.
And when she'd been a Mother twice
Decided they would quite suffice.
But Kath, so much in love with Den...
And more adventurous than Ben
Set out to beat her brother's score
And ended up producing four.
These six offspring all married now
Have added twelve twigs to the bough!

Son Leslie was the only lad
Who tried to emulate his Dad,
He got to seven without a strain
And then his strength began to wane!
He needed to produce five more
To match his virile Father's score,
So he conceded victory
Albeit most reluctantly!
The rest of us as time went by
Have helped the branches to stretch high –
Though one or two have sadly gone
There are lots more to blossom on.

Thus down the years the family tree
Spreads out its branches lovingly.
There's now so many of us all
We have to hire a village hall
When celebrating happy things
Like wedding days and christenings.
If only Frank and Rube could see
The spreading of their dynasty
They surely would be very proud
To see a Family so endowed
With intellect and charm and wit
And know that they both started it!

OUR RUBY ANNIVERSARY

At times we thought we'd never see
Our fortieth anniversary
For you'd been through so much ill health
We thought I'd be here by myself.
It means so much that I can say
I love you on our special day.
It does not seem so long ago
We hugged and kissed on Plymouth Hoe
And as your ferry wouldn't wait
We never stayed out very late.
We never had much cash to spare
What miles we walked to save 'bus fare'.
The longest time we've been apart
Was when you left with aching heart
For Egypt and the desert sand
To serve first King then Queen's command.
As craftsman with the Grenadiers
You quite enjoyed the next two years.
On your return we two were wed
Now forty years have quickly sped
Shared with our many good friends who
Have also been there for us two.
Such happy memories we share
And times when life seemed most unfair.
Together we have struggled through
And somehow never failed to
Appreciate the funny side ----
Despite the tears we've sometimes cried.
There's so much to rejoice about
And our three children without doubt
Have brought a world of happiness
That words of mine cannot express.
Not easy either to convey
How proud we are of them today.
Or say how fortunate we are
As Granny Rose and Grandad Lar
To precious Abe and treasured Rose
Who keep us young and on our toes.
Thank God that we have had all this
Throughout our years of wedded bliss.