



Margaret Anthea Litchfield

Foreword by Steve Litchfield, 2025

Mum filled this 'standard' memories book in around 2014, a year before she died. Much as I'd like to simply share a photocopy - or digital images - of her handwritten entries, her writing was *very* small and not as distinct as earlier in her life. Not helped, like myself, by her embrace of keyboards and technology for writing - meaning that handwriting skills decrease!

I tried Optical Character Recognition (OCR) of various types on her writing and nothing could make sense of it. In the end, I found the only way was to blow up each page and try to make sense of it with my own eyes and contextual understanding of the events and people and topics involved.

So I dictated what I thought each page said into my computer and then spent a lot of time 'tidying things up'.

As a result, not least because many of the people, events and places happened before I was born(!), there will be some inaccuracies herein.

In terms of content, mum was largely answering the standard questions and, as a result, there are some overlapping answers. Plus she goes 'off script' a few times, especially towards the end, as you'll see.

She also (modestly) never mentions the many plays and short stories, even a published book, or her trips to Israel with Rosemary, also documented. Some of these are available on her Rainbow Books web site.

This is version 1.4 of this document, dated 18 Oct 2025, after typo fixes from Fiona and a few pages of notes from (brother) Mike Sims, plus a slight redaction of some birth dates for ID fraud purposes on behalf of people mentioned who are still living! I may further update the document as and when corrections arrive from various other quarters!

How old were your parents when you were born?

Dad was 33, mum was 30.

Why were you given your first names?

Dad registered my birth without consulting mum, so he chose my names, Margaret after mum, and Anthea after one of his favourite poems. Throughout childhood, I was called by my second name and I hated it.

Where did you live when you were young? How many rooms were there? Did you have a room of your own?

As dad was in the Air Force, we moved a lot and so had many homes in England, Scotland and Wales. At the age of eight, we went to India for two years and lived in Sangli Mess, just outside New Delhi, attending the hill station at Naini Tai, to the Roman Catholic school - St Marys. We came back to Bristol when I was 10 and stayed there, although dad had to commute from High Wycombe and RAF Kemble for the working week.

What do you remember about it? And what sort of building was it? Did it have a garden?

I lived at 6 Henleaze Gardens, very close to The Downs, from 1950 until my marriage in 1959. It was an old roomy house with six bedrooms, attics and a cellar. There was a garden at the back with a pear tree, a Sycamore and a silver birch tree. We had a swing from one of its branches and, in the summer, had a hammock strung between the branches of a Laburnum. There was a Morello cherry tree and an arch trellis, plus a yellow rose and Virginia creeper climbing up in front of the house.

Did you receive regular pocket money? From what age? Did you have to earn it? How much did you receive and what did you spend it on?

One shilling a week from the age of 10, but we had a similar amount in India. I bought sweets and buns after swimming, Enid Blyton books, records - popular music of the 1950s. Later, make up, Surrey peach lipstick and black hair dye (it didn't work), plus a long walking umbrella, net petticoat with many layers, knitting wool.

I saved my birthday presents, Mike and I clubbed together and bought mum a brooch from Woolworths. It was pink and spelt the name 'MOTHER'. We were disappointed when she didn't wear it. Later, I bought my friends sparkly brooches from Woolworths and was humiliated when another girl said "I saw them in Woolworths".

Did you have parties on your birthday? What are the memories do you have of your early family life?

We each had one party in the 1950s. Rosemary's was when she was 16 so there were boys, music on the record player and dancing. Mine was when I was 12. My friends came in their party dresses and dad did the Indian rope trick. Mike's was when he was still at prep school, mum had made little green jellies with boats on. The boys threw the jellies at each other and generally caused havoc.

Did you have any memories of Christmas Day when you were young?

Christmas Day was always very special. There was a floor to ceiling Christmas tree, crêpe paper decorations round the walls, Chinese lanterns hung from the ceiling, and many balloons.

The grown-ups dressed up, mum in her black 'net', auntie Mary in her purple dress, auntie Chris proved she could still do a Charleston dance, auntie Peggy danced like a young girl.

Mum cooked a marvellous Christmas lunch for at least 12 people. (Seven of us lived in the house, plus five or more family visitors.) There were always silver charms inside the Christmas pudding and good crackers.

A family favourite was the balloon game, pushing and heading them over a string across the room, with teams. Many sitting down games, Consequences, Telegram Limerick, and the favourite 'the old family couch'. Dad was the narrator, of course, and told the marvellous tale. Then, by the light of the Christmas tree, he read his specially written humorous Christmas poem.

What was your father's name and date of birth and where was he born?

Born 10 March 1907 in a family house in Gwilliam Street, Bristol.
Cyril Edward Sims.

What were his interests and hobbies?

He liked sailing and swimming and sitting in the sun, he liked reading, particularly poetry, playing bridge and canasta, listening to the wireless and (later in life) learning to play the piano.

Please describe his appearance?

He was tall, dark-haired, and good looking, he had a wonderful sense of humour and was popular with men and women alike. He was kind and thoughtful and was quick to offer help when it was needed. He was strict but fair, insisting on respect from his children.

What was his occupation?

In the Air Force, he was an instructor as a sergeant pilot before the World War 2, he was commissioned as an engineering officer in 1938 and served as such through the rest of his RAF time, though still flying whenever possible.

What are your fondest memories of him?

Dad couldn't afford to run a car while we were at school, so he had a motorbike. I used to love travelling on the back, neither of us wore a helmet! We'd go from Bristol to Weston-super-Mare and meet the others who had gone in the Read's car.

Dad had a wonderful memory and could recite long Victorian poems, even as an old man, with great expression. He could act and took part in plays and even a film.

What was your mother's maiden name?

Margaret Levay.

What was the date of birth?

22nd of April 1910, in Kennington Avenue Bristol.

Please describe her appearance. What were her special interests and talent?

Mum was short with fair hair. It was straight and cut severely when younger, which didn't suit her. She was inclined to plumpness in middle life.

Mum was a born homemaker. She had high standards and worked tirelessly. She was a good plain cook and made all visitors very welcome and exhausted herself looking after their needs. She was happiest in her own home, where she was queen of the roost.

What was her occupation before marriage?

Domestic science teacher.

Brothers and sisters?

Mum had a twin sister Mary, also a older sister Christina ("Chrissie"), and an elder brother Douglas and a younger brother John. (Mum met Dad through Douglas, who was a friend of Dad at Cotham school.)

What are your fun memories of her?

She used to join us for a game of cricket on The Downs. She bowled underarm with a fancy skip but her aim was true and effective. When she took Rosemary and me to a swimming gala, she only had two tickets, so she said boldly "One and two halves please!" - I was 15 and Rosemary was 17! She was very kind when I was ill and brought up things of special food to tempt me.

Your father's father?

Arthur Thomas Sims, he was born in 1870 and died during the war in 1944 at the age of 74. He was a railway porter, and his father and extended family were coalminers in Somerset. There he married my grandmother in 1892.

"Sam, Sam pick up the musket"... (one of my grandmother's favourite '78' records/tunes)

Your father's mother?

Ellen Jane, she was born in 1870 and outlived her husband by 10 years, dying at the age of 84 in 1954. There were four children, Reg, Edith, and twins Cyril and Harold. Auntie May was childless and pleaded to adopt one of the twins, to no avail.

Granny Sims was a strict Victorian and when we visited, we had to sit in absolute silence without fidgeting. Our reward? To hear a Stanley Holloway record!

Your mother's father?

Henry Robinson Levay, born in Scotland, near Elgin, in 1873. Died in 1930, aged 57. He married granny on 21st of October 1905. He was a bank clerk.

He was a totally committed Christian and served the Presbyterian Church they attended most faithfully. Granny was there when he died and his face "lit up radiantly", he had seen Jesus, or perhaps an angel coming to escort him to heaven.

Your mother's mother?

Maiden name Oakey. Born in 1881 in Gloucester and died at the age of 100 in 1981. She had five children: Christina, Douglas, twins Margaret and Mary, and John.

She came to live with us when we returned from India in 1950 and had her own rooms upstairs. She was a very loving, gentle, generous person. She was particularly fond of children. She was blind for the last decade of her life.

Your brother's and sister's details?

Rosemary Jean, born in 1938 in Bristol. Michael Richard Cargill born in 1942 in Scotland near Glasgow.

What do you particularly remember about them from your childhood?

Mike used to take everything to pieces "to see how they worked" - this paid off in later life...

Auntie Edith gave me her her pianola when she and uncle Jimmy emigrated to the south of France. Dozens of rolls came with it and I used to play my favourite

pieces, and hoped passers by would think I was playing brilliantly! Mike had (and still has) an interest and love of music.

Rosemary was beautiful and attracted all the boys. I would play “Rosemarie” on the pianola and they would gather round and sing “Rosemary, I love you”, to her confusion!

We all went swimming together in the school holidays at Shirehampton and once in Henleaze lake. We all had bicycles and rode to school.

What were their occupations as adults and what are your funnest memories of each of them in an adult life?

Rosemary thought of joining the women’s Air Force at one time. She met David while still young and married him in 1958. They had two children, Andrew and Nicola and, as David was in the Air Force – a pilot – lived in various places, including Cyprus .

Mike joined the Air Force and he and his family were in Malta at one stage. Lately, piloted a rescue helicopter and took part in many dangerous rescues.

Mike and Ann had three children: David, Julian, and Catherine (Katie). Later they separated and Mike married Sue, so is a stepfather to John and Nicola too. Both Rosemary and Mike are thoughtful caring people, always ready to go out of their way to help others.

Rosemary has known great sorrow in her life but throughout has remained a steadfast Christian, never missing the opportunity to tell others how God wants to help them too.

Mike always comes to visit when Rosemary or I are ill .

Please describe your first school. How old were you when you first went there? What do you remember about the place and the teachers?

We moved so often during my first years, I must have attended several primary schools but remember none of them.

The first school I remember was Saint Mary’s convent in India, we were bored as we were there for two years while dad was stationed in Delhi.

We were sent there because I could not tolerate the intense heat, and would otherwise have been sent back to England. Mike was only six, too young for a boarding school, but he didn’t want to be separated from his sisters. Rosemary and I hated the school and the other girls did not welcome English girls.

On Sundays, we wore white silk dresses, we had to do a lot of marching, making patterns in the huge playground. Some of the nuns were kind, but not all.

Which school did you move onto after that?

From 1950, Rosemary and I attended Clifton high school in Bristol (mum and auntie Mary had attended there many years before)

How did you travel to school?

At first we went by bus, followed by a long walk. Later, we cycled, whatever the weather.

I found learning hard as I've always had a very poor memory. But I liked English and history and tried hard at French because I liked the teacher.

It was a happy day when I left school for the last time at the end of fifth form.

What did you enjoy most about going to school? At which subjects did you do best?

I enjoyed nothing so was a dreary member of the form. I liked English but the English mistress didn't like me, so I had to wait for my O levels and got the excellent marks I know I deserved.

(Miss Brown was very old and also taught mum and auntie Mary - they had thought her old in their time!)

Any subjects you disliked?

Maths – because I'm dyslexic with figures.

Biology – because I didn't want to dissect creatures.

Chemistry – the lab smelt horrid.

Geography – didn't like the mistress and facts were represented in a boring way.

Art – I might have liked it if my efforts hadn't been scorned.

How much homework were you given?

One or two hours each evening. By the time I took O levels, I had four free periods each week when I could do this or revise for exams.

There was no way I could cover all the history we've been taught so I chose the few likeliest topics and learned them well. This seemed to pay off and I got between 70% and 80% in my history O-level.

Did you ever get into trouble at school? What happened?

My friends were larking about and broke the light. They insisted I came too to the headmistress and we all got the telling off.

A year or two later I was back. I had bought a theatre matinee ticket, forgetting I will be back at school. (I was allowed to go!)

I once broke a thumb while playing cricket, the offending ball bouncing off my hand and going on to the boundary - the only four I ever scored!

Did you enjoy music and singing? Did you learn to play any music instruments? Can you still play any?

We had singing lessons but I hadn't a particularly good voice and didn't think much of the choice of songs. I cannot play any music instruments. I would have loved to play the piano really well. I taught myself to play in early marriage but there was always a long delay between working out the notes and playing each chord...

We did sing parts of the Messiah and singing lessons, which I quite enjoyed and also parts of the chimney sweep opera. I can still remember some of the words and tune of this.

I had some knowledge of classical music because of the pianola rolls.

Were you good at sports? Which ones did you play?

I never had much energy, so wasn't good at sports. I did make the rounders united team as dad had taught us to throw and catch hard balls. We also played netball, tennis, and went swimming each week.

I won three tennis matches consecutively one day – but it never happened again.

Did you have a part-time paid job whilst in school? How much did you earn?

Rosemary had a paper round. First she asked my help when she had overslept then handed the whole job over to me. I got £1 a week and for this I went on my bicycle all round Henleaze North view and down Parry's Lane, a very steep hill.

How old were you when you left school? Did you know what you wanted to do in life?

I left School at the age of 17. I had wanted to teach young children or become a librarian – until I found out that these were jobs that needed further qualifications... Mum and dad decided it would be a good idea for me to do a year's secretarial course, as I couldn't think of anything else.

Did you go onto further studies? Where did you go? And what did you study?

I went to the college of commerce in Bristol for one year. The main subjects were typing and shorthand but we also had French, Spanish, maths, English, speech training, commerce and bookkeeping.

We liked the drama classes, putting on plays, and whilst there we put on 'The Importance of being Ernest', with Stephanie Cole as Miss Prism, and another

would be drama student as Cecily. A couple of the man tutors played the male parts.

I quite enjoyed learning Spanish. As I have a very short memory, I would learn the new vocabulary while walking to college that morning, and remembered the words long enough for the test an hour later! I walked each day from Henleaze Gardens across the Downs ,down Whiteladies Road and to the bottom of Park Street and the college.

Why did you choose your main subject? Did you gain any qualifications?

As I've said, mum and dad decided for me that shorthand and typewriting would come in useful. This proved to be true as, apart from paid jobs, the ability to type has helped me all my life. I always wanted to write, so typing out short stories and later books was essential for presentation and publishers. It made learning to use a word processor and, later, a computer considerably easier.

I've got Royal Society qualifications in both shorthand and typewriting.

My friend Pat was still at school but we would meet up after and walk round the Henleaze area singing and dancing in the rain. (By now I was meeting Simon every weekend.)

Did you make any new friends during this time?

My best friends at college were Stephanie Cole and Barbara Toft, possibly? Barbara was Scottish and later went to India. We kept in touch for some years.

We used to go to lunch together each day at different restaurants in Bristol. Mum gave me a lunch allowance, but I often preferred to spend the money on books so used it sparingly. Once Stephanie and I went to a work women's café in the centre and were served baked beans with lots of black ones. Another place was Surgeon Hill - we had to suppress giggles.

Stephanie and I went to the library in College Green where I discovered the joy of reading plays. She read everything she could get her hands on later. I invited her to my wedding but she was ill on that day.

What was your first full-time job? Where were you employed?

Working for the AA by the Downs in Clifton as a shorthand typist. It wasn't particularly interesting but I knew that it would only be for a year and I made some very good friends there, I'm still in touch with them over 50 years later.

How much were you paid? Was it easy or hard to make ends meet?

I got £5.15 each week and I gave mum £1.10 for my keep and saved all the rest. We were saving to be married at that time and the more money I could save, the

quicker we could get married (later I wished I had bought a few clothes while I had the money!)

How did you travel to and from work?

I walked the first day and was late. It took longer than I thought to get there. Thereafter I cycled. I chose this job as I wanted to be able to get to work easily. I turned down a job in a solicitors as it was in the heart of Bristol city Centre.

What hours did you work?

I worked 5 1/2 days each week, 9 am to 5:15 pm, and on Saturday to 1pm. I didn't have to work every Saturday, just alternative ones.

I had one hour for lunch, sometimes eating sandwiches, and sometimes I heated up a snack in the AA kitchen. Other times, I cycled off to the shops either in Clifton or Whiteladies Road.

How long did you stay in your first job?

One year. I finished one week before our wedding, so from September 1958 to August 1959.

What was your main occupation during your working life?

My real Work was looking after my husband and then children, but when we lived at Somerton, I got part-time work in a shop selling stationery, books, and toys.

When Petra started school, I worked 10 hours a week for the Prudential Insurance as a shorthand typist. It was good having money of my own and I saved it for a holiday in Austria.

Later in Bishops Lydeard, I worked afternoons in The Paper Shop and liked serving but I wasn't very good at giving correct change.

Did you find your work fulfilling?

No, but I was reasonably happy typing away (at the AA) and there were some pleasant coworkers.

Diana was a typist in front of me and she would often swing round and start chatting, sometimes for 30 or so minutes at a time until told off! She would type out words of popular songs for me or do one of her sweet pictures.

Pam sat behind me and became a good friend.

Have you ever done any voluntary or charity work?

Charity sales for CAFOD or similar. We ran a library in Greenway for a year or two. We advertised that we would give a helping hand in the home if needed and we gave coffee mornings.

Social life and entertainment next: Can you remember the first clothes you bought with your own money?

Royal blue skirt, petticoat with white lace stole, full red skirt, white blonde dress: white with turquoise flowers, red shoes, white gloves, pale blue blouse, blue night dress.

How did you usually travel when you were a teenager?

As I lived in Bristol. I cycled and walked quite long distances. Aunt Mary lived with us then and told us very often the great benefits of walking. She would take us to Henleaze Lake, where there were bluebells and primroses in Spring.

What sort of entertainment did you enjoy most? Can you remember any particularly enjoyable times?

I've always loved going to the theatre, particularly the musical shows. We went to the old Vic, the Hippodrome, the Little Theatre and The Colston Hall. We loved the Christmas shows at the old Vic written by Julian Slade. The best moment was always when the lights dimmed and the overture began.

I went to the pictures (cinema) too and saw musicals, comedies, and ballet (I loved Gisele). I went to an opera once - la Traviata - and enjoyed it.

I liked going to dances but didn't go often. Rosemary's boyfriends taught me how to dance. We've always gone to bonfire nights on the Downs. It was pretty wild.

Who were your favourite singers/actors/actresses?

Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Bing Crosby, Gene Kelly, Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, Leta Rosa John, Jean Carson, Ruby Marie, Pat Boone, Frank Sinatra, Vera Lynn, Doris Day, Debbie Reynolds, Johnny Ray, Dickie Valentine, Guy Mitchell.

Were there any places that you used to go out to regularly in the evenings?

We didn't have a television so I used to go across the road to the Brighton's and watch theirs. There was 'The Grove Family' and variety shows.

Mrs Brighton used to model clothes on TV and mum and I would go to Brights department store and see the mannequins. We also went to a history pageant at the Colston Hall.

When did you go on your first date? Who was it with? And where did you go?

December 19, 1956. I went with a college boy to Clifton College dance. I wore a full length Primrose dance dress with a full skirt and white daisies on it. I was 16. I must've looked special for one of my partners told me that everyone was asking

who I was - all the boys wanted to dance with me. I was too excited to eat and only had one crisp all evening! I danced every dance and had a wonderful time.

When the dance ended there was thick fog outside and no cars could be used. So I walked home with the boy, 2 miles along the Downs, and I wasn't tired at all!

How did you first meet your husband? How old were you? What were you both doing at that time?

Rosemary was going out with David, and one of his best friends was Simon (Litchfield), who lived in the country at Ashcott. Occasionally he would come to stay with David in Bristol and one day David brought Simon with him to Henleaze Gardens. This was the second time, in fact, but the first time Simon was worried about the firefighting course he was about to go on, so he took little notice of me!

I was 17 then. Rosemary and David undertook to find Simon a girl and had arranged a foursome with one of Rosemary's friends by the time the date occurred. Simon wanted it to be me instead so paid little attention to the poor girl (I had in fact asked her if I could take her place if for any reason she couldn't go).

What were your first impressions of each other?

I thought Simon very handsome, with brown eyes and lovely soft hair. He was four years old than I was, so I thought he knew a lot more than I did. Apparently, Simon went home and told everyone he'd met 'the most beautiful girl' and told his parents he'd met 'the best girl in the world'.

We lived a long way from each other, but Simon used to drive to Bristol at weekends in his old car to see me. Later, I would go on the train to Bridgwater and Simon would collect me and take me back to his home for the weekend.

Occasionally, he would come for an hour one evening when a friend of his attended a course in Bristol and gave Simon a lift.

When you met, how long did you go out together before you became engaged?

We had been seeing each other for about 18 months when we went on holiday together in May 1958. We stayed with an old lady at Beer (a family friend, she later came to live next door to us in Ruishton). We decided we wanted to belong to each other and made a commitment, but thought we'd better keep the engagement secret for a while in case my parents thought I was too young (18).

Simon knelt on the floor in the traditional way to ask me to marry him and the radio was playing "Some enchanted evening" - it was.

We wrote to each other every day though Simon's letters were rather prosaic (he explained later that he thought someone might read them!)

Were you still living with your parents? How did your parents greet the news of your engagement.

We were both still living with our parents. Simon's parents were always very kind to me and seemed happy about our engagement but his mother said later that mothers really wanted to keep their sons forever! Dad had been abroad for some of our courting years but he seemed to approve of Simon – a hard-working boy who liked classical music!

Mum and dad produced champagne when we told them the news and were relieved that we didn't plan to marry until the following year - I was 18 then and Simon 22.

How long was your engagement?

From the end of September 1958 until 5th September 1959. We couldn't afford to get married until then.

What was the date of your wedding? And how old were you when you were married?

5th September 1959 - I was just 19, and Simon was 23.

Where did the ceremony take place?

The Catholic Pro Cathedral in Clifton, Bristol. We often went to mass there.

What did you wear on your wedding day? Who was your best man and who was your bridesmaid?

I wore a long white brocade dress with long sleeves, also a long veil and a pearl coronet fitted over my long hair, which was piled on my head (I had wanted to wear my hair loose but my mother wouldn't let me – said I would look like a child bride).

We had three bridesmaids: Bridget (Simon's sister), Pat, my friend from school, and my young cousin Judy (known then as 'Linda', a name she hated). The bridesmaids all wore turquoise brocade dresses.

I carried a bouquet of multicoloured carnations, Linda carried a small basket of flowers.

How many guests came? Did you have a reception, and where was it held?

The Reception was at the Royal West Academy of Art in its Victoria Rooms in Bristol. It was a very short walk from the Pro Cathedral, where we were married.

We had between 70 and 80 guests. The food was buffet style, so we were able to walk around and talked to everyone (we weren't given a moment to eat anything!) Dad, Simon, and the best man John wore traditional morning suits

What's your chief memory of that day?

When I arrived at the church, the guests were still outside – the previous wedding had overrun! My wedding car had to drive round the corner and wait (some of my friends had gone inside and witnessed the wrong wedding, only realising it wasn't me when the bride came down the aisle!)

Mike had dad's camera so he could take photos but had instead taken lots of photos of young Andrew in his carrycot! When we finally left the reception to drive away in our green van, Pam wrote 'just married' in bright red lipstick on it. As we moved away, we also found that David had put stones inside the hubcaps so we made a loud noise all the way.

Did you go away on honeymoon?

We just went to Somerton, where we were to live - neither of us had lived there before so we were happy to explore that area.

Aunt Lily had tried to persuade us to stay with them for a London honeymoon but neither of us wanted to. We had also been offered the chance to stay on Lundy Island and I do regret Simon turning this idea down.

Where was your first home together? Can you describe it?

We had two rooms in Beacon House, Behind Berry, Somerton, and the shared use of the kitchen and bathroom. The landlady was called Mrs. Webb.

There was a large back garden overlooking fields where we used to pick black berries. Simon liked the huge plum tree in the garden. I had to do washing by hand in the kitchen sink, then put it through the wringer. Hard work, but possible, until we were faced with laundering baby nappies... Our landlady like to save money - we weren't allowed to have the fridge switched on in the winter! Nor have running hot water upstairs, except for baths.

Why did you choose to live where you did?

Simon was working in Lloyds Bank, Somerton. It was a good place to start married life as it was very different from Bristol. Somerton had a lot of shops and there were beautiful country walks in every direction. Simon was able to walk home to lunch each day. It didn't take long to drive to Ashcott too.

There was a Catholic Church along the road, served from Langport. I was on the flower rota and Father Stacey noted me to teach the catechism class. The children came on a Saturday morning.

We paid Mrs Webb £2.50 a week rent and gave her extra when we used the electric fire.

Early married life: What were your children's names? Where were they born? Do you remember how much they weighed at birth?

Stephen Mark, Buckley Hospital near Glastonbury, 6lbs, baptised January 1962 at Langport

Petronella Thérèse, born 8th May 1963, Bridgwater, 6lbs 5oz
Baptised 16th June 1963 , St George's Church Taunton.

Where did your children go to school?

Ruishton Church of England primary school and then Bishops Lydeard primary School, and finally Queens College, Taunton and Saint Josephs Convent (which then became Bishop Fox's).

What were their best subjects?

Both children could read before they went to school. They were highly intelligent and good at every subject (Miss Bertram once said that Petra could miss a whole term and she'd still be ahead of the others!) Later ,Steve showed the greatest interest in maths and science subjects, while Petra loved writing.

What was your monthly income in the early years of your marriage?

Simon earned £25 a month - he gave me 2.2 shillings a week for food. It was difficult to manage on this and we didn't often have extras like jam and marmalade. I would buy sausages and make them into little pies to make them last several days. We had half a pint of milk a day.

We couldn't afford to have meals out or to go away on holiday.

Did it sometimes seem hard to make ends meet?

I joined the Co-op. I had to pay a dividend of a pound - they allowed me to make this in three payments.

Petrol was about one shilling and nine pence a gallon, which is 7p in modern money.

We bought the cheapest grade of coal which had a lot of slack and didn't burn very well. We never bought books or records or any luxuries.

What did you do in your leisure hours?

At the beginning in Somerton, there was little to do, with only two rented rooms and no gardening. I tried to teach myself to play the piano but practice never brought any improvement.

Then Stephen was born (in 1961) and suddenly I was pushing him along the road in a large black pram. I really did feel 10 feet tall.

Within three months we had moved to a newly built bungalow at Ruishton. There were other young couples in the bungalows. Many also just starting their families, so we made good friends.

Early family memories?

Petra was born in May 1963. Baby Stephen had been checking the carrycot each morning to see if she had arrived yet!

As there wasn't much of a gap in their age, Stephen wasn't jealous of the new baby and they became good friends almost immediately. Once they were toddlers, we would take them on day trips to the seaside – we had our first holiday since we were married in Hayle in a chalet by the beach.

We would sometimes go to Bristol to stay with mum and dad for weekends and they always made the children very welcome and devised treats for them. E.g. dad made a money tree in the garden.

Who have been your best friends during your life?

Pat Gardner, Diana Blake, Pat Ward, Pat Wilby, and Mary Smith (through all, she has a good sense of humour and always manages to be positive).

How did you meet them and get to know them?

I was at school with Pat Gardner. She lived in the next road to me in Bristol, so we would meet up to sort out homework when she came to my house. She would put a record on the record player and dance rock 'n' roll and Elvis Presley or Bill Haley. We would walk round the Bristol streets in the evening singing and dancing like Gene Kelly. Pat was a rebel and was often told off at school. I've always hated breaking rules so admired her for this. She was a bridesmaid at our wedding and later she married a Persian and went to live in America. I saw her again at a 40 year school reunion, where she also brought her daughter.

Diana, I met working in The AA again, she was an original thinker. We've kept in touch with long letters for over 50 years,

Pat Ward was my best friend at Ruishton but we didn't have much in common apart from our young children.

Pat Wilby bubbled over with enthusiasm for life. She would forget homework and go and sit in the field of poppies to read poetry. She celebrated a golden wedding with a hot air balloon ride. We hit it off from day one and I had endless interesting discussions.

Grandchildren

Laurie, Rachel, Bethany.

These three definitely need a page about them. We are not in any way prejudiced: they really are highly intelligent and lovely to look at.

We got to know Laurie and Bethany well because we looked after them while Petra worked. At first they were shy and wary but soon it was as if they were our own children, completely relaxed and at home with us. They have brought much joy to our lives.

Once they stayed overnight by themselves and when, the following morning, I opened our bedroom door, Laurie and Bethany was standing outside, hand-in-hand waiting... They used to like to go to Ash Priors Common - Simon would organise races and we would fly kites and throw catching rings.

Can you recall all the different cars you've owned and what you paid for them?

1936 FORD 8, £30

Austin 7 £76

FORD van 1959, £190

Austin Somerset 1961, £195

Hillman Minx

Singer Gazelle

Austin Maxi

Austin Metro

Nissan Micra £6950

Which did you enjoy the most and why?

Simon used to go to work in his Ford 8 for some years, his father using the starting handle each morning to send him on his way. The Austin 7 broke down on its maiden voyage and we had to walk home. The Ford van was painted green to make it look better, but it still didn't travel faster than 30 miles an hour. We only bought an Austin Maxi (in fact several of them) because we met Ron Potter, an enthusiast, who serviced them all for us for years.

The only car I've liked is our Nissan Micra - a beautiful colour and easy to drive.

Laurie liked setting up Hot Wheels tracks (an old toy of Stephen's) in the garden and sending down cars to jump into cups at the other end - and he made a level crossing for the ants.

We haven't had the same opportunity to look after Rachel, but she is a beautiful talented girl and we are proud of her.

Where have you left? Can you remember all the places in which you've lived during your life?

Mum and dad bought 6 Henleaze Gardens. Bristol in 1950. This was their first permanent home because of dad's RAF postings. It was an old house with six floors from cellar to bedroom and attics on the top floor. The rooms were spacious with high ceilings and there were bells to summon the maids.

In 1959, I moved to Somerton with Simon after our marriage - we only only had two rooms and a shared kitchen and bathroom and use of the garden.

In 1962, we moved to a new semi-detached bungalow at Ruishton. It was lovely to have our own home and it did us well until, with the growing children, we needed more space. So we moved to our present home at Rainbow End, Bishops Lydeard, in 1972 on Petra's ninth birthday. Once again we had to start a garden from scratch on an uneven piece of field, but we had learned a bit from our first garden. Views were vitally important to us, so we loved seeing the hills and fields in each direction. The sitting room is quiet, overlooking the garden.

Can you remember any of your holidays when you were a child and what sort of holiday did you most enjoy?

We would go on day trips to the sea while living in Bristol. I always went on the back of dad's motorbike – the others went in the Reed's car. When dad was commanding officer at RAF Kemble, we spent a week there - they had tennis courts, but Rosemary and I were too young to appreciate all the young officers!

When dad was posted to High Wycombe, we had a holiday at Marlow on the river looking after someone's house and dogs. There was a punt, a rowing boat, and three canoes, and swimming in the river. Once by mistake, when my canoe floated away as I was getting into it! We'd go off to High Wycombe and see films free as dad's friends owned cinemas across the road from each other.

When dad was in Cyprus, we went to Budleigh Salterton and stayed with auntie Mary and uncle Nevis (he found children trying so it wasn't a great success).

By the time Rosemary and I had met David and Simon, dad took us to Woolacombe and the boys camped on the beach.

Where did you go on holiday when your children were young?

We always went to the sea – Devon, Cornwall, Dorset, Wales.

Hayle was our first family holiday, a chalet on the beach. We hadn't noticed in the brochure that there was no running water, but the rain soon filled up the water tank. We spent many hours on the beaches but also took the children for cliff walks, taking squirrel and pet blankets with them. Sometimes we went on boat trips on more commercial beaches. We would ride donkeys and have train rides. If we were on a holiday complex there would be a swimming pool and table tennis etc.

Petra and I had one special holiday when she was eight - we went to Austria for eight days. We stayed in a chalet hotel in the Tyrol with a wonderful view of snow capped mountains and spring flowers in the meadows.

We went up to the snow in a cable car and also went on a ski lift. We went on a Sound of Music tour, explored Salzburg, and went on a boat trip on a lake to see where the young couple danced.

What type of holiday do you enjoy most now?

We still like to be beside the sea, though I am just happy if there is water, like in the Lake District. I love mountains, though can't climb them, so I enjoyed our Scottish holiday in later years.

We like to explore rather than lie on a beach all day, so prefer to walk on the cliffs far above the sea.

And so...

So what has my life been all about? What has always mattered to me is love, truth, and beauty, so perhaps all my decisions have been made seeking them.

Truth has proved to be God's law of love: we need to love and to be loved unconditionally. Beauty I found in nature - bluebells in a wood, a field of buttercups, a hill of heather, a diamond-glinting sea - and I can collect and make beautiful things.

I have been greatly blessed with a loving family: a husband, children, and grandchildren.

It is hard when one's much loved children leave home. When I got married, I drove away without a backward glance. I thought "that's the end of that part of my life" - I was really surprised when mum told me she expected me to write to keep in touch!...

And then my own children went to university and for the first time I did not know whether they were well or ill, happy or unhappy. The only thing I discovered was that they no longer needed their parents or their home. They had grown wings and flown away...

There was a long wait until grandchildren came along, and with them, new contact with our own children. They have their own interests and hobbies, but nothing will ever matter to us so much as spending time with our most precious children.

We pray for their health, joy, peace and contentment every day of our lives.

Faith

This book gives more lead lines for unimportant questions to answer. I could answer them but the reader would never know what really matters to me. What are the vitally important things that make me the person I am?

So many people have influenced me over the years, perhaps beginning with my grandmother (Mrs. Levay) who, when she became blind, never once made a word

of complaint. She was unfailingly kind, gentle, and loving. Mum and dad too were always kind and courteous and taught us to consider other people at all times.

I was happy to be brought up as a Christian, but later there were times when I found it hard to live my beliefs. This is when I came into contact with the catholic prayer group in Taunton. I was bowled over by the great love I found there. These people not only had a personal love relationship with Jesus, but they cared for each other unconditionally. Their joy and peace were unshakeable – something I hadn't found in attending Mass and the other sacraments. The answer was to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and then everything made sense.

I knew for the first time that God loved me; I am an adopted daughter of the King of heaven, so I can hold my head up high. I need fear nothing, for nothing could touch me unless he allows it – and if he did, he would bring good from it. I can trust the One who loves me best completely.

Gradually, I realised that he was more truly present in the sacraments than in the praise of the prayer group and it means everything to me to belong to his church.

This life is short - what is 100 years compared to eternity? How could people not think about where they are to spend eternity? What I want most in the world is for each member of my family to live in God's kingdom of love here on Earth and thereafter in heaven. I want each person to know the One who loves them the best, to talk to Him, ask His advice, and thank Him for all his blessings.

May God grant my prayer and allow us all to be united with Him in heaven for all eternity. Amen.