

The best explanation for my decision to record my mother's life story appears in the preface I wrote for her book.

'In 1995, the 50th anniversary of VE Day was celebrated with major events taking place in Hyde Park, not far from where my wife and I lived. I was struck by the need to think about what was being celebrated and in particular the experience of those who had been through the War. If it is easy for us to forget this, it is only easier for our children. While I have the chance of learning from first hand testimony of those who were adults during the War years, many of my contemporaries' parents were too young to remember the War and its impact on their lives, and it seems even more remote to children growing up to day. It is not long before the first hand oral history of the War will be lost.

This made me think about asking Mum to tell her own experience of the War, and it was not long before I began to think in terms of broadening the scope of her recollections to her entire life. The main reason for this was the long generations in which our family tends to specialise. At this point I still did not have children of my own, and it was clear that, by the time any I did have were old enough to benefit from hearing Mum talk about her life, she would no longer be in her first flush of youth.

I did not want them just to learn about the War. As the following pages show, a person's life is an extraordinary record of the times in which they lived, how society has changed and how the family's path has evolved over time. These pages provide a fascinating social as well as personal document. One of the things of which I was always conscious was how privileged I was and how incredibly privileged my children would be (and now are!) in terms of

the material wealth of their lives. It is all too easy to take this for granted, to forget what had to happen to make this possible. Our parents came from reasonably humble beginnings but through hard work (and not a little personal flair) made great strides from which we, and ultimately our offspring, have benefited enormously. I think it is hugely important to remember where one came from and what it took to get here, and to be grateful for what one has. For me, an important thing to take out of this testimony is the contrast between how Mum lived when she was young and how our children live and will live.

There was one other factor that drove me to embark upon this story, and that was Dad. Dad died when I was 17 and had been ill for a couple of years prior to that. As a consequence, I feel I never really got to know him as a man. In the years I should have been wrestling with him emotionally and intellectually, I could not because he was sick. This left me with a bit of a hole where Dad should have been and some impressions of him that perhaps would have been rather different if I had ever really got to know him. I also think that knowing your parents is an important part of knowing yourself, so this was an important gap. In asking Mum to talk about her life, therefore, I was also keen to hear about Dad, in the hope that I could get to know him a little better through her. And that has worked. I like the man she has described, and I am happy that some of him lives on in me, and therefore in my children too.

Mum was worried that she wouldn't be very good at recounting her memories and she could not imagine that her life would be of interest to anybody. She was wrong on both counts: she thoroughly enjoyed the process and my children love reading and hearing the stories of her life. I am so glad I asked her to do it.'