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I was born in Hove a long time ago. I had two older brothers and when I was about three the family moved to Golders Green. My father, Harry Rowson, came from Manchester and was one of a family of six whose parents had immigrated from Russia/Poland. The family name was Rosenbaum, but the three brothers changed their names to Rowson during World War I. My mother was Vera Davis and lived in Hampstead and she and my father met through their common contacts in the film business. My mother's family was Sephardi and hailed from Leicester. Our home-life was reasonably observant and although Fridays were sacrosanct, Saturday shul- going was spasmodic. However, it was firmly in place for the first days of the Festivals. We were members of the United Synagogue in Dunstan Road, Golders Green until a few years before World War II when mother started taking me to Alyth Gardens.

Between the ages of five and eleven I went to school at Henrietta Barnett and then to boarding school for six years at Battle Abbey, Sussex, the Abbey that was built by William the Conqueror as a thanksgiving to God for his victory at the Battle of Hastings. 1066 is the only date in history about which I can be confident and I feel I have a proprietary interest in the Bayeux Tapestry! On leaving Battle Abbey I went to Switzerland for a year, ostensibly to learn French and German, but after six months this venture was cut short on account of the imminence of World War II. My mother obtained a seat for me in a chartered plane, a rare thing at that time, and met me at the then important aerodrome of Croydon - a town which she knew to some extent as her parents built and ran the Davis Theatre there.

At the beginning of the war I was evacuated to an aunt, Beatrice Doniger, late member of BRS whose commemorative window is on the north wall of the synagogue. After a few weeks of the phoney-war, I enrolled on a three months crash course at Parkstone Secretarial College then in Ashley Road, Poole. This was another venture which did not reach completion as, before the three months was up I had joined the WAAF in a category which had been promulgated as "Clerk, Special Duty". The Armed Services have curious ways of describing some of their occupations, especially ones that are secret or confidential and I must say that as a "Clerk, Special Duty" I expected I would



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be using my newly half-acquired secretarial skills and would have the opportunity to become proficient in them while doing interesting war-work. The work was certainly interesting, but had nothing to do with clerking, shorthand or typing. Clerks, Special Duty, turned out to be a hush-hush name for Radar Operators, and Radar was then the highly secret way of detecting the approach of enemy aircraft. Training included the elements of how Radar worked, as well as how to work Radar and, by the time the course was finished, the Battle of Britain was about to start. I spent most of the next eighteen months on south coast Units, remaining for a long period near Ta n g m e r e , but also for a shorter one at Sopley. Little could I have known then that I would be visiting there in the early 1980's when AJEX took food and comforts to the Boat People who were in transit camps there, after their watery ordeals escaping from Vietnam.

Late in 1941 I was commissioned as a WAAF Administration Officer, a job for which I was far too young, and transferred to the Equipment Branch which had a more practical connotation with responsibilities for the provisioning and supply of anything from boots, battle-dresses and bicycles, to vehicles and aeroplanes and aviation fuel. I served on a number of Stations countrywide, with a long spell in Northumberland, somewhere on Hadrian's Wall, and at Ta n g m e r e and finally at Aberporth, from where I was de-mobbed. Aberporth was a tiny Army Co-op Command Unit on the west coast of Wales. Food was severely rationed at that time, but the farms around were so isolated that the Egg Marketing Board did not even collect eggs from them. One recollection of Aberporth is joining a "run" from the Mess in a vehicle allocated to go round the farms to purchase eggs, and of being able to buy a personal allocation to take to friends I was about to stay with on leave. I was a very welcome guest!

De-mob dates were usually announced a couple of months ahead of time and I was offered to go to France about two weeks before I was due to "go outside". I had been in the WAAF for six years and was fully adjusted to the idea of starting afresh as a civilian and getting on with my life. I also had a little fiat lined up (almost unheard of at that time) in Be'size Park, so I refused. I have not had a substantial chance to speak French since and now I can't. I often wonder if I made the right decision. During the war my family had become dispersed. My mother had died, both brothers had married and the elder one was on the verge of emigrating with his family to Palestine; my father was in



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lodgings and I would have to fend for myself. I hadn't kept house before and the war had changed the domestic scene beyond recognition, so adjusting to Civvy Street was going to be almost more of a challenge than joining-up. In the Services one had been cushioned from the practicalities of war-time privations, which in some instances became even more severe in the first post-war years. So I had to learn what to do with a ration book - how to register with a butcher, how much or how little meat one could buy for the weekly ration of 1/- or 1/6d (about 5 or 7 1/2p), how to take best advantage of two ounces of cheese a week or one egg and, whether or not it was worth spending a month's whole allocation of points on a small tin of corned beef and doing without biscuits, and how on earth did one reconstitute an egg? Furnishing a flat had similar restrictions.

In addition to such intricacies I had to get work of some sort. The advice of the de-mob "Careers Officer" did not extend to pointing out the possible job-value of my experience in provisioning and -supply and, as with millions of others I thought only of re-training. Before the war I had been an enthusiastic Girl Guide and gained badges in first aid, home nursing, life saving and I felt I wanted to do something medical. I eliminated medicine and nursing as such for various reasons, so I investigated the possibilities of Orthoptics, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Medico-Social work and, having been accepted in principle as a "mature student" in each of them, I plumped for the first course which occurred and again took a crash-course, this time in Medico-Social work. I worked mainly at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and the Royal Northern Hospitals and I think I became passably effective in this profession and remained in it until I married. However, it was not quite right for me; I should have done something more tangible.

Peter and I, whose families knew each other before the war, were married in 1952 by Rev. Reinhart at Upper Berkeley Street Synagogue. We had a guard of honour of Royal Marines and Naval Officers. It was still a time when the traffic at Marble Arch was controlled by policemen on point duty and we greatly enjoyed it that they held up the traffic for our be-ribboned car to drive by! Peter had actually been granted leave from his unit, 3 Commando Brigade, in Malta to get married and after our honeymoon he had to return to duty. I followed six weeks later in time for my first important parade as an R.M. wife, when the Duke of Edinburgh presented new Colours to the Brigade, an event imbued



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with formalities and celebrations. About six weeks later the Brigade went to north Africa on manoeuvres and expected to be there for about two months. It was 1953, the year Abdul Nasser fermented a military coup against King Farouk of Egypt and 3 Commando Brigade was transferred to Egypt to safeguard British interests in the Suez Canal. Except for a few days duty in Malta Peter remained there with the unit until they returned to the U.K. via Malta in 1954. I saw him when he embarked briefly in Valetta, then waved the troopship goodbye a couple of days later, flew back to U.K. and went to Plymouth in time to welcome the ship as she sailed home. In those years such timing was a novelty worth commenting upon.

Peter was next posted to Poole and we settled in Lower Parkstone and started a family. Simon was born in 1955 when the BRS Congregation was still using Trinity Church Hall for Services and he was blessed there by Rev. Solomons. Adam was born in 1958 and was the first baby to be blessed in the newly built synagogue. In 1959 we moved to Broadstone. The pattern of our lives was set when I was in Malta and Peter was ostensibly in Malta but mostly in north Africa and in subsequent years we often set out for destinations, expecting to be together, and then finding he was posted off elsewhere. His major postings included Poole, the USA (Virginia where we spent the whole time together), Malaya, Plymouth, when we lived in Cornwall. Peter had two long commissions in Aircraft Carriers and in 1964 I returned to Broadstone while Peter was at sea. On his return he was posted first to Old Sarum (Salisbury), then to the Ministry of Defence (London), and finally to Portsmouth, all of which required weekly commuting. By the time he retired in 1970 we had moved house thirteen times. We had taken three major sea voyages leaving our homes and taking our household belongings with us, driven and camped across the North American Continent en famille and spent more time apart than together.

When he retired from the Royal Marines, Peter became Bursar to Cannel College and this required another move and eventually we settled in a wonderful cottage in Dorchester-on-Thames. It was an excellent area to live, in the middle of England, and seemed to be half-way to everywhere one wanted to go to and half-way from everywhere friends came from. We were a good mid-journey halt.

It was also easy to get to London, and it was during this time that I was able to



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substantiate a long-held but suspended interest in ballet and I started to research ballet on early television — very early television, from pre-1936 days. As well as it being easy to get to the British Library Newspaper Collection at Colindale, The Royal Television Society and other relevant libraries in London, it turned out that BBC Written Archives Centre was at Reading and that the Bodleian library had a useful collection. In order to be able to describe the actual quality of what viewers could see on the small monochrome screen, I needed to delve into development of television itself. Unexpectedly my war-time radar training, which had included a modicum of television theory, stood me in good stead for this. It was some time and about two house-moves later, that I arrived at a stage where I could write up my researches for an American Dance journal.

Another subject that was important to me around this time was my research into the life of the ballet impresario Rene Blum, brother to Leon Blum, first Socialist Premier of France who died in or en route to Auschwitz in 1942. With the aid of dictionaries much of my French came back as far as reading and translating was concerned and I reached an impasse only when I was faced with legal documents. Although I wrote a paper on Blum which I read at a Dance conference in the USA, my interesting collection of partly sorted documents is still waiting to be written up. Help!

Peter made job changes after four years and work brought him back to this area and we lived in Southboume for about twelve years, until we moved to our present home in Manor Road. Our return to the area led to the expansion of another of my interests. I had always been quite good at hand-work and I had embroidered several tapestry cushions to be made up. I joined an Adult Education Class for embroidery at the Punshion Memorial Centre to learn how to do just this, but I was captivated by the myriad of possible canvas-work stitches I discovered there and became addicted. The project I ran for The Chagall tapestry windows in the Simcha Hall was one outcome of this growing interest and I also taught canvas work embroidery for U3A for three years in its early days and exhibited at the Dorset County Arts & Crafts Association's annual exhibition at Puddletown.

I joined this association about twelve years ago and have exhibited there annually ever since, not without success. I was invited on to the Committee



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about nine years ago and five years ago took on the editorship of the annual four-page newsletter which I have developed into a small magazine. Not surprisingly I also became involved in the local dance and ballet scene and joined two organisations, the Dorchester Ballet Club, of which I am currently President and the Western Association of Ballet Schools (WABS). WABS is an amalgam of local schools which gives about 250 children annually the chance to participate in professionally produced performances in purpose-built theatres.

Throughout my life I have undertaken voluntary work. After the war I helped at Brady Street, and for several years I went to Guide camps as a qualified Life Saver if bathing facilities were available. As a Service Officer's wife there were always demands, particularly overseas where I helped run hospital car-pools, wives clubs, visited hospitals and entertained families especially if their menfolk were away on active service. I also worked as a Voluntary Aid at Boscombe Hospital for several years. Currently I do several "back-room" tasks for the synagogue, and I got roped in to talk about Judaism to several non-Jewish groups and schools as well as undertaking one-off jobs.

Peter and I are both involved in ex-Service organisations (Peter more than I) particularly AJEX and the Royal Marines Association (RMA). These have to be fitted in around home and family with Simon living nearby and Adam, wife and two young children living in Harrow. As one gets older there seems to be more and more to do and demands on one's time and energy seem to proliferate, but one gets slower and feebler and tries harder - if one was born a long time ago.