

Isola Macrae
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Dear Librarian,

Here's a bit of history for you.

I had 2 happy years at Leeds from 1933-35.
I was Swimming Captain + General Sports Rep. yet
I left with a heart problem before my final
term. I recovered enough to start teaching in
a village school but I hated it + gave it up
in October - + got a job dancing in a pantomime!
At the end of the run I got a job as Swimming
Instructors for Newcastle schools, + from that got
into the Keep-Fit Movement C.L.R.A.T - now CCPR
as a Leader, till the 2nd World War began + I
got married in 1940 - after being drafted into a
First Aid post, where my heart problem started
up again + I was put on the telephones instead
of going out on "Blackout accidents".
I was bored + got out of that
when people were being made
redundant because the war didn't
really start until the Spring + the
BEF were driven out of France at
Dunkirk, at the end of June. My
husband - originally in a "Reserved
Occupation", was called up - so on June



8th we were married. By this time I was working at
a Holiday Fellowship Centre at Keswick & my husband
to-be had moved from South Shields to Bromley
(Kent). We moved into a furnished room till he was
called - in December & was sent to train at
Canterbury. I followed & went into 'digs' & got
a job as an Investigating Officer with the
Assistance Board. - In June he was sent to Swansea
& I followed, got digs again, & had just got a job
in a Nursery Garden (mainly tomato greenhouses) when
he was given 4 days embarkation leave & sent to
Tenby - to embark from Pembroke - I followed & he
got a "Sleep-out Pass" - then Singapore fell & he
went to Inverary to practise for the invasion of
Normandy. From there the unit went to Comrie where
he transferred to the Royal Corps of Signals & went
to Crieff. I went home when we left Tenby because
my Mother was ill & he went to Glasgow before
going on to Inverary. My Mother died - I sent
him a telegram - before he could get permission
to come, the police came to the door to confirm
that it was true. By this time I was working
as Permit Supervisor for Maczom Ltd. (Margarine
Combines) All the different makers of Margarine were
combined & had permits for their quotas to produce
& sell Marg - which was rationed to $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs per person
per week - & you had to be registered with 1 shop.
Their quotas were determined by the number of
their customers & everybody was issued with a
ration card which they had to produce when shopping.

From Grief he was transferred to the Intelligence Corps & trained first at Winchester then Cambridge then Bletchley Park, then went to London for posting to India just before Xmas 1942. I changed my job to Thos. Healdys (now Proctor & Gamble) during Time Study, & had more health problems after 2 years, which were put down to "Nervous Debility" so I was given a month's sick leave, & went to stay with my Father who had remarried. I didn't improve so I went as Youth Hostel Warden to Alton (Lock Ness) My job was kept open for me, but although I still had bouts of what I thought was indigestion I realised that it certainly wasn't "nervous", so I decided to stay till the hostel closed in October, & I got a job in the Forestry Service which I loved - but I had to move into the forestry hut which had been condemned 20 years previously as unfit for human habitation - but a Chemical Toilet was put in one of the cubicles & the women were put in. It was built on piles over a peat bog, & was tilting to one side, so furniture gradually walked across the room, & a full cup of tea spilled over. The water was collected from a spring at the door & in Nov we had to break the ice to get at it. It froze overnight in the boiler in the stove & we had to get a good fire going in the morning to get water for breakfast. There were gaps in the walls & floor where the boards had shrunk. Nobody had lasted there longer than 2 years! I lasted 2½ months - being sick during the night, which I thought was from living on fried dried egg! Then I got early pneumonia & the Dr. advised me to leave.

I went to stay with my brother + his wife at Stockton-on-Tees, where I got a job as accounts clerk in the Borough Treasurer Dept till Easter, when I was booked to go back to Descent Bank as Secretary (as well as doing the accounts I took the A parties over the mountains every day + seemed to be as fit as a fiddle, though I still got stomach pains + was often sick - then the heart symptoms returned + were at first diagnosed as "malnutrition" but turned out to be a gumbling appendix! I had it out at Kenwick Cottage Hospital + never looked back. The war in Europe had just ended + while I was convalescing at my brother's the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima + Nagasaki + Japan capitulated. My first thought was "Hooray - Ben (my husband) will be coming home". Then I thought of the horror for the Japanese - women + children, + I've been a pacifist ever since. He did come back just in time for Xmas - which we spent at Descent Bank where I was booked as assistant secretary over the holiday. He got a posting in London + we got digs in Bromley till we got a flat in a requisitioned, partly converted house - where our first son was born Dec 3rd 1946. In March 1948 we moved to Hexham where he was the Treasurer to the Rural District Council till the amalgamation of local Authorities in 1974, when he took early retirement. During our time till then I taught Country Dancing + introduced Scottish to my classes, then to my all women's I introduced Keep-Fit which grew from strength to strength. A local cinema was converted into a swimming pool so when the evening classes finished at Easter, I tried it + took adult swimming classes on a "pay as you come, come when you can basis". I started with 1 night a week + had to turn people away so I took 2 then 3. In Sept. my Keep-Fit + Country Dancing class started so

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I had to get a substitute to take one night. That lasted for 3 weeks then it faded so I managed with 2 classes through the winter. I ran a bus from the Tyne Valley, picking up at stages en route + kept the cost within the range of housewives who had to catch what they could out of the housekeeping.

I also did Supply Teaching in 3 local schools + when I got a dog (a large hairy Alsatian) I took her with me to one in a village 3 miles away - I walked her there + back, + she was so popular with the children they used to ask for me when a teacher was off.

My husband dropped dead on the tennis court - never having been ill in his life - on April 11th (Easter Monday) 1977 + since then I have been all over the world except Japan (because I don't want to spend time in Tokyo) + South America - too expensive - but I have been all around Australia on an Aussie-Pass - swam from an island in the barrier reef, snorkelled in Sydney Harbour, climbed Ayers Rock + a gully in the Mt. Olgas; I have been back twice since then, visiting relatives. - my son in Tasmania, a niece in Sydney, a cousin in Mullumbidgee (NSW/Queensland border) + a friend in Melbourne. I have also visited cousins in South Africa where I took 2 safaris in the Kruger National Park + one north of Durban as part of a trip to Cape Town by the Garden Route - where I stayed 5 days + climbed Table Mountain by myself. My cousins had a holiday house at Ovingo in Natal, where we spent 3 weeks over Xmas + New Year + I bought a

snaf (belly) board & rapidly became an expert & got
so banned people thought I was a resident & I was
dubbed "The Nature Girl" (at 64!) En route from
Johannesburg we stopped off at a "Golden Gate" Reserve
& I got my cousins to the top of the Drakensberg where
they had never been though they had spent many holidays
there & they are 12 + 14 years younger! I could go
on, but now I'm an 82 year old wreck - crippled
with Arthritis & Osteoporosis (2 steel plates in my
spine, a surgical collar & corset) I'm registered
"Visually Impaired" (Glaucoma) very deaf (wear 2
expensive hearing aids - can't use the NHS issue
with a thing behind the ear which is knocked off
by my collar!) & have Angina. I am preparing
to go into a Care Home - hence the old "Cwts" which
I thought might be of interest to you.

I hope you can read this script - I can't see
my hand as I write & my range of vision is
further limited by the fact that I can't hold my
head up without my collar & with it I can't
move my head. I can't sit unsupported & I
can't write any more. But I still have my wit
& my memories! I've had a good long run
so I shouldn't complain. Yours sincerely, Ellen Taylor.

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P.S.

I have been in the Care Home since the 7th, but only for 2 weeks "Respite Care" so I'm not yet very organised yet, & I'm dependent on a visitor to come & take this away to post. As with most Care Homes it's rather out of the way so I don't have too many of those. It has to be weighed, so the post box is no good & the post office is 3 miles away. There is a bus twice a day.

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I was interrupted by the only visitor I expected & he won't be able to come again

I expect to be interrupted any minute by the Matron coming to put my Glaucoma eye drops in & I'm squirming with the pain in my back so I'll switch on the T.V. for 15 to 1 — it takes my mind off & I don't have to hold myself up — & it keeps my brain alive.