

These chapters are written down at the request of family members who wished to have a record of my parents and what I have been up to in a varied life. They are simply a string of anecdotes and incidents which were significant enough to have left their mark in my memory.

My father was Benjamin Frederick Day, who was born in Hull in 1897 to Walter Day and Alice Cornforth. He left Estcourt Street School in 1911 at the age of 14 with good reports, particularly for handicraft.

He began work as errand boy at Mallorie's ironmongers for 5/- for a five and a half day week. For 6/- a week he stocked shelves and vulcanised goods at Thomas Blenkins, seamen's outfitters.

He would return home from school and find his mother dead drunk, no food in the house and the blankets pawned. Often he went hungry, or had to scavenge food from dustbins. He left home and worked as a 'hanger-on' in the docks. Casual labourers worked in ships' holds, fixing hooks and lines in bales of wool for unloading. If he wasn't picked for work any day, he had no money for lodgings, so he slept rough on the dockside.

One day at the dock a man asked if he could cook. When he said, 'Yes', he was told to go home for his clothes and return at noon, because the SS 'Glynn' was sailing at 1.00 pm and needed a mess room steward. He was engaged for several voyages at 30/- a week. In August 1914 when Britain declared war on Germany he was on board the Glynn when she went to Scapa Flow to fuel HMS 'Duke of York' when she had her plates stove in.

On return to Hull in December he went to the Civic Hall to enlist. The minimum age was 19. He and his friend were only 17, but the officer told them to run round the block, then they would be old enough when they came back. This they did, and Ben joined the Rifle Brigade.

After training in Winchester he was sent to France in March 1915. Six weeks later he was struck in the back by shrapnel and sent back to England for treatment. On recovery, he went to Sheppey where his battalion were re-formed. They returned to the front in 1916 and went into action in the Battle of the Somme (July to November). Ben said there was a 28-day continuous shelling of the German trenches starting 1st July. He was engaged with others in tunnelling under the lines. As they emerged, a shell dropped nearby and men were cut down like grass.

In 1917 he was invalided out with a shrapnel-chipped coccyx, and was sent to hospital in Roundhay Road, Leeds. While convalescing he went to stay with his mother's sister Emma in Hunslet and while there visited his Aunt Mary Margaret, meeting her daughter, his cousin Hilda Cornforth. This was probably the start of their courtship. After returning to the Front he sent her postcards with affectionate messages.

Hilda, the eldest of six children, was born in 1899. She started work at 13 in a pharmaceutical factory making children's dummies. She left because the wages were low and the hours long (8.00 - 6.00 Monday to Friday, 8.00 - 1.00 Saturdays). She had to leave a job at Stanningley worsted spinning mill when the machine grease affected her lungs. She enjoyed work at Halliday's boot factory, Bramley Town End.

In 1919 Ben was transferred to the Army Reserve and took a job in Leeds as a tram driver. Hilda meanwhile was working at the boot factory in Bramley. As she waited there one day with other girls for the tram to take her back to Armley, one arrived driven by Dad. Other girls exclaimed, 'Oh no! It's that mad driver!' Hilda didn't dare let on that she was his sweetheart.

At some point Ben worked with another man in a small shop making and repairing shoes. It was here that he learned his shoe-repairing skills which he used constantly for the family. He was able to achieve a very professional finish.

Hilda and Ben were married on the 30th September 1920. They took rooms over Thornton's shop, Armley Town Street. In 1922 they moved to Layard Street, New Wortley, then to 11 Autumn Street, Burley. It was there that Marjorie, Frank and Ethel grew up, and where I was born.

Ben transferred to working as a bus conductor, and later driver. When the Second World War started he impulsively volunteered for the army on 22nd November 1939. He had not been called up as he was over the age. He worked as a driver in the Royal Army Service Corps, and saw action at Dunkirk. During the war he was wounded by a bullet through the arm, and was injured in the right thigh, left side and back. He spent months in hospital at Seacroft and other places near Leeds. On 24th April 1941 he was discharged from the army on medical grounds.

Dad got a job as storeman at Marston Excelsior IMI in Armley Road. A few years after the war the job came to an end. In a panic at being out of work he took a labouring job at a factory down Pickering Street. One day of pushing a heavy wheelbarrow broke him. He reported sick and the doctor told him he was not fit enough for such heavy work. From 1948 to 1955 he was employed by the British Legion as general office and wages clerk. Then from 1956 until retirement in 1961 he did clerical work with stock control and job costing for the NE Gas Board in Leeds.

In 1959 Dad had his first coronary attack. This was the first of several major and numerous minor heart crises. That he survived until 1987 was amazing. He suffered a lot from fibrositis and work injuries, which exacerbated his quick temper and impatience.

Ten years after his first coronary a considerable mellowing was evident in his attitude when faith in God was mentioned. He said it was because he had seen how God had provided for Colin and Jean when they had worked with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Vietnam, India and Nepal.

It was some time during the mid or early 1970s that Dad said he was trusting Christ as his Saviour. Mam also said she was, though it is possible that she had believed much earlier than Dad. She was so happy at the change in him.