



## CHRISTMAS IN JULY ?? - OH, YES, IT CAN HAPPEN

Everyone loves a story at Christmas time, especially when it contains an element of mystery. This is just such a tale of bizarre workings of time. They say that truth is stranger than fiction; judge for yourselves, for this story is absolutely true and some of you reading this now figure prominently in it. No names have been changed since there are no guilty parties — only innocents walking the way of life. Times, dates and places are all accurate although much detail, of necessity, has been omitted. The story has no ending. One or more of you will write the ending for me. But to the beginning . . . . .

Go back in time many years to October, of 1935, when a child, a second daughter, was born to Joseph and Nellie Riley at their home on Wargrave Road (ironic address in view of subsequent events) in Earlstown (England).

It was a close-knit, happy family and within the love and care of her parents, her elder sister Kathleen, and her beloved dog Rex, the child grew and flourished.

Time passed, and the grim specter of war loomed over Europe. Like so many others, the little family was caught in its shadow and the child knew what it was to be pulled from her bed night after night, bundled into a full "siren" suit and hustled along with all the rest beneath the eerie wailing of sirens to spend the next few hours huddled below ground in air raid shelters, until morning light and "all clear" permitted them to return to their homes.

On the night of Monday, the 7th of April, 1941, for the first time the family did not go to the shelters when the sirens sounded the alarm. The father had only just returned from working late and the mother, a professional tailoress, was fitting a dress for her elder daughter who was soon to be a bridesmaid at her cousin's wedding. It was a beautiful dress — long cream crepe with a bright yellow sash. The child, although prepared for bed, was sitting by the radio eagerly awaiting a favorite tune. She had always loved music, especially dance music, and as a special treat, she was allowed to stay up on Monday night until 8:00 o'clock when a catchy signature tune which delighted the child, announced the very popular radio show, "Monday Night at 8:00." It was to be the last happiness she was to know for a long time, for a short time later the little home was blown to bits by a direct hit from a full load of high explosive bombs, delivered with unerring accuracy by a German pilot who doubtlessly believed that he was doing his bit for his country.

Within minutes the emergency services were on hand, searching feverishly among the fire and rubble. They located the father, mother and elder daughter, all of whom were lost, but of the child there was no trace. Then fate took a hand again, in the shape of a miner on his way home from the local pit. Miners know all about explosives and digging for comrades buried alive under rock falls. He seized a spade and set about quartering the ruins calling insistently while urging everyone else to be absolutely quiet. Suddenly he heard the sound for which he hoped — a faint whimper. Instantly, willing hands were heaving away the rubble where the miner instructed them to help him search. Meanwhile the cries had ceased but

the rescuers worked on and eventually exposed an oblong piece of stone beneath which they could see the child. It was a windowsill which had fallen lengthwise over the tiny body shielding it from the rest of the wreckage. Slowly and carefully they eased the stone upwards until they could lift it away, and the roughly calloused hands of the miner, with gentle urgency, pulled the child out and cradled her in his arms — her face against the rough cloth of his working jacket. The child was alive — just. She was severely injured and was badly shocked. A waiting ambulance rushed her off to the hospital, and the miner, another job done, picked up his bait pail and quietly resumed his journey home. Such is the quiet dignity and enormous character of these men.

The next few weeks were, for the child, filled with pain and fear. Her right leg had been broken and the bones contracted as she lay buried. Her right foot had been burned and crushed. She had multiple injuries all over her body and was severely shocked. It was to fall to the lot of the surgeons at Winwick Hospital near Warrington to treat her injuries and try to put things right.

The child lay in the hospital for weeks. Firstly, in plaster from the waist down, then with her leg being stretched to offset the shortening effect of the injury. Unfortunately, it was stretched too far and the pelvis tilted. She was left with one leg considerably longer than the other and the maimed foot. It was suggested that she might never walk again and certainly not without a limp. However, the little girl had other ideas! She proceeded firstly to walk and then to dance, although she was to wear special shoes for many years.

Throughout her stay in the hospital, the child was not told of the fate of her family. She had no recollection as to what had caused her injury, and strenuous efforts were made by everyone to insure that nothing occurred to awaken her memory. Meanwhile she fretted as to why, when she was so ill, mummy, daddy and Kathleen didn't come to see her.

She was finally discharged from the hospital, having been told by the Ward Sister, Sister Williamson, that she must be a brave girl and promise not to cry, but that she would not see mummy, daddy and Kathleen again, as they had gone to be with Jesus. The child was 5½ years old.

An aunt, the twin sister of the child's mother, agreed to foster her and bring her up with her own two children, a boy David, who was five years younger, and a girl, Mary who was almost the same age, six months younger.

We move on now to 1944 when the Americans were in Europe, many stationed in England, and the tide was turning against the Axis forces. It was decided that to commemorate Anglo-American cooperation there and as a publicity exercise for the folks stateside, several British war orphans were to be "adopted" by the American forces. The child was one of those chosen. However, she refused to go unless Mary, who was not an orphan, could go also. In typically generous fashion, the Americans agreed. The time for the weekend visit was set for July and the children could barely contain their excitement as they counted the days. New outfits had been made for them — coats with matching hats. The child's was a soft shade of green, and Mary's was a pale blue. Came the agreed day and the kids were ready by breakfast time only to see the hours tick away until they became convinced that they had been forgotten. Then came a knock at the door and there was a smartly uniformed lady with a big shiny car. A CAR! Nobody had a car then. Most of the people the kids knew had never been in one! And so the magic began.

The children were whisked off to an American base "somewhere in England" which turned out to be near Grantham in Lincolnshire. There they were the guests of among others, the 53rd Troop Carrier Squadron. There followed a weekend of pure delight. The child's "American uncles" left no stone unturned in their efforts to give the kids a wonderful time, and oh, how

they succeeded! There was food - so much food! Just imagine TWO eggs for breakfast when for years the child had only seen a half egg on her plate. There were cakes and biscuits and joy of joys – sweets! Chocolate and chewing gum aplenty.

The children were shown all over the base surrounded wherever they went by lots of men in uniform from all ranks and all walks of life all eager to talk to the kids, to entertain them, laugh with them, and give them the time of their lives. The sheer warmth of those men amazed the child for not since the loss of her parents had she felt instinctively such genuine interest and care. It was as if they really were her uncles, and that impression was to remain with her.

After a long and hectic day, the kids were packed off to bed, tired and happy, but unable to sleep. To the disparity of the blokes destined to keep an eye on them until they slept, the children kept climbing out of bed to peer out of the window which overlooked the runway, only to see the other side of life for those men; the constant roar of engines and the menacing black shape of aircraft as they took off on their grim journeys over Germany. Remember, these were the same men, with the opposite number from Britain, who were doing a distasteful job not of their own choice to the best of their ability and with unfailing fearlessness. They too were far from home and many of them had children back home similar in age to the two kids in their temporary care.

Next day, the joy riding continued. They were taken to see the "bull room" where the child gazed entranced at the parachute with which the ceiling was festooned. They were driven around in a jeep which had the child's name printed on it and then taken to an aircraft similarly named. Strong hands lifted them aboard where they sat in the cockpit on the lap of the pilot delighting in the stashes of tiny biscuits and chewing gum he produced from all sorts of cubby-holes around the controls. It was intended to take the kids for a brief fly around

but Mary was nervous so they kept the trip to a taxi run around the airfield. All too soon the hours flew by and it was time to go home. Before they left, the kids were given a pair of wooden American Air Force wings which they were told had been carved with pen knives by two Italian prisoners of war. On the pair given to the child, there was the letter "G" carved on the central panel. There was an inscription written on the back – but more of that later.

The American lady driver once more appeared with her shiny car. Sadly the kids said their "thank yous" and "goodbyes" and they were off, accompanied by boxes of cakes, biscuits, sweets, chewing gum, and a length of white parachute silk. The goodies they shared with the kids back home. The silk was made into a dress for each of them.

Thus ended a brief time of pure happiness in what was a very bleak episode of her life – and the child never forgot.

We telescope time again. The child grew through girlhood and adolescence into womanhood still retaining her great love of dance. After many boyfriends, "none of whom were any good unless they could dance!" she met and married a tall, young man who possessed many of the qualities which were important to her and which she had seen in her American "Uncles" – gentleness, courtesy, love of life and people, humor and worth. They lived for many years in the city of Chester, and then in the early 1980s they moved to the southeast of England, where they bought a modest home in a small village out in the country, about 35 miles north of London.

A quarter of a century passed and the scene now moved to the continent of Europe – to a small cabaret in the beautiful town of Kitzbuhel in the Austrian Alps. The couple had gone there on a "spur of the moment" holiday and one evening while out for a stroll had heard dance music and her unerring instinct for such (for she was now a professional teacher of dancing) took her to its source.

They danced gently around the tiny floor and attracted the attention of some Americans on vacation ; eventually joining them at their table. Instinctively the woman felt the same warmth in their company as she had felt so long ago with her American uncles. A chance remark made by one of

them about his wartime service during World War II led to the woman's recounting her story. Two people were in that group, perhaps the two people in all America who being fascinated by the tale, became determined to try to locate some of the servicemen involved. They were John and



Margaret (on the left), with her husband John Livesley, share an evening with John and Doris Carty, of Winfield, Iowa, during a visit to London in September of 1987. John Carty "volunteered" to assist Margaret in tracking down her former American "Uncles" of the 53rd Troop Carrier Squadron. Mr. Carty, who is now an attorney, was a former Combat Infantryman in the 80th Infantry Division of Patton's Third Army, carrying a BAR from France to Czechoslovakia.

Doris Carty, a married pair from Mt. Union, Iowa, who have become close and dear friends of the English couple. For three years, they have been ceaseless in their efforts meeting with deadends and disappointments but continuing strong in their belief

that there must be "somebody out there." The Cartys inform me that they received great assistance from Jerome H. Schelley, of Clark Ford, Idaho, and from several other glider pilots and members of troop carrier squadron as a result of a "seeking" advertisement placed by Mr. Carty in the August (1988) edition of the VFW magazine.



At an American Troop Carrier Base - "Somewhere in England" two little English girls are given the Red Carpet treatment by their American "Uncles" of the 53rd Troop Carrier Squadron, 61st Troop Carrier Group. Margaret, the "adopted" orphan is on the right. Her companion was Mary, her cousin, who shared the holidays since Margaret did not want to go alone.

BELOW: Margaret stands on the hood of an American jeep named in her honor and in front of a C-47 aircraft also given her name. The American personnel in the photos have not been identified.



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Newsletter articles.](#)

On October 6, 1988 the Cartys returned from a holiday in the Austrian Alps and found in their mail a request from Mr. William Horn, editor of SILENT WINGS, asking for further information in response to a letter which Mr. Carty had written to him in September. This article is the result of that request.

I know this story to be true, as you have guessed, I was that child Margaret. I am the woman with such a long memory and some of you can vouch for its accuracy for it is OUR story, yours and mine, and it is still ongoing.

The pair of American Air Force wings which are hung on the wall of my living room bear the inscription :

“ TO MARGARET ”

From the Glider Pilots of the  
53rd Troop Carrier Squadron ”

“OUR PIN UP GIRL ”

Underneath, many of you signed your names which sadly, being written in ink on rough wood have become almost unreadable.

So there you have it all, and at this season of Good Will, I send to any or all of you, my dear American uncles, my love and best wishes for Christmas 1988 and for the New Year, but most of all I send my heartfelt thanks for a beautiful, shining memory which is as warm and bright in my heart as it was when you created it for me all those years ago.

MARGARET (Mrs. John Livesley)  
Hitchin, Herts  
England

P. S. I still would like to be your Pin Up Girl.

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EDITOR'S ADDENDUM : Our sincere thanks to John W. Canty and to GP Jerry Schelley for bringing this SPECIAL story

*Editor was Bill Horn, 78<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron, 435<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group. This was republished from the December 1988 Silent Wings Newsletter. Watch for the rest of this story soon be republished.*