THE JOURNEYS OF JOYCE AND PETER ©

as told to Michael Peeters by
Johannes Cornelis (Peter) Peeters & Joyce Peeters

Cover photograph:
Newly-weds Joyce and Peter outside their first home in 1951, a rental in Herne Bay, just south of the Harbour Bridge, Auckland, NZ.

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THE JOURNEYS OF JOYCE AND PETER

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Joyce and Peter from their children; Anthony, Timothy Michael and Ingrid (and their children)

FOREWORD

As the title implies, the three stories in this book are an amalgamation of Joyce and Peter's memories of their life, love and travels – from their meeting on New Year's Eve 1950 at the New Settler's Club in Auckland, New Zealand, until the present day; Peter's birth in the small town of Oisterwijk on September 30, 1919 until he met Joyce on that fateful night, and Joyce's life from her birth in Golcar, Yorkshire, on October 20, 1929.

The stories are based on interviews I had with Peter at Cheverel (the family home in Western Road, Cheltenham) when I visited there with my former wife Robynne and son Liam in 1997/1998. Since then a lot of water has passed under the bridge, with the 'Old Dutch's' (and the younger 'Golcar Lily's') extensive travels effectively coming to a close in Perth, WA, in October 2001 after they settled permanently in Coolbinia. Apart from one or two short side trips in 2003 and 2004 to Sydney and Brisbane – to see Joyce's older brother Phil and the couple's oldest son Anthony and his children Matthew, James, Alexandra and James – this was their last major trip. But it was still a huge shift, considering Peter was by then in his early 80s and Joyce in her early 70s. Their never-say-die attitude was with them to the very end of their 61-year marriage.

The years since they arrived in Perth in late-2001 were for the most part delightful, as Joyce and Peter could now enjoy unlimited quality time with their four, Perth-based grandchildren. Youngest children Ingrid and Michael (me) also both had young kids of a very similar age, so Peter was especially in his element. As Joyce always said, "Peter loved children until they got too big to pick up and play with, then he lost a bit of interest!"

At the time of writing, Ingrid and husband Rob's children, Katya and Nicola, are 16 and 13, while Michael's kids, Liam and Ella are 14 and 17. Many were the times we would roll up as a family to visit Joyce and Peter in Warralong Crescent to enjoy a chat, cup of tea and, in summer, a swim in the backyard pool.

Coming to Perth gave Joyce and Peter a new lease of life - enabling them to live in their own home for much longer than they could have back in England without family support. The siblings all chipped in - with second son Tim helping to furnish the new home with a variety of affordable, old furniture.

In their later years in particular, Ingrid especially helped out with cleaning the house and making dinners for the two of them - until the family called upon the help of the excellent 'Meals on Wheels' service and the very useful HACC (Home and Community Care) which helped with garden maintenance and the like.

Mum & Dad's 60th wedding anniversary, July 27, 2011.

Joyce and Peter's 60th wedding anniversary was on July 27, 2011 and the smiles on their faces were priceless when mid-morning on the big day, congratulations cards arrived from the Queen, Governor-General, Prime Minister, Premier, Leaders of the Opposition (State and Federal) and local MPs.

The idea for the 60th anniversary cards was spawned after I had gone to the UK for a three-week holiday and my old school friend Jason Pughe suggested it. I don't think I had ever seen the two of them so proud, (especially Mum).

Unfortunately, in late-2011, Peter's health deteriorated and he became so frail that the family was forced to place him in permanent residential care at the Embleton Aged Care facility. Separating the two of them was heart-wrenching and it took another six months before a place at Embleton could be found for Joyce and enable her to be reunited with Peter. In that time, the children took turns to spend time with Mum, staying over regularly at the house so that she did not feel so alone.

Finally, in March 2012, a double room at Embleton became available and for the next 10 months or so the two of them lived relatively happily, although Joyce's dementia became steadily worse.

Joyce and Peter both passed away in 2013 and are now singing with the angels in heaven.

Michael Peeters
February 2014

THE DYNAMIC DUO

The meeting

It was New Year's Eve 1950 and Joyce and her friend Eileen were off to the New Settlers' Club as they were having 'a bit of a do'.

While playing table tennis they noticed their friend, Jerry Brakeveldt, talking to a strange man.

"Jerry and this stranger began watching us play," said Joyce.

"After the game, they came over and suggested a game of darts. We agreed, although I thought the stranger a bit of a clever pot as he couldn't even hit the board, never mind the bull's eye!"

Afterwards, Jerry and the stranger – a mysterious Dutchman who introduced himself as Peter - invited the girls over the road for a coffee at the Rendezvous Milkbar.

"After coffee, they suggested we go for a swim at Parnell Baths but we didn't have our togs with us," said Joyce. "Don't worry about that," they said cheekily.

Joyce said she thought something fishy was going on - but they decided to go along with it anyway.

Unfortunately, Parnell Baths was closed for New Year's Eve, but undeterred; the boys climbed the fence, followed by a somewhat reluctant Eileen and Joyce.

"They were so keen to have a swim they stripped straight down to their underpants and dived in," said Joyce.

Somewhat taken aback, Joyce and Eileen were happy to watch them splashing around in the water, but steadfastly refused to join in without their togs!

By now it was nearly midnight, so the four of them rushed down to the bottom of Queen Street to join in the New Year's Eve celebrations, which were well underway.

It was such a fun evening that, as Eileen and Joyce were preparing to catch the tram back home, Peter suggested everyone get together in the morning for a trip to Milford Beach.

So, early next morning, the four of them set off by ferry to Devonport to catch a bus to Milford Beach.

"I can clearly remember the swimsuit Mum wore that day," said Peter.

"It was a check bikini (two-piece) and, with Mum's long legs, I was naturally fascinated."

In fact, after lunch and a Tip Top ice cream, Peter was hooked!

The following week, they went to Waihiki Island - only a short ferry ride across Auckland Harbour - a trip also organised by the New Settlers' Club.

It was on Waihiki Beach that they met Mr Mack - who was as bald as a billiard ball – and according to Joyce, a real 'hard case'.

Mr Mack and his wife Susan lived in Devonport and they soon became firm friends with Joyce and Peter, who would sometimes spend the weekends at Mr Mack's bach, along with Eileen and Jerry.

At the New Settlers' Club, Joyce and Peter also met another character called Ellis Staggard, or 'the mad Dane'.

An ex-Danish naval officer, he was the son of the Curator of Elsinore (Hamlet's Castle in Denmark) and covered in tattoos.

While working at Farmer's Trading Company, Peter also met a Dutchman called Mr Blitz, who sold indent textiles from around the world.

He offered Peter a job, but he had a sad history.

Blitz, his wife and three children survived Belsen concentration camp and, after the war, lived in Amsterdam.

At the start of the Korean War in 1950, Mr Blitz became worried about the prospect of a Third World War centred on Europe.

He liked the idea of living somewhere remote and chose New Zealand.

So, after packing up their old Renault with everything they possessed, the Blitz family drove to Marseille and boarded a cargo ship to New Caledonia.

They arrived safely in New Zealand a few weeks later as refugees with no permits.

After negotiating with the authorities, Mr Blitz secured six months residency and set up a thriving textile business.

Peter said he got a good deal working for him and received five pounds a week more than his first job at Farmers Trading Company.

In June 1951 Peter proposed to Joyce at the Burlington Café, where they often met for lunch.

A dapper couple, Queen Street, Auckland, early 1951.

Joyce, who was working as a secretary at nearby Gummer and Ford, the Queen Street architects, said Peter made the marriage sound like a business arrangement!

"He said if we were married and he got called up to fight in the Korean War, I would get his army pension! Of course, the call-up never came, but it was a very persuasive argument!"

After accepting Peter's proposal, the two lovebirds went to the nearest jewellers to choose the ring.

Luckily, Joyce liked a ring that matched the exact amount of money Peter had – 10 pounds!

"The ring was nice and had a large rhinestone in it," said Joyce.

"However, within a few weeks the shine started to fade, so Peter had a real diamond put in for 25 pounds."

The happy couple 'tied the knot' at a lunchtime ceremony in the Auckland Registry Office on Friday July 27, 1951.

Wedding day, July 27, 1951, Auckland, NZ.

Joyce, who was still living with Eileen at Mrs Rowe's in Mount Albert, arranged for everyone to come back there for the reception.

Mrs Rowe made a delicious cake and trifles and a good time was had by all.

After the reception, the newlyweds caught a tram to the Star Hotel in Albert Street, (directly above Farmers Trading Company), for their honeymoon night.

The next morning they caught a ferry to Takapuna on the North Shore of Auckland Harbour and booked in to the Mon Desir Hotel.

Unfortunately, the only available room was a twin share - with separate single beds!

"Joyce also forgot her pyjamas so she used mine," said Peter.

"We only stayed the one night as we were both working on Monday."

The following week Joyce and Peter rented a house in Herne Bay with friends Jenny and John, and Eileen moved in with Nana and Pop.

Joyce had met Jenny and John on the liner Atlantis when they were emigrating from England and they were great fun.

"But, in the rental, we had to abide by some pretty strict rules laid down by the owners," said Joyce.

"For example, the house had some beautiful orange and lemon trees full of fruit in the back garden, but they were strictly off-limits."

Peter spent a lot of time away during the early part of their marriage, making frequent trips around New Zealand to organize orders of textiles, chemicals, foodstuffs and hardware from Japan.

Mr Blitz was on good terms with the Japanese and had his own office in Osaka, where he was seen as a good ambassador for New Zealand.

"One of our biggest orders was for 50,000 tons of corrugated aluminium roofing sheets from Osaka to Auckland," said Peter.

"Destined for Auckland schools, the iron would normally have come from England, but there was a strike on there. Mr Blitz received three percent commission on the Japanese order and I got 10 per cent of his commission."

In Christmas 1951, Joyce and Peter hitchhiked to Christchurch where Mr Blitz was thinking of opening an office.

They rented a flat and Joyce found a job with Ingleswright advertising agency.

"We had a small dog which we carried on the tram in a hold-all, as dogs weren't really allowed on public transport," said Joyce.

"He used to poke his head out of the bag and caused a few raised eyebrows!"

They stayed in Christchurch for about six months during which Peter would also visit Wellington and Dunedin on business.

Eventually, Mr Blitz's permit expired and Joyce and Peter went to Wellington.

"We lived in a bed-and-breakfast in The Terrace with Peter's friend, Dick Myer," said Joyce.

Unfortunately, Peter's job folded when Mr Blitz was finally deported.

However, Dick Myer's wife, who had come out to New Zealand on the same ship as Joyce, was working at Porirua Mental Asylum and suggested they try for a job there.

"Dick and his wife rented a house atop a hill overlooking the harbour -very suitable if you were a goat!" said Peter.

Joyce and Peter were attracted by the excellent wages and free accommodation offered by the asylum.

While checking out the prospects of a job, they rented a boat shed in nearby Plimmerton, right on the beach.

Through the Myers, they met Joan and Brian Hawkins, and hit it off with them right away.

"The Hawkins had a young son called Brandon and Brian had just left the merchant navy and bought a grocery business in the city,'' said Peter.

"The shed was ideal for entertaining - a bit like something out of a Somerset Maugham novel. Everyone was amazed we could live in a place like this, but we thought ourselves very *avant-garde*."

Having secured jobs at the Porirua Mental Asylum, Joyce and Peter moved into the accommodation provided.

Peter lived in the male quarters and Joyce in the nurse's home, but Joyce said, it was a bit of a nightmare from the start.

After only a week, she was put on night duty.

"I had to look after a ward full of mental patients by myself in a solitary building surrounded only by pine trees," she said.

"There should have been at least three nurses on each night, but the Health Service was so short-staffed and the conditions were almost Dickensian."

One of the nurses put Joyce off completely by telling her that one night, when two of them were rostered on; they saw a face at one of the windows.

The nurse said they chased the intruder with a fire iron through the trees.

After this Joyce became so worried that Peter decided to borrow a bike and cycle over to the ward to sleep in the nurse's spare room.

Joyce would call him and let him know when the sister had done her rounds.

He would cycle over and somehow squeeze into the tiny single bed to sleep, before returning to the male quarters at 6am to avoid discovery.

The roster was three days on and one day off.

On one of their days off, they met Mrs Mack, a Scottish lady who ran an old deserted hotel in Porirua village that reminded Peter of the set a B-Grade Western.

After three months at the asylum, they bought a Morris Minor convertible, with help from Dick Myer who knew the Managing Director of Morris, New Zealand and put in a good word for them.

Joyce with their first car, a brand new Morris 1000 convertible, late 1951, Porirua, NZ.

"New Zealand had very few cars on the road then as buyers needed overseas funds – preferably sterling – to purchase one," said Peter.

"We felt like kings in our new Morris and even bought a canvas car cover for it to protect it from the sun."

"We borrowed part of the deposit of 200 pounds for the car from Mrs Mack, who we would sometimes stay with on our nights off," said Peter.

As collateral she only asked for Peter's signet ring and overcoat.

After a few weeks they paid Mrs Mack off and, putting everything they owned into the Morris, set off for Taranaki near the West coast of the north island of New Zealand.

"We hoped to get a job at The Chateau - a ski resort near Mt Egmont," said Joyce, "but after only one night in the staff quarters, we hated it!"

They were also caught in a blizzard while trying to walk up Mount Egmont!

Next stop was New Plymouth, followed by Te Awamutu, where they had heard about another mental hospital at Tokanui.

Talk about gluttons for punishment!

"We had nothing to lose as we were short of money and had experience in the job," said Peter.

"Not surprisingly, we were taken on straight away, as experienced staff were hard to come by in those days."

Not wanting to live apart this time, they rented a caravan advertised in the paper at Te Awamutu for three pounds a week.

A farmer called George Parks owned the land across from the hospital and offered to let Peter park the caravan on his land.

"We had to fetch the water in the morning with a bucket and quite often it was frozen solid," said Peter.

"Cows rubbed themselves against the side of the caravan and woke us up in the morning."

As meals were provided at the hospital, Joyce and Peter's only real expense was rent for the caravan.

"I remember going to the pictures one night in Te Awamutu," said Joyce.

"We must have forgotten to pay the rent that week as, when we went to pay it a few days later, the caravan owner grumbled that we couldn't afford to pay the rent on time but we could afford to go to the pictures! He must have seen us there!"

One night, George Parks came over and said he knew of a bach (small cabin) for sale for 50 pounds.

Joyce and Peter were still paying their car off and had no spare money, but George generously offered to give them a loan.

"The bach was just a wooden hut, about 12 feet long and eight feet wide," said Peter.

"It was the New Zealand equivalent of a small holiday home and they are quite popular over there and usually located in country or beachside areas.

"George let us put it on his land again, this time near a tap in a different part of the field so we could have easier access to water. Joyce was expecting Anthony by this time."

On their day off, Joyce and Peter went to investigate Tauranga – a charming seaside town on the North-east coast – and well-known for its sunshine and beautiful beaches.

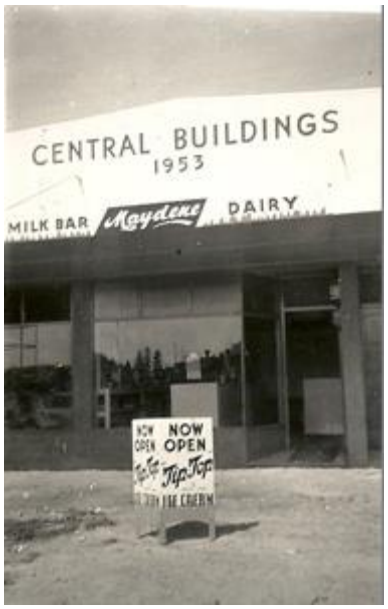
On their way back to Tokanui, they passed a building site on the corner of Hunter and Fraser Streets, Tauranga, which had five shops under construction.

Interested, Peter stopped and asked to see the developer about the possibility of renting one of them.

The owner, Phil Weston, said they were welcome to lease one of the shops but it would have to be run as a dairy (like a deli or corner store) as all the other shops were already let.

He even came out to see Joyce, who was sitting in the car, to check if she could make sponge cakes!

After selling the car in Auckland for 450 pounds, they moved into the shop.



Joyce and Peters' first business – a dairy/milk bar called Maydene – in Tauranga, NZ.

"We used the money from the sale of the car to furnish the shop," said Joyce.

"The rent was only three pounds ten shillings a week."

Needing somewhere to live, they organised for their bach to be shifted from Tokanui to Phil Weston's brother Charlie's back garden in Greerton, near Tauranga.

This was a hazardous journey of some 60 miles on the back of a farmer's truck.

"Charlie's garden was huge and full of fruit trees," said Joyce. "We used to call it the Garden of Eden."

With no car though, it was a very convenient location and only about half-a-mile from the shop, although they had to cut open the hedge around the garden to get the bach inside!

"There was no electricity in the bach and the only lighting was a kerosene lamp," said Peter.

For the next few weeks they prepared the shop - which they called Maydene – and opened the doors in April 1953, three months before Anthony was due.

"We started off with takings of about 50 pounds a week and built the business up," said Joyce.

Anthony arrived on July 3 1953, and the neighbours picked Joyce and Anthony up from the hospital, while Peter waited in the shop with his apron on! That was how it was done in those days.

A customer called Stella lent the proud parents a cot full of frilly lace for Anthony to sleep in.

As he got older, Anthony was so rough he almost destroyed the Pedigree pram as it had only weak bolts!

"Anthony had lovely brown legs because we would put him in the sun with his head shaded and legs exposed," said Peter. "We still have photos of that."

The customers were all very friendly and Joyce would quite often bath Anthony at the back of the shop.

"Once, we were chatting to some customers when Anthony came out dripping wet, wondering where we had got to," said Peter.

On their days off they would take him to the beach and he learnt to swim very early, although they had to watch him like a hawk.

In the shop they sold bread, sweets, ice cream and home-made cakes.

After Anthony came along, Joyce started to get the cakes delivered from a bakery in Tauranga called Horsecroft.

"Every morning the bakery would put a box of cakes on the local bus for us as the bus went right by our door," said Joyce.

"In those days the sheep would still hold up the traffic in the town."

Joyce and Peter needed transport so they bought a Chevvy half-ton truck for 25 pounds.

"It had only one fault," said Peter, "you could only drive for about 15 minutes before the radiator boiled!"

"But this was just enough time for Mum to do her shopping and get home safely!"

In the early days Joyce could scarcely fit behind the huge wheel, she was so heavily pregnant!

After about 18 months, they sold the Chevvy, bought a Jowet van, and sold the shop to a butcher.

Putting everything into the van, not forgetting Anthony and the pram, they set off for Auckland.

Arriving in Auckland, they spotted a house for sale in Mount Eden Road for 2500 pounds.

Being desperate for somewhere to live, they bought it and moved straight in!

"We had few belongings - only what we could fit into the little van,'' said Joyce.

"But we soon realised we had made a terrible mistake.

"The wooden foundations were sinking into the ground and the floors sloped something terrible! Luckily, the mortgage hadn't gone through so we were able to pull out of the contract with no costs."

They saw a much better house in Ohinerau Street, Remuera and thanks to their accountant Mr Keyes, were able to transfer the mortgage.

"In those days most buyers went through solicitors who had funds from clients rather than banks," said Peter.

"Mr Kees got us a second mortgage for 5400 pounds for Ohinerau Street - a lot of money in those days."

Peter had various jobs at that time including one at the meat works, and several as a carpenter.

"I made him a tool bag out of an old bit of canvas and he really looked the part," said Joyce.

"He went through quite a few jobs in the beginning, as he was learning on the job."

They divided Ohinerau Street into four flats, living in one and putting the rent from the others towards the mortgage.

After Timothy was born on November 20, 1955, Peter got a job selling American aluminum awnings.

"While selling these awnings, I came across an old farmhouse on half-an-acre in Massey, next to a trotting track," said Peter.

"It had grapevines growing through its windows and looked empty."

The following Sunday, Peter saw the owner working in the garden and asked if he would be interested in selling.

"The man was Mr Massey; the solicitor-son of the former NZ Liberal prime minister and only lived across the road," said Peter.

"He said we could have the house for 3000 pounds, with a 200 pound deposit, which, of course, we didn't have!"

Luckily, Joyce and Peter's best friend, Reg Scott, came to the rescue.

"Reg's wife Dora had returned to England for a holiday with their two kids and Reg had gone to the races and won 200 pounds!" said Joyce.

"He lent us the money to put down on the house and we moved in, letting out the fourth flat in Ohinerau Street."

Unfortunately, the Massey house was in a terrible state and full of borer so Peter went to the Auckland Gas Company and bought four gallons of tar oil.

"I coated the floors with the oil to kill the borer, but the smell was horrendous," said Peter.

"It took weeks to clear, but we continued to stay there as I only treated one room at a time."

To help with the mortgage, Joyce and Peter invited an Irish couple, Bill and Maud, to share the house.

Peter had worked with Bill who was also a carpenter.

It was such a big house that they also asked a Dutch couple they had met, Rita and John, to share.

"The kids were running wild and we got some chickens and bantams for the back garden," said Joyce.

"Grape vines were growing everywhere and we had to hack our way through them to get to the veranda."

Opposite the house, there was another retail development under construction and Peter asked the builder if any of the shops were for sale.

The builder said one was, and even offered him a job as a carpenter on the site.

But Joyce was due to go into hospital to have her gall bladder removed so Peter decided against it.

"I had heard about a dairy in Parnell - opposite The Domain - which would soon become available," said Peter.

"Called Patticake, it was owned by a Greek family. They would stand outside the shop and beckon passers-by to try and attract business."

It was only 100 pounds, and much better located than the one in Massey Road, so Peter decided to take it.

The shop was owned by a Jewish immigrant called Friedlander - one of the biggest property owners in Auckland.

After moving in they began building up the business.

"We took an inside wall out and generally improved the place," said Peter.

"But, three months later, a shocking incident occurred just down the road when a little boy was murdered by a fellow who used to come into the shop. Not surprisingly, this put the wind up us and we decided to sell up."

After making a profit of 1000 pounds in three months, they bought three flats in Penrose but were only there a month before going back to live in Ohinerau Street.

"We saw a little grocery shop for sale in Grove Road in Sandringham for 3000 pounds," said Joyce.

"It was on a corner and had accommodation. It needed rejuvenating so we moved in. By this time I was pregnant with Michael."

They were very 'go-ahead' - making the shop self-service so that people could go in and browse. This was unheard of in those days!

"I made some lovely varnished New Zealand pine shelves, a new entry and sliding doors," said Peter.

"We knew we wouldn't live at the shop forever so we bought a house in Benson Road, Remuera for 3000 pounds and divided it into two to make a duplex."

This involved a lot of work but eventually it was livable and they moved in, just in time for the birth of Michael on February 7, 1960.

Unable to sell the Grove Road shop, Joyce and Peter accepted an offer by a chap from the Salvation Army to rent it for 12 months.

"This enabled us to go off to Holland, as we also had the Benson Road property (rented out to a naval officer and his family), as well as houses in Blockhouse Bay Road, Onehunga and Ohinerau Street," said Peter.

Reg Scott did all the rent collection leaving Joyce and Peter free to go gallivanting!!

In July 1960 the family boarded the Royal New Zealand Line passenger ship Rangitoto.

"The ship's staff made a real fuss of Michael putting a cap on his head because he would giggle all the time," said Peter.

The kids would always be fed first in the children's dining room - where they were looked after by a stewardess - while Joyce and Peter went to the main dining room for their meal.

One of the exotic locations the ship called at was Peru where the family caught a bus up the Pacific Highway to some Inca ruins.

"We even found some old bones lying on the top of the ground there," said Joyce.

They said one of the most fascinating things about the trip was the sudden change in the countryside about ten miles out of town - from barren wasteland to lush green fields - in the space of a few minutes.

"Someone said it was the United Nations contribution to irrigation in the area, which showed that with the right amount of water, even the most arid parts of Peru could grow anything they wanted," said Peter.

The poverty in the country though, was abysmal.

"In Lima we saw some old women pushing a cart full of rubbish with old sacks over their shoulders," he said.

They also saw a dump alive with people fossicking for junk, in stark contrast to a nearby church which glistened with gold and decorative wrought iron.

After a day in Peru, they carried on through the Panama Canal before stopping in Kingston, Jamaica and Curacao in the Netherlands Antilles.

"Next we stopped in Bermuda for a special sightseeing tour which cost 104 pounds each, with the children half-price," said Joyce.

After arriving in Southampton, the family continued to London by train, picking up a previously-ordered new Peugeot 403 from the suburb of Croydon.

"We drove on to the ferry, eventually arriving at Opa and Oma's place in Oisterwijk for a family reunion," said Joyce.

"After catching up with all the family, we headed back to England to get the boys into school. Buying a newspaper in Dover, I noticed a house for rent in Hythe on the South Coast. It turned out to be suitable and only cost 7 guineas a week."

Peter got a job guarding the ammunition in an army barracks in Hythe, while the soldiers practiced their shooting on the nearby firing range.

"Even then the Government was worried about the IRA coming to steal the ammunition," said Peter.

Joyce with Oma, Opa and a young Michael, about 1961, at 48 Kerkstraat in Oisterwijk, Holland.

In February 1961, the family returned to Holland and lived in a rented cottage in the Kappelhof, just outside Beekbergen, near Arnhem.

Anthony and Timothy went to school there and were already picking up some Dutch.

"Michael was besotted with this dustpan and brush we had in the cottage," said Joyce.

"He was always walking up and down with it and we even have photos of him carrying it."

Next door was another family with small children so the kids had friends to play with.

The cottage was out in the woods near Apeldoorn but after a month or two Joyce and Peter got restless again and moved on to Vught - between Den Bosch and Oisterwijk - where the family lived in a converted henhouse!

The happy couple at St Johann, The Tyrol, Austria in the early 1960s.

"After a few weeks we went to Oisterwijk where we rented another holiday cottage in the Bosch," said Peter.

"Here we were visited by Jan van der Heyden who had come over from America."

One day, Jan took everyone over the border into Germany to the town of Aachen, near Maastricht, where they visited a cafe and tried some beautiful cream cakes.

After a year in Holland the family returned to Benson Road, New Zealand on the Willem Ruys, via Cape Town.

On July 24, 1962 Ingrid was born and in 1963 they bought Seascape Road, Remuera.

The kids on the family pedal bike in the garden at Seascape Road, Remuera, circa 1963.

Family photo at Seascape Road, 1965.

Peter also managed to swap the Blockhouse Bay Road, Penrose and Onehunga properties for three shops alongside the railway line in Mount Albert.

Peter worked as a salesman at Ultimate Echo Electrical Supply Company while Anthony and Timothy went to Sacred Hearts School, Glen Innes, and Michael to Mount Carmel School, Meadowbank.

Early shot at Cornwall Park, Auckland about 1963.

Atop the family car – a Peugeot 403 - at Joyce and Peter's friend Ellie's house in Te Awamutu, about 1963.

At St Helier's Bay, Auckland about 1964.

With Uncle Phil and Nana and Pop at Seascape Road 1964/5.

"We sold Benson Road for $5000 and, in 1966, got itchy feet, renting out Seascape Road and once again booking tickets to England by ship," said Joyce.

"Nana and Pop had decided to sell their house in Mount Albert and go to Australia as they didn't want to be in New Zealand by themselves."

The family lived with Nana and Pop for a while in their spare flat at 1173 New North Road, before leaving for England.

"Our dog Scottie knew we were going, he could sense it," said Peter.

Before leaving, they also rented a house in Glendowie for a few weeks, just until the ship, the RNZSL Rangitane, sailed for England.

"We went directly through the Panama Canal, via Tahiti," said Joyce.

"After arriving in England, we again went straight over to Holland for a few weeks, this time living in Uncle Be's garage."

While they were in Holland, Joyce bought a Dalton's Weekly newspaper and wrote off to five different addresses to find somewhere for the family to stay in England.

Only one replied - the owner of the house "Makindie", in Clive Avenue, Church Stretton.

"We set off by car to Shropshire, stopping for a short time at the O'Meara's in Midhurst on the way," said Joyce.

"We had met them on the Rangitane and they invited us to come and stay with them on our way back from Holland."

Church Stretton is a beautiful, 'picture postcard' town set in a valley amongst rolling Shropshire countryside, between the Long Mynd and Ragleth mountains.

"At Makindie we lived opposite another young family, the Sturdys. Our house was at the top of the hill overlooking the whole village," said Joyce.

"In winter there was plenty of snow and it was like a little Switzerland."

There was no work in Church Stretton however, so Peter decided to go to Shrewsbury - the nearest big town - to look.

"We had the rent from the shops but otherwise, things were very tight," said Peter. "We lived on sausages, baked beans and pancakes for a while," added Joyce.

In Shrewsbury, Peter went to the offices of Southam's Brewery to ask about a job.

At first the man at reception said there were none, and he asked Peter to leave his name and address.

But, as Peter was about to leave, the man cried out, "Hold on, I've just noticed there's a manager's job coming up at the Sandford Hotel in Church Stretton!"

The Sandford Hotel, Church Stretton, Shropshire UK – our home from 1966 to 1968.

This was a real piece of luck and the man immediately put Peter on the list to meet the brewery managers and attend an interview.

Anyway, Peter got the job and before the family knew it, everyone had moved into the Sandford Hotel with Peter installed as licensee and manager and Joyce as his paid assistant!

Joyce and Peter outside the Tante's house, The Lind, Oisterwijk, 1966.

Soon after, Nana and Pop arrived from Australia and, after staying up in Yorkshire for a while with Aunty Marion and Uncle Steve, also moved in.

"You wouldn't credit it, but the first week we arrived at the Sandford there was a wedding party booked for more than 100 people," said Joyce.

"It was very hectic to organise but we soon got into the swing of it and managed it quite well."

Some of the staff left a bit to be desired, said Joyce, especially the cook who was absolutely useless and was soon given her marching orders!

"There was also John the little Welsh barman and Edna the chambermaid," she said.

"Peter eventually had to fire John because he tried to molest one of the guests."

He was replaced by Nancy who, Joyce said, was very nice and did her job very well.

There was also Veronica, who lived in, and was only about 17. Her job was to help Joyce with the day-to-day running of the hotel.

"She always stood behind Joyce watching how she did things," said Peter. "She didn't always pick things up straight away and seemed to stand there quite a lot with her hands on her hips."

Ingrid latched on to Geoff Griffiths - the son of the local schoolteacher - who had a Triumph motorbike, which she loved to sit on.

Things went along very well for a while until Southams was bought out by the brewery Threlfalls.

Peter was asked to go up to Liverpool to attend a computer course and meet the new managers, and he could already sense another takeover bid in the air, this time from Whitbreads.

"They were looking not only at the Sandford but also at the function centre building at the back where the wedding receptions were held, next to Mrs Reynolds' house," said Peter.

"They saw this as a big asset for Whitbreads."

Soon after, the Threlfalls' manager Mr Evans, asked Peter if he would like to manage a large hotel in Liverpool that catered for foreign visitors.

Obviously, he thought Peter's excellent command of languages would be a great asset.

Peter thanked him but refused, saying he didn't know how long the family would be staying in England and that they liked Church Stretton.

However, soon after the Whitbread takeover, Peter booked their tickets back to New Zealand and before joining the ship at Southampton, they decided to have a holiday.

"We took up a long-standing invitation from Ulla and Philip - a Swedish couple we had met when they stayed at the Sandford," said Joyce.

The family boarded the ferry Svea to Goteborg, Sweden and spent a week with Ulla, Philip and their children - a visit which included trips to see the famous Little Mermaid (from the Hans Christian Anderson fairy story) in Copenhagen, Denmark and the natural history museum in Goteborg.

"This was in February 1968 and Peter had just bought a nice new red Jaguar Mk2. As we were leaving the country for a short time, the car had to go into bond until we sailed back to New Zealand."

On returning to England, the family drove their other car - the Peugeot 404 station wagon, from Shropshire to Blackpool, before heading south to board the ferry at Fishguard, arriving in Cork after a rough crossing to first enjoy a week's holiday in Ireland.

With tiny Fiat 850 hire car on family holiday in Ireland, mid-1968.

They left the car in Fishguard for a week and hired another car - a tiny white Fiat 850 - after arriving in Cork.

It was in this car that Anthony and Timothy learnt to drive on the beach at Inch on the far West coast of Ireland.

"We went to the Blarney Castle where Mum kissed the Blarney Stone, as well as the Gap of Dunlow, Killarney, Limerick and Tralee," said Peter.

Finally, arriving back in Southampton, the family boarded the Shaw Savill Line ship Northern Star and returned to New Zealand via South Africa (Cape Town and Durban).

"We also stopped at Fremantle and Melbourne - where we caught up with Peter's brother Theo and his family - and Sydney, where we stopped to see Phil, Joyce's brother and his wife Mary and their kids," said Joyce.

"But after we got off the ship in Wellington, we were disillusioned, thinking we had made a big mistake. We had forgotten how different New Zealand was to England. So when we got back to Auckland, we already had thoughts of coming home to England again."

While away in England, Joyce and Peter had rented out Seascape Road, Remuera to an English couple, who looked after it beautifully.

"It was immaculate when we returned," said Joyce.

"The kids of course, all went back to school - Ingrid and Michael to Mount Carmel in Meadowbank, and Timothy and Anthony to Sacred Hearts in Glen Innes."

When Nana and Pop - who had also returned to live in New Zealand - heard of the Joyce and Peter's plans to return to England, they decided it would be best for them to go and live in Sydney, to be near Phil and Mary.

"Nana and Pop sold 1173 New North Road and once again we went to stay with them for a few weeks before we all left," said Joyce.

"By this time we had already picked up Scottie from Jerry Brakeveldt's and didn't know what we were going to do with him. So we put an ad in the paper and a nice woman from Titirangi offered to have him."

After Seascape Road was sold, the family rented a furnished house in Glen Innes, before sailing back to England on the Castel Felice in June 1969.

Anthony didn't return on the ship with the rest of the family as he was about to take his final examinations, and so flew back to England a few weeks afterwards.

"When we got back to Southampton, the O'Meara's were there to meet us at the wharf," said Peter.

"We had a huge amount of luggage - double beds, cabin trunks etc - all piled up, and of course, the three kids. The customs officer asked us where we were going. When I said we were 're-emigrating', he quickly put his chalk mark on the side of the luggage and said 'off you go'!"

Luckily, Brian had his VW Kombi towing a big trailer.

After a few days at the O'Mearas in Midhurst, Anthony arrived and everyone left for Bognor Regis on the South Coast, where Peter spotted a Vauxhall station wagon for 50 pounds that was big enough to take all their gear.

Joyce suggested they go to Devon to live as she had always liked the idea of it.

By now it was August and they needed to sort out accommodation quickly, as the kids had to get back into school.

After staying a night in a busy seaside town in Devon, Joyce suggested it might be quieter in Stratford-on-Avon, but accommodation again was very hard to find.

"Everywhere was jam packed with holidaymakers," she said.

"We finished up in a caravan park in Stratford but, as they were all privately-owned, there were no caravans available. However, luckily for us, one of the owners - who lived in Birmingham - said he didn't need his caravan for a few days, and offered to let us stay in it!"

After three or four days of looking around Stratford, Joyce and Peter soon realised it was going to be too expensive for them there to find long-term accommodation.

So they rang old friends Joan and Brian in Ramsgate to see what they thought they should do.

"Of course, they invited us to come down to Ramsgate and stay with them until we got sorted out," said Joyce.

"We ended up staying in the basement flat of a leaky old building called Liverpool House which although not flash, was at least a roof over our heads."

It didn't take long to find somewhere better to rent - a furnished house in Ramsgate Road, Broadstairs - while Peter looked for a small business to run, such as a pub or shop.

At last, they came across a shop at 4 Richmond Road, Ramsgate, for 3000 pounds.

Ironically, it was being run by a young couple who had decided to emigrate to Australia.

It was New Year's Day, 1970 and soon all of the children were in school and Joyce and Peter had once again become shopkeepers.

However, after 18 months the family got bitten by the travel bug again, but not before a memorable incident with a shady character who turned out to be a proper conman - Mr Huff.

"This fellow said he had come about the advertisement for the shop but, before we knew it, he had invited himself into our house, sat in front of the television and helped himself to our cigarettes," said Peter.

"He showed us his Ancient Order of Buffalo paraphernalia and said the shop was just ideal for his purposes. He said he had a sister in London who couldn't wait to move to a smaller town and it would be ideal for her."

The following weekend - a Whitsuntide weekend, Mr Huff returned and Peter took him on a tour around Ramsgate to show him the sights.

Returning the next day, Mr Huff stayed for dinner and was really enjoying himself also saying he would like to bring his sister down on the following Wednesday.

He said he was also running a bit low on cash and asked Peter if he would mind cashing him a cheque for five pounds.

Peter was so keen to help that he asked him if five pounds was enough!

Well, said Mr Huff, in that case perhaps you had better make it 10!

Peter even took him to the train station so that he would be on time for his train to London.

On Tuesday, Peter banked Mr Huff's cheque and on the Wednesday, the day Mr Huff and his sister were expected to arrive, two detectives arrived at the shop.

The chequebook had been stolen from someone called 'Huff' and the cat was now out of the bag.

"I don't think Peter ever quite lived that down!" said Joyce.

"Apparently the man posing as Mr Huff was, in reality, a conman who had been in jail for most of his life. But he came across as extremely charming and a real gentleman. He reminded me very much of the comedian Arthur Askey - a small dapper chap with glasses."

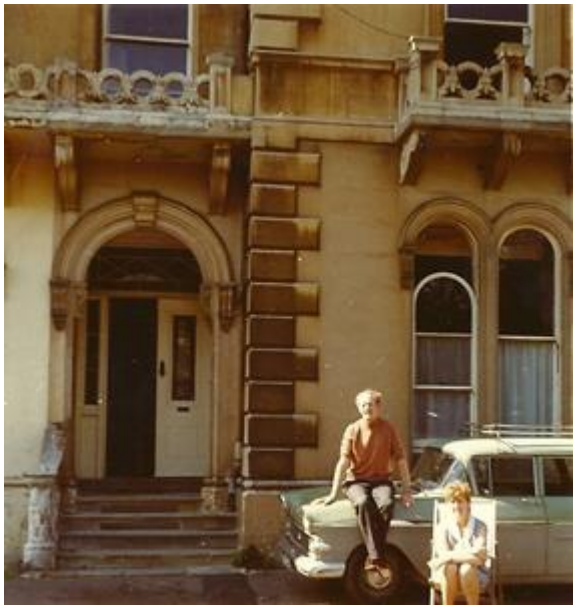
By July 1971 the shop was finally sold and Uncle Be, Aunty Therese and their children arrived from Holland and they all had a week in Margate.

In the meantime, Joan and Brian left the Foy Boat Hotel and bought another pub in Cirencester Road, near Cheltenham. It was called The Highwayman.

"When we left Ramsgate we went up to Joan and Brian's as I'd gone to see the Highwayman when they bought it and liked the look of the area," said Joyce.

"We stayed with them for a few days and also looked after the pub for a few weeks while they went on holiday."

In the meantime, Peter found a house to rent in Lypiatt Terrace, Cheltenham, complete with a live-in housekeeper called Mrs Tilley.



Outside our impressive rental at 7 Lypiatt Terrace, Montpellier, Cheltenham, in August 1971 that came with a live-in (but grumpy!) housekeeper!

The family stayed there until Peter bought 87 St George's Road a large end-of-terrace home with a steady income from a first-floor flat let to a Mrs Gilmour-White.

A front shot of 87 St George's Road, Cheltenham – our wonderful family home from 1971 to 1979.

This was in September 1971 and perfect timing for the kids to begin the new school term.

To help pay the mortgage, Peter redecorated the two top rooms at St George's Road and rented them out to Khalil Fooladi (a Middle-Eastern student), and the other to Derek, a painter and decorator. Later, when Khalil left, Alf, a Whitbread brewery worker, moved in.

In 1972 the family also adopted a new member: Casper the yellow Labrador.

Casper the family Labrador - Joyce and Peter's loyal companion from 1972 to 1986.

By this time Anthony had already joined the Merchant Navy, following up on his early cadet training at Warsash, near Southampton, when the family still lived in Ramsgate.

"The bed and breakfasts became more frequent at St Georges Road as time wore on, which helped the finances," said Joyce. "But in the early days things were very tight."

Joyce said things were so bad that, at one stage, Anthony actually lent them 50 pounds to buy oil for the central heating.

The rent from the shops in New Zealand also came in handy for helping to pay the mortgage on St George's Road.

Joyce and Peter soon got on their feet, however. Peter found work in the hardware section of Cavendish House; Joyce as a secretary at a doctor's surgery in Leckhampton.

In 1973 Nana arrived from Sydney with Uncle Phil. She stayed for three years.

Tim couldn't wait to ask Phil about Australia as it was an exciting opportunity for him to get away from Dowty's Engineering where he was working for a pittance.

In 1976 Phil sponsored Tim to come to Australia, offering him a job at Taylorgraphics (the family greeting card business) on his arrival.

Ingrid developed curvature of the spine (scoliosis) in 1977, a condition that, untreated, could have left her a hunchback. Luckily Michael spotted it one day… while she was sitting at the kitchen table of all places.

Ingrid was soon admitted to a specialist orthopaedic hospital in Birmingham for corrective treatment and the surgical implantation of a thin, stainless-steel, 'Harrington Rod' into her spine.

Meanwhile Michael, who had been working as a cashier at the Elf Garage in Shurdington Road, Cheltenham, was offered a job at an accountant's in Cambray Place, Cheltenham but found it wasn't his cup of tea.

In 1978, Anthony returned to Cheltenham to marry Philippa after working on an offshore oil rig off the Western Australian coast. However, he got cold feet, returning to Australia on a cargo ship from Liverpool to think things over. Nevertheless, in December 1978 Anthony rang to say he was flying back home to Cheltenham to marry Philippa as 'he couldn't live without her'!

They were married in January 1979 in a hastily arranged ceremony at the registry office across the road from 87 St George's Road. The happy couple stayed at St George's Road for a few weeks in the vacant flat upstairs before flying out to Perth, where Anthony continued his job on the oil rigs off Karratha.

In February 1979, Peter (who was now working for STITA Farm Tours – showing foreign farmers around Europe and Australia) began a world tour and met up with Ant and Phil at their unit in Brisbane Street, Perth.

"At that stage we were already negotiating the sale of 87 St George's Road to two different schools of English but, instead of having a 'Dutch Auction,' we decided to put the price up 10 per cent and force one of them to drop out," said Peter.

The plan worked with Mrs Cawsey agreeing to the extra 10 per cent and becoming the eventual buyer.

With the house sold, Peter booked flights to New Zealand (via Perth and Sydney) and had the family's furniture shipped to Auckland.

"As Anthony and Tim were both living and working in WA, we decided to stop over in Perth first, and then drive across to Sydney with Tim, Michael and Ingrid," said Joyce. "We stayed in a hotel around the corner from Brisbane Street and, later, in a flat in Herdsman Parade, Wembley, that Philippa had found for us."

Before arriving in Perth, there was drama when Michael lost his passport on holiday in Holland and it looked like he was going to miss the Australian connection.

Luckily, it was posted to him just in time to make the flight at Heathrow and the whole family arrived safely in Perth.

While looking for a vehicle to take them to Sydney, Anthony suggested they take his 1969 HK Holden as he was trying to sell it anyway.

Peter agreed, saying they could sell the car in Sydney and send the money back to Anthony.

After an eventful trip across the Nullarbor, via Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie, Norseman, Balladonia, Port Augusta, Adelaide and Broken Hill, the family finally arrived in one piece at Phil and Mary's in Rose Bay, Sydney.

After a week or two, Peter and Michael left Sydney ahead of Joyce and Ingrid to look for a motel to lease in Auckland.

They eventually found the Phoenix Palm Motel in Remuera and the whole family moved there in the summer of 1979.

Peter also shipped across the family's green Mini Clubman estate from England (Casper was, of course, already installed in quarantine at Howick on the outskirts of Auckland).

Mike and Ingrid both found work in Remuera - Mike at the National Bank and Ingrid at Swallows bookshop and later at Nestles in Parnell.

"After a year of 'purgatory' at the Pheonix Palm, the Van Dorstens - old friends of ours - decided to buy the motel and we packed up again and went back to England," said Joyce.

Joyce and Ingrid went first, via Sydney, where they stayed with Phil and Mary, and Mike and Peter stayed on to find a house for good friends Reg and Dora who had just sold their dairy in Manukau Road, Epsom.

"After we had found Reg and Dora a nice place in Glen Innes, Tim and Mike caught the P&O cruise ship Sea Princess from Auckland to Sydney where they met up with the rest of the family at Rose Bay, and I flew back," said Peter.

This was the beginning of an incredible adventure for Tim and Mike who spent the next eight days riding their Honda 750 and 900 motorbikes across Australia to Perth.

The rest of the family arrived in Perth in more civilised fashion by plane, staying once again with Anthony and Philippa in Perth - this time in their new house in Marradong Street, Coolbinia.

Joyce and Peter rented a unit at The Gables in Maylands where they eventually became caretakers of the block, with the offer of a permanent position!

"We decided not to take it as we had to get back to England," said Joyce.

By then, Tim and Mike had moved into a grand, but run-down, old federation style house down the road overlooking the Swan River and decided to stay on in Perth as Mike had been accepted into the Western Australian Institute of Technology, now Curtin University, to study journalism.

In November 1980 Joyce and Peter returned to Cheltenham. Ingrid had already gone back to stay with her friend Vicky Cook as she was so homesick.

On their way back Joyce and Peter once again visited Holland, where Peter bought a left-hand drive Mini Traveller and drove it back to England complete with Dutch number plates.

They arrived back in Cheltenham with nowhere to stay so were relieved when Vicky's parents - John and Rosemary Cook - offered them one of their flats at Pembury in Malvern Road.

Peter returned to work with STITA as a freelance and Joyce got a job picking mushrooms in Southam.

With only about 30,000 pounds to their name they knew their chances of finding a good house at such a low price were slim.

However, fate intervened once again with Joyce spotting an ad in the local Echo newspaper for an old house near the centre of town called 'Cheverel'.

"There was quite a bit of interest in it as it was only 27,500 pounds, and after only five minutes we knew it was the house for us," said Joyce.

They moved in on April 1, 1981, just days before the snowstorms started!

They had no furniture and the place was an absolute pigsty to start off with, but Joyce soon had it shipshape and Bristol-fashion!

Soon after, Casper was released from quarantine after spending six months at boarding kennels in Newbury (near Reading).

In July, Tim and his New Zealand girlfriend Deidre arrived to help out with the renovations which continued for quite a few months until the place became extremely comfortable.

Mike arrived from Perth in December 1981, just in time for one of the coldest winters in living memory.

Tim stayed on and Joyce and Peter once again started doing bed and breakfasts to help make ends meet.

Later, James Cook (Vicky's brother) knocked an opening through the kitchen wall to help open up the adjoining lounge area, and later installed a pair of heavy wood and glass doors.

John Welch boarded at Cheverel for a few months and his brother Gary (Ingrid's boyfriend, known none-too affectionately as 'The Cobra') was a frequent visitor, although his presence went largely undetected by Joyce and Peter!

In 1982, Joyce once again visited Australia to help look after Nana in Sydney as her health was deteriorating.

Joyce also stopped in Perth on her way back - to see Mike, Anthony and Tim.

Paul Lovelace was staying in Perth at the time, after returning from a gold mining trip to Meekatharra in the Western Australian outback.

Peter was on tour in Canada with STITA and left Casper in the hands of Ingrid and 'The Cobra', until they got back.

In November 1982, Phil and Mary brought Nana over to stay at Cheverel as they were very concerned about her health.

Although Nana looked in a bad way, amazingly, she perked up and survived another 18 months before passing away peacefully on June 6, 1984 at the age of 84.

Phil, RAF friend Terry Gledhill and most of the family, except for Tim and Anthony who were in Australia, attended the funeral.

Casper also died a couple of years later of heart complications.

Shortly after Nana's funeral, Phil suggested Joyce and Peter go off on holiday to Wales to help cheer them up.

They went to Cardigan and while driving through a small village, stopped at the Post Office where they saw a notice in the window advertising a Renault 12.

The family car from 1984 onwards – a Renault 12 sedan that never missed a beat.

After a short test drive, they decided to buy it and offered the asking price of 750 pounds - which was an absolute bargain as it had only done 23,000 miles.

The middle-aged owner said he was happy to let it go at a reasonable price as he no longer used it.

They returned to Cheltenham in two cars, driving back in convoy, and were extremely pleased with the performance of their purchase, which was in excellent condition and was to last them another 12 years.

Beautiful blossom at Cheverel, Cheltenham, summer of 1984.

For the next three years, Joyce and Peter concentrated on bed and breakfasts until, in 1987, they decided to visit Australia again for 12 months.

Luckily, their friends Joan and Gordon Hackwell offered to look after Cheverel, even volunteering to do some bed and breakfasts!

Although only August, Perth was in the grip of an unusually hot, early summer, and Joyce and Peter spent a lot of time in the only air conditioned room available - the front room of Tim's house in 10th Avenue, Inglewood (the part that used to be a shop).

A couple of months later the Peeters duo visited Anthony and family in Tasmania, staying in their big, old, rambling house in Bain Terrace, Launceston.

It was here that Joyce had a close encounter with the Hills Hoist in Anthony's back garden, breaking her nose when the metal framework fell on top of her!

They also stayed in Melbourne with Theo and his wife Seiko for a couple of days on their way back to Perth - where Joyce was again in the wars, falling over a protruding paving slab on her way back from the shops in Inglewood and breaking her kneecap.

She spent the next few days in hospital before eventually returning to Cheverel none the worse for wear, although she was advised to visit the doctor regularly for blood tests.

"We also stopped off in Holland for a while on the way back, as Joan and Gordon weren't vacating Cheverel until early March 1988 and we had a few days to spare," said Joyce.

In April 1988 Mike arrived from Perth, spending the rest of the year in Cheltenham, as well as two weeks in Italy in August.

By 1990 the Peeters duo had the travel bug yet again - but they were also considering selling Cheverel to a chap called Bob from GCHQ - who had offered to look after the house for six months while they went to Australia.

Joyce and Peter took him up on his offer, once again catching the Jumbo to Perth and staying with Tim in Robinson Street, Inglewood.

While at Tim's, they got a call from Bob saying he had decided to buy Cheverel after all, and what did they want to do with all of their furniture?

Peter said OK and asked him to put their furniture in storage until they could organise something more permanent.

However, in the meantime, Bob and his wife took a two-week holiday to France and, on their return, had a change of heart - deciding to withdraw their offer.

Joyce and Peter, however, were unconcerned and, after visiting Anthony again in Tasmania, (this time in Evandale), returned to Cheverel and their familiar home.

In 1992, they came out to Perth again when Ingrid was admitted to hospital with a collapsed lung.

Mary looked after the house for the six weeks they were there and Joan Hawkins also came to Perth.

By this time, Tim was running a second-hand shop in Inglewood called Ned Kelly's, where they all stayed, and Ingrid thankfully, made a full recovery and Joyce and Peter returned to Cheverel.

Peter well remembers the trip he and Tim made to the air show at Fairford, Glos in 1993 when there was a terrible crash between two Russian aircraft, which were completely destroyed.

"Luckily," said Peter, "both pilots survived by ejecting safely from their planes, but it was nonetheless a shocking experience.

"The planes disintegrated only a few hundred metres from where Tim and I were standing."

In September of 1994, Mike and Robynne were married in Perth and Joyce and Peter arrived in Brisbane in June of that year to visit Anthony and his family.

After six weeks they flew to Perth for the wedding.

In April 1996, Ingrid and Rob also got married and Joyce and Peter went on to Sydney to see Phil and Mary, and afterwards Peter's brother Theo in Melbourne.

1997 was another busy year with visitors by the dozen to Cheverel including Tim and Laura, Mike, Robynne and 9-month old Liam, Rob, Ingrid and Katya and Julie Scott.

It reminded Peter a bit of being on tour, he said!

"When I retired in about 1985 I must have been the oldest tour operator in England," he said.

Peter said he missed some of the comments made by some of the Americans he had taken on tour.

Once, when he was with a group of Americans in the coach on the motorway driving past Windsor Castle, one woman called out: “Peter, why did the Queen build Windsor Castle so close to Heathrow?”

On another tour, this time to Stratford on Avon, choice questions included: “Where does that guy Stratford live?” and “Is this where the Queen is crowned King?”

Some Kenyans had Peter doubling up with laughter on the coach once when one of them put out his hand up while they were on the motorway, asking: “Permission to pass water?”

Apparently they had been trained by missionaries and had the most impeccable manners.

Another Zambian had explained to Peter that his main reason for visiting Britain was to find the stuff that makes white bread into brown bread, because people now like brown bread!

Once, at the Royal Show, another Nigerian had inadvertently stood behind a bull and been kicked hard between the legs.

He was naturally in terrible pain so Peter took him to the hospital and one of the male nurses who was incidentally, in Peter’s words, as ‘queer as a cucumber’, said he was fine as he had only been hit in the reproductive organs!

JC PEETERS

The Early Years 1919-1950

Johannes Cornelis (Peter) Peeters was born in Oisterwijk in the South of Holland on September 30, 1919 - the second of ten children - six boys and four girls.

Sadly, the eldest child, Peter's older sister Yopie, passed away in 1982, leaving three younger sisters, Tina, Meece and Therese. Therese and Tina have also since passed away, leaving only Meece as the surviving girl.

Peter's younger brothers were, in chronological order - Paul, Anton, Be, Theo and Pym (the baby). At the time of writing, Paul and Theo are the only remaining boys.

Peter and nine brothers and sisters, with Oma (centre left) and Opa (far right), in Oisterwijk, early 1930s.

As Peter said, "It was fashionable to have big families then as most of the population consisted of small farmers growing food crops for pigs and cattle."

In 1919, Oisterwijk was a small town of some 8000 people and Peter's father had built their house on the edge of the woods in the Kerrijkstraat.

Peter's primary school - John the Baptist - was located next to the house and near the playing fields.

At school Peter chose to study languages, as French was still an important language in Holland.

Indeed, when Louis (Napoleon's brother) became King of Holland, Peter's father (Opa), spoke only French as a boy.

Peter said Opa never worried much about the children and left it up to their three aunties - Tantes Core, Yette and Marie, to help out.

They lived in a large house called The Lind in Oisterwijk and did a great deal to help keep the family going.

When Peter picked up the bread from the bakery it was Tante Core who paid the bill.

This was the midst of the Depression and a food truck would arrive every Thursday at the square in Oisterwijk - opposite the Town Hall and The Lind - to help feed the poor.

Luckily, Peter's family never needed it as Oma and the Tantes always made sure there was enough food.

Originally from the north of Holland, Peter's mother was much more laidback than 'the Southerners'.

Opa belonged to a gymnastics club where they did athletics, running and other exercises.

When Peter was a young boy Opa would take him along as a mascot - dressed up like the grown-ups.

He threw him up in the air and made him do to do all manner of acrobatics.

Afterwards, they would all march through the town accompanied by a brass band playing 'oompah music'.

Opa was famous in the town as being fluent in French.

One day this came in handy when a French balloonist lost his way over Holland and landed in a field near Oisterwijk.

No-one could communicate with him, not even the mayor, so Opa was called in and quickly took charge - translating the Frenchman's excitable account of how he had tried to avoid the trees on his way to landing in the field.

The story made headlines in the local newspaper - complete with pictures of Opa, Peter and the balloonist on the front page.

Opa, of course, was the star of the show, and not only on this occasion!

At carnival time he was the Prince of the Carnival helping organise the entire show, which consisted of masked revellers and much music and merriment.

"He was a bit of a playboy," said Peter.

"When he worked at the bank he was groomed for higher things but after a while, they didn't think he would make it."

When Yopie and Peter were born, Opa left the bank to start a leather and shoe business.

He told Peter once of a trip he did to Manchester in England, and Peter would dream of Opa on the high seas visiting 'exotic lands' across the sea.

"It was only a few hours away across the Channel and the North Sea, but at that age, I didn't know," said Peter.

Later, Opa established himself as a wholesaler in wines and spirits with some good agencies, including Johnny Walker, Black and White Scotch Whiskey, and Bordeaux wine.

Opa would also deal with the clergy, as his brother Anton was a priest.

At 14, Peter went to Tilburg to study at The Lycee (the equivalent of a grammar school) called St Adolphus.

"I stayed there for about three years but never finished my last year as Opa had not paid the fees."

This was most upsetting for Peter as it meant university was out of the question.

At 16, Peter began selling cigars to Opa's liquor clients to help the family survive.

"Tante Core helped me as she knew a cigar wholesaler in Tilburg," said Peter.

"I bought some cigars for a few hundred guilders and, as I was so young and Opa's son, the clients bought plenty of cigars from me."

Peter gave all the profit to Oma and things went well.

He would ride 50 and 60 kilometres a day, delivering cigars to clients as far as Eindhoven, Boxtel, Dousel and Breda.

In 1939, Oma received a letter requesting Peter to attend a medical examination for military service.

Before going, Opa told Peter that if he passed, he would have to choose between the air force, navy, army, artillery or infantry.

Opa said conscription with these services always took 12 months, but there was a way to do it in only six.

He recommended Peter join the stretcher-bearer brigade.

"In the south of Holland at that time pacifism was dominant as 99 per cent of the population was Catholic and did not believe in wars," said Peter.

After passing the medical with flying colours, Peter was accepted into the stretcher-bearers corps at Rosendal (near Breda) for six-month conscription.

"I was taught how to handle a rifle and all about the Red Cross according to the Treaty of Geneva," said Peter.

While Peter completed his training, the Germans invaded Poland and Britain declared war on Germany.

Holland, of course, remained neutral as it had done in the Great War, but the mobilisation forced the Dutch defences to be prepared for a German attack.

"That German attack came on May 10, 1940 by which time my unit was positioned on the Eastern border between Holland and Germany in Winterswijk," said Peter.

Now it looked like he was in it for the duration.

The attack happened in the middle of the night and Peter could hear the explosions as the German aircraft bombed Rotterdam.

"The whole of Rotterdam was flattened in a few hours," he said.

"Afterwards, they dropped large man-sized puppets by parachute. The Dutch army was fooled into thinking the puppets were German parachutists and diverted their defences.

"The real German paratroopers soon followed, meeting little resistance. Other German infantry came over the Eastern border from the Ruhr carrying boats as they knew Holland was a country of water."

Peter was taken prisoner-of-war and put on a train to Germany.

Peter's destination was Stargaart (now Poland) but, as he was a Red Cross soldier, he was treated differently to the other prisoners, largely thanks to the Geneva Convention.

"At the camp there were Polish soldiers with no shoes and rags on their feet," said Peter.

"They slept on straw with no pillows while we Dutch POWs had pillows and sheets. We also wore Red Cross armbands. I think the Germans considered us to be of the same race as them (the Ubermensch). They were sympathetic to us and said we would not have to be prisoners for too long."

On one occasion, the Dutch POWs were issued with a range of delicious food and drink, including sausages and beer.

But they soon discovered the real reason for the Germans' generosity.

"A deputation of Red Cross officers from Geneva was coming for an inspection of the prisoner-of-war camp," said Peter.

"Naturally we were forced to give all the food back, (uneaten presumably!), when they had gone."

At the camp Peter was interpreter for some 1200 Dutch POWs and had to attend the sick report each morning.

"The sick came to see the German doctor and I interpreted as the doctor couldn't speak Dutch," said Peter.

"But I soon discovered that many of the so-called 'sick' men were cheating. They said they had back pain, stomach aches and headaches when all they really wanted was to be relieved from duty."

The work being done at that camp was heavy, involving digging foundations up to a metre deep, to build a new aspirin factory.

In the beginning, as a reward for translating the descriptions of their aches and pains, the men would put cigarettes in Peter's pocket.

But, Peter became uncomfortable with this, and 'came clean' about their malingering.

By mid-1940, the Germans were poised to invade Britain and had already assembled a small armada of barges on the island of Jersey in the English Channel.

However, this plan failed when they were defeated in the air in June and July 1940 in the Battle of Britain.

The Dutch POWs were repatriated to Holland, and asked to sign a form stating they would never take any provocative action against the Germans.

Only about four POWs refused to sign it, including Peter.

"The Germans have a code of honour of soldier to soldier," said Peter.

"If I had signed it, I would have had to stick by the declaration, and I didn't know if my family was already fighting the Germans. It turned out I did the right thing as when I returned to Holland, my brothers Paul, Be and Anton were already in the Resistance movement. If I had signed that form and been caught, I would have been executed."

Peter went to Amsterdam, hoping to start a sugar business, as there was a shortage in Holland.

He found stocks of a sugar-substitute, glucose - which was readily available - and being produced by a Jew in Groningen.

Peter bought some barrels, divided the contents up into jam-jars, and sold it in Amsterdam on the black market.

"But soon the glucose supply ran out and I returned to Oisterwijk to my parents," said Peter.

"They were really suffering as everything was rationed. I decided not to stay as food was scarce, and I went to Winterswijk where I had done my conscription. I got a job at the Dutch Button Factory staying with a family I knew."

A year later Peter was skating to work when he got stuck in the ice.

Seeing him in difficulty, a German motor transport vehicle stopped and asked him some probing questions.

Apparently satisfied with his answers, they picked him up, announcing he would make a suitable soldier for the SS.

"By this stage of the war (1942) the Germans had already invaded Russia and were looking for tall, strong, Arian soldiers for the front," said Peter.

But when he refused to join the SS, Peter was told he had two choices - to work in the Herman Goering Steelworks in Austria, or go to the Norwegian airfields - where he would, no doubt, be bombed by the RAF.

"I chose Austria as I thought the mountains were a slightly safer bet," he said.

The next morning Peter and hundreds of other POWs were herded on to a cattle train at Winterswijk railway station.

Forty-eight hours later they arrived in Linz on the River Danube, Austria.

"I saw people in distinctive blue uniforms wearing berets," he said.

"They were Spanish soldiers from Franco's Blue Division chosen to fight alongside the Germans against the Russians. They were working at the steelworks because the Germans had found them useless at the front."

Peter was soon issued with work equipment - including shoes and overalls - and started work on the blast furnace, something he was not particularly happy about.

"I went to the factory doctor and explained that I used to be a Red Cross soldier and was not qualified for this work," he said.

"As I spoke German he let me stay in his office as an interpreter. He said he dealt with people from all nationalities, and couldn't understand half of them."

Peter was given a special room in the surgery and told to attend the sick report and interpret as much as he could.

"I was OK with the Dutch and German and got by with the French," said Peter.

The doctor soon intimated to Peter that he was no admirer of Hitler.

He said that as a young man in Hamburg, he had stowed away on a ship to New York.

Everything is possible in America, he said, and he had the time of his life.

He said it was a fantastic adventure and something very few Germans had ever done.

"When I came back I settled down to study to be a doctor, but I will always remember my adventure," said the doctor.

Finally, the doctor volunteered to help Peter get out of the steelworks.

As part of the escape plan, the doctor gave Peter a full list of prescriptions to hand deliver to a chemist in Linz.

"If you don't come back I won't be looking for you," he said.

With the doctor's authority, Peter walked out of the steelworks and delivered his prescriptions safely.

Spotting a grocer's shop in the square, Peter introduced himself to the shopkeeper, explaining he had come from Holland and needed help to get home again.

The grocer was very sympathetic and also disliked Hitler, so he invited Peter to his home to share a meal with his wife and family.

He also gave Peter a note of introduction and the address of a Resistance member on the Cathedral Square, which Peter later visited.

The door was opened by a lady who, after reading the note carefully, invited Peter in.

"She took me into a big room under the old Cathedral dome and introduced me to two gentlemen who I will never forget for the rest of my life," said Peter.

"Their names were Dr Schwartzbauer and Professor Kronsteiner. They advised me to take a train from Linz to Munich, Bavaria where I should contact a Bishop who was also in the German resistance."

As Peter was leaving he was given an envelope, and told not to open it until he reached Linz train station.

At the station he found 50 marks inside - enough for a ticket to Munich.

But when he arrived at the Bishop's house, the woman inside would have nothing to do with him.

"She didn't trust me," said Peter.

"I think she thought I was a spy because my German was so good."

Disappointed, Peter went to Munich's Maria Plaza to look at Hitler's monument to the famous failed Beer Hall Putsch.

"Many were killed and it was the start of the dictator's struggle to conquer Germany for the Nazis in 1936," he said.

The monument depicted two SS men giving the Nazi salute and was put up when the Nazis came to power.

As Peter walked past, he was approached by two Secret Service men and asked why he hadn't saluted.

Peter explained that he was a visitor and didn't know he had to.

They asked to see his passport and, after a short conversation, let him go, apparently thinking he was a tourist.

To celebrate his good fortune, Peter used the remainder of his 50 marks to buy a frankfurter from a stall in the Plaza.

Walked around the markets he was surprised to see some other Dutch people.

Introducing himself as one of their countryman, he discovered they were drivers requisitioned by the German government to take ammunition trucks to the Russian front, and would shortly be undergoing six weeks training.

"The training was in a mountain suburb in Bavaria and they must have felt sorry for me, as they invited me to join them," said Peter.

"I was hesitant at first, of course, especially about going to the front but, in the end, it was better than sleeping in an air raid shelter. Also, I thought, it could perhaps, afford me an opportunity to get back to Holland."

On the course Peter was given food and a bed, took part in the lectures, undertook mountain drives in the trucks and became one of the gang.

The only time he could not join in was when they collected their pay.

All too soon, the detachment for Russia was declared ready and the drivers, including Peter, readied themselves for the journey to Berlin to pick up their trucks.

Peter knew things could be very difficult for him in Berlin, so had to leave the group at Dresden, to avoid almost certain arrest later on.

"Sadly, that was the last I ever saw of my friends," he said.

Alone on a Dresden railway platform and unsure of his next move, Peter knew that he had to find someone he could trust.

He sought out the Bishop (Provost) of Dresden Cathedral, who proved very sympathetic.

"I knew immediately this man was anti-Nazi," said Peter.

"He said he would help me, although he knew he might regret it," said Peter.

The Provost gave Peter the address of a firm at Polierstraat 17 run by Mr Winkel.

On the strength of the Provost's letter of authority, Peter was offered a job by Mr Winkel in the office.

Before the Nazi takeover, Mr Winkel had been a politician and editor of the newspaper Das Centrum, owned by Von Papen, the German Ambassador to Turkey during the First World War.

"When the Nazis came to power in 1936, the newspaper was closed down, and the Nazis began printing a propaganda sheet called The People's Magazine of Saxonia," said Peter.

"But Mr Winkel managed to keep the old presses running printing stationery for the German railways."

When Peter arrived in Dresden in August 1942 the Gestapo was already making enquiries about foreign workers at the printing works.

Somehow, Mr Winkel managed to hold them off, and Peter is well aware he owes his life to this man.

"I thank my lucky stars for meeting him. If I had been caught, I would have been sent straight to the concentration camp," he said.

Most of the foreign workers, including the French POWs, were delivered to work in the morning and returned at night.

This would give them no time to visit a shop to spend any of their meagre earnings.

Understandably, many did not like the idea that Peter, a mere Dutchman, had the relative freedom of lodgings above a cafe -The Drei Raben (The Three Ravens).

It was at The Drei Raben that Peter met two French brothers - Antoine and Philippe Roget - who had worked in an ammunition factory.

They were both medical students and came from an aristocratic background. Their father was a pilot who had been killed in the First World War.

Peter, with his limited knowledge of French, soon built up a friendship with them.

Antoine drove a truck delivering goods for the German army and one day he took some sweets and biscuits that fell off the back of the truck after a minor accident.

When the secret police found out Antoine had stolen food destined for the German army, he was put into jail and sentenced to death by firing squad.

Peter felt terribly sorry for his friend and told Mr Winkel about what had happened.

Mr Winkel gave Peter the address of a barrister Dr Eric Kasener, who, he said, might be able to help.

Peter had no money but Dr Kasener said not to worry, he could pay him in coffee beans from the black market.

Quickly, Peter traded a watch and a camera to get a kilo of coffee beans, gave them to Dr Kasener and Antoine was released with all charges dropped.

After the war, Peter discovered Dr Kasener had become a minister in the East German cabinet and died in office.

By 1945 Peter had moved to a room on the second floor of a convent with full board.

"The nuns made me lovely meals - much better than the cafe - and they were wonderful people," said Peter.

It was the night of February 12, 1945 at about 10pm when the British bombed Dresden.

"The British were very smart. The Germans had no idea which destination the bombers were heading until they were only a few hundred miles from the city. They could have gone to several places - Berlin, Hamburg or the Skoda works in Czechoslovakia - all of these were recognized targets."

Peter, who was in bed, was instantly woken by the deafening sound of hundreds of bombers roaring over the city.

"Also in rooms on my floor were another Dutchman and a Russian," said Peter.

"We all came out into the corridor together, wondering what all this noise in the sky could be, when the incendiary bombs started exploding."

"The phosphorous set fire to everything it touched - including roads, buildings and people."

Within ten minutes the second floor of the convent was ablaze.

It started from above and below and soon engulfed the entire building.

With acrid smoke drifting up to the second floor, Peter's eyes were burning and he knew he had to escape very quickly.

Pulling on a pair of ski trousers, pullover and a jacket, Peter soaked his bed sheets in water and wrapped them around his head to protect him from the fierce heat.

Grabbing his passport, he slid down the bannisters to the ground floor.

Downstairs the streets were burning, but luckily he had his heavy ski shoes on, protecting him from the blazing tar.

He found a windscreen from a car that had exploded and held that in front of him, but his hands were still burning so he put cloths around them.

He walked until he came to a spot where the tarmac was no longer burning. There he stood looking at the sky, and the buildings which were burning everywhere.

He found a spot that led to the railway station which he tried to reach but, on the way, found a viaduct after about 100 yards.

It took Peter at least an hour to get there with the windscreen still in front of him protecting him from the heat. At the viaduct he finally rested.

Peter later discovered that the RAF bombers had continued on to the Skoda factory in Czechoslovakia to pummel it with high explosive.

On their return they had a perfect view of Dresden all lit up by the blazing fires, and accurately dropped the remainder of their high explosive bombs.

But by the second onslaught, Peter had already taken refuge under the viaduct, (which was made of solid granite four metres thick), and was mercifully protected.

"I saw 10 and 12 storey buildings just disappear completely," said Peter.

"After the air raid siren had stopped, I walked around and saw bodies being dragged out of the basements. They were asphyxiated by the high explosives sucking out all the air."

After the attack Peter's thoughts turned immediately to his French friends - Antoine and Philippe.

Unfortunately, he couldn't find them.

Walking along the River Elbe he was horrified to see the entire river piled high with bodies.

"Burning people had tried to jump into the river but died anyway because of the phosphorous," he said.

"It was so bad you could have walked across on the dead bodies instead of the bridge."

It was here that Peter finally threw away the piece of windscreen that had saved his life

Walking over the bridge he continued along the river for miles until he could finally see the still-smouldering city far below him.

Totally exhausted, he collapsed onto a soaking wet mattress he had found next to the river.

He was awoken in the morning by another terrible sound.

It was not the British this time but the Americans with their B25 bombers who had come to finish off what the British had missed.

Peter saw all this from a distance but he was already safe.

From then on his overriding goal was to return to Holland.

"En route I saw some gruesome sights including escaped Russian POWs raiding farms and slaughtering cows to make bonfires with the carcasses," said Peter.

Several times he was forced to prove his Dutch identity as his German accent was so good the conquering Russians thought he really was a German.

It was incredible that through all this, he still had his passport in the pocket of his ski jacket, and it almost certainly saved his life.

"It took me about 10 days to get from Dresden to Westphalia where my mother's sister, Tante Meece, lived in the village of Drensteinfort," said Peter.

"This village was only 60 kilometres from the Dutch border so I thought that when I got there, I would probably be safe."

Indeed, when Peter arrived at Tante Meece's she did look after him until Germany officially surrendered.

But the drama wasn't over then as there was quite a surprise waiting for Peter in Tante Meece's potato cellar - six SS men hiding from the Allies.

"They had vowed they would resist if the Allies came over and refused to go quietly," said Peter.

"The Americans were on their way and reconnaissance planes filled the skies, but still, these SS men were determined to shoot when the Allies arrived.

I said to them: 'What are you trying to prove? The war is over. It's finished. The only way to save your lives is to smash your rifles against a tree and surrender.'"

After much persuasion they finally saw sense.

With the arrival of the first American transport, Peter - brandishing his Dutch passport - flagged it down, and the SS men were taken prisoner.

In gratitude for his good work, the US lieutenant in charge of the convoy asked Peter to join them as an interpreter.

This he did - but only for a day.

"I knew if I stayed longer things would have got very dicey," he said.

"They wanted me to go to farms and confiscate their cattle and food. The risks were too high."

Leaving the American transport column, the American lieutenant thanked him again for helping with the liberation of Germany and invited him to come to America to live at any time.

He said he would always be guaranteed free entry and, although Peter never took the offer up, held onto the address of the American officer.

When Peter returned to Drensteinfort an amazing transformation had taken place.

"It was full of American negroes - soldiers who had occupied the village while the liberation was underway," he said.

Peter knew he was no longer needed there and decided to return to Holland with his old girlfriend Mica who lived in Drensteinfort.

He said her name was originally Maria, but she changed it to make it sound more Viking.

"I had her parents' permission so I said to her - come to Holland and I can introduce you to my parents," said Peter.

They decided to travel by bicycle but, en route, were stopped by the Americans.

Peter had to do some quick thinking.

He explained he was Dutch, had escaped from Germany, and Mica was a friend of his aunty.

Unfortunately, they didn't believe him and separated them before taking them both prisoner.

In the middle of the night Peter escaped on his bike and sadly, never saw Mica again.

He made it safely back to Holland where he was reunited with his family.

"But I got restless again and volunteered for the British expeditionary force to fight in Burma and Indonesia," said Peter.

"At that time, the Dutch and British governments had an agreement that any Dutch volunteer would be trained in Britain so that was where I went, together with my good friend, Jan van de Heyden."

The Dutch contingent were assembled in Eindhoven, went by train to Calais and then by ferry to Dover.

In Britain Peter soon realised his English was limited, but quickly began to pick up a few words.

They went by lorry through London to the headquarters of the Royal Fusiliers in Brentwood, Essex.

This was the biggest infantry centre in Britain and catered for soldiers doing National Service or compulsory conscription, which the British maintained for all males of a certain age until the early 1960s.

The Dutch contingent was billeted in barracks with English conscripts.

"There was immediate competition between us and tests were carried out in physical training and weapons instruction, among others," said Peter.

"One of these tests involved completely stripping down a Bren gun with an old English penny, and putting it back together, five times. Then we had to do it in the dark! This could be a bit of a struggle."

Somehow Peter managed it and points were given for performance.

Another highly competitive activity was the mile-run, which Peter admitted was not his best event.

"Swimming was my sport as a youngster so I thought, let them all go, to hell with it," he said.

"As long as I can finish in my own time, then I am happy."

Unfortunately for Peter, the brigade's commanding officer - Colonel TE Hearne - had other ideas.

The Colonel was a colourful character, having served in the British Army at the Khyber Pass in the 1920s.

As Peter was running happily towards the back of the group, the Colonel approached him on horseback and looking down on him, cried: "What's all this Lofty? Can't you do better than this?? Come on; let's see what you can do!"

Whether through fear or determination, Peter was really encouraged by this and started speeding up.

He overtook one runner after another but, by the time he reached half-way, was completely exhausted.

With the Colonel nowhere to be seen, Peter settled into a comfortable position about half-way through the pack and finished the race creditably.

Other activities at Brentwood included commando training held over an obstacle course with ropes and slings over water, and pyat shooting.

"A pyat was like a bazooka which we would shoot from a few hundred yards at large targets, like tanks," said Peter.

The best part of Peter's stay at the camp was the dancing with the local village girls and the WRENs.

"There was no beer - only coffee and tea from the Naafi - but it was enjoyable," said Peter.

"Some of the girls had sports cars and would take us for rides around the Essex countryside."

But he was always worried about coming back to the camp late in the evening, as the guards were liable to stop you and take your name.

If that happened you could be assigned CB (Confined to Barracks), which quite often meant a few days solitary in a single cell.

"Sometimes we would bribe them with a packet of fags but that didn't always work," said Peter.

After about six weeks Peter and Jan van de Heyden completed their training and, leaving quite a few friends behind (especially the WRENS), they were sent to Wolverhampton for cadet training.

Following the Japanese surrender, the Dutch were no longer needed in Burma, so their efforts were concentrated on Indonesia instead.

Peter remembers VJ (Victory Japan) Day very well.

"Some of my friends and I went on a trip to London to celebrate," he said.

"I can clearly remember standing on the roof of an old Austin Seven to watch the huge crowds in Trafalgar Square."

Wolverhampton's Wolseley Park was the centre for the Dutch volunteers, and also where Peter and Jan van de Heyden received their Indonesian training.

Learning the Indonesian language, Peter said, was quite simple.

"For instance, anak in Indonesian is a child. Where there are two children it is anak anak."

Peter particularly liked Indonesian singing and one particular song he had learnt in Indonesia was called 'Tarumbalan', and he would sing it to us as children.

Leaving Wolverhampton, Peter and about 100 other Dutch trainees were detached to Maryhill Barracks in Glasgow for six weeks of special training.

It was mid-winter and, with the Black Watch regiment in charge, things were never going to be easy.

"A typical day began at 6am when we would pull on thin black singlets, ski trousers and gym shoes before being driven in a truck, like cattle, to the exercise quadrant," said Peter.

"It was freezing cold but the exercises warmed us up and the sweat was soon pouring off us."

After exercises the trainees had breakfast and began their day's study.

Peter's memories from the Hogmanay (or New Year's Eve) of that year were very vivid.

"Everybody went mad," he said.

"We all had a few drinks and a great time."

There was one not-so memorable incident, however.

"We saw a horrific fight between Scots and American soldiers outside a pub," said Peter.

"There was blood everywhere but the Military Police soon arrived to break it up."

Peter would also always remember the remarkable sight of a drunken vicar attempting to climb a lamppost.

"Who knows, perhaps he was trying to get closer to God?" said Peter.

Staying at the YMCA meant Peter and the other Dutch boys were always getting invites to parties, and not always personally.

Sometimes cards would appear on the noticeboard, such as: 'Six Dutch boys wanted for a party,' or 'Three Dutch boys wanted for a party!'

"The Scots were very happy to see us," said Peter.

"Being war survivors I think they thought us special and I will never forget their generosity."

At one party, the Scots were so impressed with Jan van der Heyden's command of English - which he could speak so well and without the trace of an accent - that one of them stood up and proclaimed:

"If there is anyone in this room who can answer this young man in his own language, I will give them a five pound note!"

Jan was such a wizard in languages that Peter obviously learnt a great deal from him.

On their arrival in England, Peter's English had been very mediocre.

For example, standing on a platform at the Underground in London waiting for a train, Peter had accidentally trodden on someone's toe.

Instead of saying "excuse me" he said "please" by mistake.

"Also, if you wanted to light a cigarette and you didn't have a lighter or matches, you would ask for some 'fire'," said Peter.

"This could of course cause some complications!"

The sergeant in charge in Glasgow - who was quite a character and spoke with a very strong Scottish accent - had quite a sense of humour.

He asked Peter: "Lofty, what comes out of a chimney?"

Naturally Peter replied, "Smoke," and the sergeant quickly thanked him saying: "Don't mind if I do!"

This sergeant would also frequently inspect the barracks at night to make sure the trainees were all in bed.

"One night towards the end of our training, I found I couldn't sleep on the straw mattress," said Peter.

"I started walking around a bit until I felt tired, but at that point, the sergeant came in and, seeing my bed unoccupied, shouted loudly, 'Lofty! Why aren't you in your bed?'

"When I protested I couldn't sleep on the straw, he said: 'Straw? There's enough straw in that bed to feed a horse for a week!'"

Towards the end of their training, Peter and the other Dutch soldiers were made to sit a test in front of the Brigade's top brass to help decide final rankings.

Everyone was a private so the competition to become lance-corporals, corporals and sergeants was fierce.

The night before the test, Peter and Jan were sitting at the bar enjoying a quiet beer when who should walk in but the Scottish sergeant.

Seeing them, he sauntered over and they ordered him a drink.

Over his beer, the sergeant began dispensing a bit of advice: "Tomorrow there is going to be a test," he said.

"Now, when you stand in front of the Brigadier and address your squad, you don't talk to them nicely! YOU SHOUT AT THEM!! You don't say, 'Please pick up your rifles', you shout, 'PICK UP YOUR RIFLES!'"

"And this is exactly what we did," said Peter.

"Amazingly, our voices were so loud and effective that by the end of the test, we were appointed the only sergeants out of a squad of more than 100 trainees!"

Back in Wolverhampton, the two newly-promoted sergeants had to decide which field of combat they wanted to be in.

Peter decided on the Military Intelligence Corps where he could use the Indonesian language to spy on the enemy.

Peter in uniform – Dutch Intelligence – 1944.

Jan chose Infantry and was immediately accepted for officer training in London, where he spent the next nine months.

After a short three-week training course in London with British Intelligence, Peter was sent to Holland for further training near The Hague.

He left for Indonesia on the Dutch passenger ship the Tagelberg soon after.

At Jakarta Harbour four weeks later, there was no welcoming party for the Dutch liberators.

The Indonesian resistance had by then firmly established itself and was hell-bent on taking the country back from the Dutch.

Peter was sent to Polonia - a suburb of Jakarta - and detached by military intelligence to the headquarters of the Second Brigade.

There he met up with old friends Polly de Zwart and Hans Auding and began work on gaining information about the Indonesian resistance and freedom fighters.

"Our area was very restricted," said Peter.

"There was a demarcation line in Java we could not cross because of the political influence of the United Nations. The trend was for colonies to be dissolved and given back to their own people, so the issue became a sort of political football."

He said the Dutch objected not so much to giving back the country to its people as letting it be run by President Sukharno - a man well known for collaborating with the Japanese in World War Two.

A year after Peter's arrival in Indonesia, the Dutch government made the decision to ignore UN directives and overrun the demarcation line, thereby effectively taking control of the whole country.

By then Jan van der Heyden and Peter's brother Theo had arrived in the second division of Dutch soldiers.

"Theo and Jan were stationed only about 30 miles from my headquarters, about 100 miles south of Jakarta in the middle of the mountains," said Peter.

Peter got on very well with his commanding officer, Byron Benting, working with him to help organise Indonesian spies.

"We took some heavy casualties on night patrols but I never had to go on these," said Peter.

"My job at headquarters involved getting information and writing reports to be distributed to various companies under us. One of the organisations we dealt with was Hezbollah which of course, still exists today in some Moslem countries. It was very radical and called for total, all-out war."

Peter said the United Nations made frequent visits to Indonesia and representatives from all over the world - Columbia, Korea, Japan, Russia, France - were anxious to see what Holland was doing.

Was Holland trying to claim Indonesia for itself or merely preparing the country for a handover to its native people?

After another year in Indonesia, Peter said it was obvious that Dutch colonisation would have to end.

"We lost about 15 or 16 Dutch soldiers on night patrols and in retaliation, some horrible things happened as our commanders pursued a 'scorched earth' policy," said Peter.

"The closest I came to action was on a 48-hour leave. I was in a weapon-carrier with Polly de Zwart and we were shot at from the high ground."

Also with them was a soldier from Ambon - an Indonesian island where the professional army of the Dutch East Indies under Queen Wilhelmina and Queen Juliana - were trained.

The Ambons were excellent soldiers - comparable to the Gurkhas who fought for the British in India.

After hearing the shots, Polly and Peter jumped from the weapon-carrier and took cover behind a large tyre on the ground.

Peter had a revolver but didn't need it, as the soldier from Ambon - tying a red handkerchief to his wrist (meaning, 'I am going in') - darted quickly into the high grass.

Five minutes later he returned holding aloft with the ears of the enemy.

Slinging the sniper's boots in the vehicle, he jumped in and said, "Carry on."

Peter was also shot at while swimming in a lake in Wanayassa, but luckily they missed and he escaped.

Following the United Nations round table conference in Bali in 1949, a document authorising the Dutch to hand over Indonesia to Sukharno was finally signed, in spite of the Indonesian General's Japanese collaboration.

Peter returned to Holland only to find that after three years in the Tropics, he was completely at a loss with what to do with himself.

"All I possessed when I returned was a written recommendation from a multimillionaire Chinaman, Chong Boon Hok," said Peter.

"I had taught Dutch and English to his son Willy in Jakarta and he invited me to work for him as his private secretary in Amsterdam when I was demobbed."

Chong Boon Hok's business involved rice-processing, and he owned thousands of acres of land in Indonesia, as well as a textile factory.

On his desk sat two flags: the national flag of China and the communist flag of Mao Tse Tung.

Ever the diplomat and clever businessman, Chong Boon Hok would change the flag according to who visited him.

Chong Boon Hok's five-storey house in Amsterdam was located on the canal only 100 yards from the house where Anne Frank had lived.

As a private secretary, Peter was responsible for organising shiploads of tea en route from Chong Boon Hok's plantations in Indonesia to Holland.

Polly de Zwart also got a job as Chong Boon Hok's driver, responsible for ferrying him around in his Mercedes Benz limousine.

"I remember when Chong Boon Hok, Polly and I went to London," said Peter.

"We visited Madame Tussaud's and I translated for Chong Boon Hok, explaining the exhibits to him, although he seemed only really interested in the Asian and African waxworks."

It was during this London trip that Peter first had doubts about Chong Boon Hok.

He worried he could not trust him and it was not long before his fears were realised.

Back in Amsterdam, Chong Boon Hok asked Peter to pick up some tea samples from Jakarta urgently to give to the bank in Amsterdam.

Peter thought this strange as it would have been quicker and easier by post.

Polly agreed and Peter checked with Chong Boon Hok's bank manager.

He admitted that an investigation into Chong Boon Hok's affairs was already underway and thought diamonds were involved.

Peter decided he wasn't cut out for smuggling and black money and told Chong Boon Hok he couldn't do it.

He said he was leaving Holland because he thought there was a better future for him in Australia.

Chong Boon Hok seemed surprised but didn't question his decision, even advising Peter on the best way to get an Australian visa.

The following day Peter went to the Immigration Department in The Hague to pick up his discharge papers.

He also received an application for a free flight to Australia but decided against applying as it would have meant signing a work contract with the Australian government and Peter wanted to be free to choose his own job.

As he had saved some money from his time as a sergeant in Indonesia, Peter made the wise decision to pay his own fare of 1800 guilders (equivalent to about 180 pounds).

For this he could travel by ship or plane but he decided to fly, as it was quicker and he could work some of the time he had saved, thereby recovering the extra costs.

"I arrived in Sydney on a KLM flight on ANZAC Day (April 25), 1950. I was a bit bewildered by the big city with its bridge and massive harbour, but also relieved to be in Australia.

"At the airport I was greeted by an official from the Australian government who gave me an envelope containing 25 pounds. It was a thank you for fighting in World War Two as an Allied soldier and I will never forget their generosity.

"I stayed in a beautiful hotel in Rose Bay with a room overlooking the harbour and watching the yachts sailing through the clear blue water I thought, this is pretty good!"

Two nights later and with ANZAC Day celebrations well-and-truly over, Peter used some of his 25 pounds to pay for accommodation in Bellevue Street, Double Bay.

He said the Irish landlady there was quite friendly and had three daughters.

To make ends meet she rented out five different rooms, so Peter knew he would have to pay his rent on time.

One thing Peter disliked about Australia was the 'Six O'clock Swill'.

"People would drink as much beer as possible in the shortest possible time," he said.

While observing the 'Six O'clock Swill' at a beer parlour one night, a policeman jokingly explained to Peter why some of the men were carrying their big bottles of beer in the back pockets of their trousers.

"The trousers are specially designed for this," the policeman said.

"When the man is drunk and falls forwards, the bottles are protected from damage.

"However," he added, "if the man falls over backwards, then we have to call the ambulance!"

Peter found the eating houses in Sydney a little different to what he was used to.

For example at one café, he was served by a huge covered in tattoos. Her first words were always: "Waadya' want?"

When Peter replied; "What can you offer?" she would always say the same thing: "Steak and eggs."

"Have you got anything different?" said Peter.

"Yes, eggs and steak!" she said.

This, Peter said, was about as far as the Australian menu went in those days.

Of course, buying a meal was one thing, but getting accommodation and a job was another thing entirely.

Peter thought he would try Taronga Zoo as there were bound to be vacancies there.

Sure enough, when he arrived, he saw a vacancy sign asking for people to work with the lions and tigers.

The pay was bad but Peter took the job and was soon feeding the lions and tigers, a job he was told, that could eventually lead to becoming a lion tamer!

Unfortunately, Peter found working with these animals wasn't his cup of tea and he left to take up another job working for a Scotsman in Castlereagh Street.

"He was a lovely fellow and offered me a job with his wholesale printing business selling carbon paper," said Peter.

"He told me I would get one pound for every 10 pounds worth of paper I could sell."

Peter made a few sales but it was not consistent.

He found another job working in the menswear section of the Murdoch department store, opposite the Sydney Town Hall.

His supervisor was an old Englishman who Peter got on very well with.

He regularly sent Peter out to pick up things from the wholesalers and other stores and one day, gave Peter a letter addressed to England and a shilling coin for a stamp.

"I wish I could go to England for a shilling," the old man had said.

Peter had a good social life at that time and would frequently go to the picture house in Double Bay or to the dancing.

"At the dance hall it was always the same," he said.

"The girls sat on benches on both sides of the hall, with a big gap in between for the dance floor. When the band started, you got up and picked the girl you fancied.

"In my case she was usually a tall blonde. Although my dancing was bad, I was never frightened to go up there."

Peter said the conversation while dancing was nearly always the same.

"How do you like Australia?" the girl would say, and, "What do you think of our Harbour Bridge?"

Peter found the Australians very nationalistic and proud of what they had.

They also had a great respect for people from other countries in the world and seemed fascinated with Peter's accent.

Peter said he did very well with various girls, getting many invites to their parents for Sunday lunch or dinner.

Peter made many friends in Sydney, both male and female.

"I remember one chap in particular who was Polish- a survivor of the Holocaust," said Peter.

"He was sponsored by the Australian Jewish Society to make a new life in Australia," said Peter.

Peter had no Dutch friends in Sydney but after four or five months, he met some New Zealanders.

They came into Murdoch's to buy clothes for their families across the Tasman.

"They were somehow different to the Australians," said Peter.

"They had a friendlier outlook and talked about nature and the countryside. I found them more European."

He said the Aussies were generally too nice, but more businesslike.

"If you stopped someone in the streets of Sydney and asked them for the time, very often they couldn't be bothered to help you," said Peter.

The New Zealanders called in at Murdoch's quite often and Peter got quite friendly with them.

They explained that New Zealand had quite a few things in common with Holland.

For example, the country was named after Zeeland in Holland and there was a mountain called Tasman (a Dutch explorer).

They invited Peter to visit New Zealand, giving him their mother's address so he could stay with her.

Peter quit his job and bought a ticket on the 'Monawai', arriving in Wellington in September 1950.

But it was not all smooth sailing, as it had taken him about four weeks of correspondence with the New Zealand Embassy in Sydney before he could gain official entrance.

"Papers were sent backwards and forwards and I had to supply a chest X-ray, doctor's certificate and passport," he said.

Once there though, he knew was in a good position, as he would only have to live in New Zealand for five years and he could become a naturalised New Zealand citizen.

Peter already knew quite a bit about New Zealand from his history lessons at school in Holland.

"So I decided to start from the bottom of the country and work my way up," said Peter.

He took the ferry from Wellington to Lyttleton Harbour in Christchurch, and caught the train from Christchurch to Invercargill.

But he never made it there as he decided to get off at Dunedin.

"In the 1950s most of the country's financial affairs were still directed from Dunedin as the Scots, who brought much of the agricultural business to New Zealand, were based there," said Peter.

"Offices also existed in Auckland and other cities, but the headquarters were most often in Dunedin."

Peter thought Dunedin would be a good place to find a job, and when he arrived, he scanned the newspapers for employment.

Someone had told him wool was a good business to get into, as there was a big demand after the war.

Peter followed up some of the job vacancies, applied for a few and a reply soon came from a farm at Gore, halfway between Dunedin and Invercargill.

"They told me a position was available to learn all about the wool and sheep industry," he said.

"They invited me to come down and, if I liked it, I could have the job."

When Peter arrived in Gore he was disappointed to find the farmer was away in America selling wool.

He had been delayed because of the high price of wool which had caused the auctions to take longer than expected.

His wife thought he would be back in a week, so Peter settled down to wait for him.

A week later the farmer's wife received another telegram from America saying the auction had been delayed for another month.

Peter couldn't wait that long so he hitchhiked back to Dunedin.

He still wasn't that keen to see the North Island as someone had told him they charged you sixpence for a glass of water.

"From that I understood that perhaps there was quite a rivalry, and the two islands didn't get on all that well together!" he said.

Peter took lodgings in a house in Dunedin where he met a friendly medical student, Gwen Hookings.

They got on very well and Peter got a job in a garage pumping petrol to earn some money.

Finally, he decided to leave Dunedin and head north, so Gwen gave him the address of her mother who lived in St Heliers, Auckland.

Staying in bed and breakfasts for 7/6d a night, Peter hitchhiked up the East coast of New Zealand.

One of his lifts - between Dunedin and Christchurch - was with a middle-aged electrician in a van.

"He agreed to give me a lift to Christchurch, but on the way, we stopped at a pub," said Peter.

"He said it was the last place in the South Island where you could buy beer as the rest of the island was dry," said Peter.

"We both had a beer and he met up with some people he knew. He started drinking, and drinking - one pint after the other - until late into the night."

By 10.30pm the electrician was incapable of driving but, when they got in the van, he started the engine and was about to drive off.

Peter soon stopped him and questioned him about how many pints he had drunk.

He replied: "Don't worry, it will be alright." Peter disagreed, so the man reluctantly let him drive.

Peter didn't mention he only had an Indonesian driving licence and was used to driving weapon carriers and jeeps, but he felt that - under the circumstances - this small oversight could be overlooked!

As soon as Peter set off in the van the electrician flaked out and slept all the way into Christchurch.

In the centre of the city, Peter woke him, declaring: "We are now in Christchurch."

"Man," the electrician replied, "You saved my life!"

Peter left him there and made his way to Lyttleton where he caught the ferry to Wellington, and again started hitching north.

"I went via Palmerston North and Napier, which was the scene of a terrible earthquake in 1931," said Peter.

"I remembered seeing photographs of this earthquake in the Dutch newspapers, as a boy in Holland," he said.

Peter also visited Whakatane, Rotorua, Lake Taupo and Tauranga on the Bay of Plenty, before arriving in Auckland.

He telephoned Gwen's mother in St Heliers - who had heard all about him from Gwen - and she welcomed him to stay.

"Gwen's Mum was a lovely lady," said Peter.

Peter's first task was to find a job so he tried the Farmers Trading Company - a big department store in the centre of Auckland.

As luck would have it, there was a job going in the menswear section - the same section he had worked in at Murdoch's in Sydney.

Farmers was about 20 minutes' drive along the waterfront from St Heliers and quite an expensive area, so Peter knew he had to find accommodation closer to the city.

"I found lodgings with a family in the city centre where my evening meal was provided," he said.

"This way, I could save about five pounds a week. The wages in those days were only about eight pounds a week, and the rent 30 shillings a week."

At Farmers Peter met Cliff, whose mother was English and father a New Zealander and ex-pilot.

Cliff lived in Takapuna on the North Shore of Auckland Harbour which, in those days, could only be accessed by ferry, as the Harbour Bridge was not yet built.

Peter spent quite a few weekends with Cliff and his Mum and Dad at Takapuna, and they would go surfing or out on the boat.

"We usually took our refreshments at a milk bar as the beer parlours didn't appeal to me," said Peter.

After Peter had been at Farmers for a couple of months, a Dutchman called Mr Blitz called to see the buyer at Peter's department.

He was from Amsterdam and had some good textile samples.

As Mr Blitz was Dutch, Farmer's chief buyer thought he should deal directly with Peter.

"So I took the place of the purchase officer and Mr Blitz placed his order through me," said Peter.

A week later Mr Blitz called in to Farmers again and this time, he invited Peter around for a meal with his wife and family in Mount Albert.

At Farmers Peter also met a Dane called Ellis Staggard, who was formerly in the Danish Navy.

He had tattoos and could walk on his hands.

When Peter asked Ellis what he did for a living, he said: "I carry dead pigs on my shoulders!"

Ellis worked in the freezing works and it was he who invited Peter to the New Settlers Club, where he would introduce him to people from all over the world.

"This, of course, was where I met Joyce, Eileen and Jerry Brakevelt, on New Year's Eve 1950," said Peter.

Peter remembers Mum was a bit shy to dance at first.

"I had to get her up and bring her on to the dance floor, but I think it was playing darts that brought us together."

Later that night, Joyce and Peter went for a milkshake and at the stroke of midnight gave each other a New Year kiss.

The next day they went to Milford Beach and Peter recalls the swimsuit Joyce wore, but it was that first kiss on New Year's Eve that started it all.

As Peter said, "That was where I met my Waterloo."

THE GOLCAR LILY

The Early Years 1929 -1950

"Eee, she's ta' bonny to live!" exclaimed next-door-neighbour Mrs Walters when she first saw newborn baby, Elaine Joycelyn Taylor.

Joyce came into the world in the small village of Golcar, some 10 miles from the town of Huddersfield, Yorkshire, on October 20, 1929.

Her first memory was of older brother Phil bringing home a hedgehog in a bucket to their house, 'Acre Cottage'.

Joyce - who was three at the time - desperately wanted to keep the hedgehog as a pet.

Understandably, she wasn't allowed and got most upset!

"I remember another time my friend Ted and I ate all the peas growing in the garden, leaving only the empty pods," said Joyce.

"Of course, when Nana and the neighbours went to pick the peas and found there were none, there was merry hell to pay!"

Joyce also remembers the night Phil came home with blood streaming down from his eye.

"I was sitting in the bath in the front room when Phil walked in," she said.

"He had been out to the library and somebody had fired a pea-shooter and accidentally hit him in the eye. Luckily, after a trip to the infirmary, he was fine."

Soon after this, the family moved to a house in Scar Lane.

"But the rent was too dear," said Joyce, "So we moved to Myrtle Terrace for a more affordable nine shillings a week.

"There were only three toilets for the five houses in the block, so the middle and end houses had to share facilities. But as ours was the first in the row we were lucky and had our own toilet."

The Taylors had no bathroom though, and were forced to bathe down in the cellar.

"Nana would fill the tin bath with hot water from the gas boiler which was lit from underneath," said Joyce.

"Bath night was something to really look forward to in those days!"

A beautiful picture of Joyce aged nearly 18, drawn in 1947 by her artist brother Phil.

Much later, when she was 18, Joyce remembers an incident with Eileen and their boyfriends at the time - Leo and Peter.

"Nana and Pop had gone to Morecombe for the weekend so we decided to have a party with another girlfriend Brenda, and a chap called Mike Healey, to make up the six," she said.

"We borrowed a record player from Phil's friend, Terry Gledhill. The only embarrassing moment came when one of the guests asked where the bathroom was. Luckily, Eileen came to the rescue and replied, as calm as you like, 'just outside, third on the left!'"

Joyce's first school was Golcar Church School which she attended from the age of five.

"We were very poor in those days, although Pop had a good job in the mill office," said Joyce.

"Nana received about three pounds-a-week housekeeping and Pop kept the rest. Nana had to pay all the bills and everything out of that three pounds."

Nana worked part-time in the mill next to Acre Cottage, sorting cotton and wool waste from the big mills.

Pop wanted Joyce to work in the mill too but the girls were having none of it so, at the tender age of 14, Joyce enrolled at Galloway's Secretarial College.

"I don't know where Nana got the money from, but I went there for a year to learn shorthand and typing," said Joyce.

"If it hadn't been for that training I could have been stuck working at the mill."

At 15, Joyce got her first job at a firm called Pickups, but she hated it.

Soon after starting, she was at the post office picking up a parcel, when she bumped into an old classmate from Galloway's, Marie Knight.

"She told me she was leaving her job at the infirmary," said Joyce.

"That same lunchtime, I went up to the infirmary to ask about the job and got it. I met some really nice people there, including lifelong friends like Eileen and Kenneth."

In 1949, at the age of 20, Joyce and Eileen decided to emigrate to Australia as Eileen had an uncle there who had emigrated after the First World War.

But they changed their minds when they heard Phil would be emigrating to New Zealand after he left the RAF.

So, after the usual medicals and interviews, Joyce and Eileen left for Wellington on the liner Atlantis on November 25, 1949.

"Nana came with us as far as London and we stayed one night at The Strand Palace Hotel," said Joyce.

"When the cabby dropped us at the hotel, a funny thing happened. Nana gave him a sixpence tip, but he didn't even say thank you. Nana was quite taken aback!"

The Atlantis was the proverbial 'slow boat to China' stopping many times along the way.

The first port of call was Port Said, Egypt.

Here Joyce received an unexpected letter from Nana saying she and Pop had secured a passage to New Zealand!

"They had two cancellations on a ship sailing on December 10, 1949," said Joyce.

"Nana had always wanted to go but had finally put her foot down, giving Pop an ultimatum - either they go together or she would leave him!"

After auctioning most of their possessions, Nana and Pop left England on a Blue Star Line ship on time.

Meanwhile, Joyce and Eileen sailed on through Aden to Colombo, Ceylon where they decided to explore the city.

"We finished up in the Colombo native quarter," said Joyce.

"A young boy attached himself to us, guiding us to a basement where a large, fat Indian was sitting behind a desk. He looked very pleased to see us and brought out some big trays of rings and necklaces saying we could pick what we wanted."

When Joyce and Eileen explained they had no money, he said no problem - he had his car outside and would only need 'a little consideration!'

Suddenly, it dawned on them that they could be in considerable danger.

Quickly, they dashed up the stairs, and out of the basement onto the street, where luckily they bumped into some others from the ship.

Back on the ship, however, more drama awaited.

Some years earlier, Joyce and Eileen had met a pilot called John Sands on the train to Leicester while visiting Eileen's aunty.

"I kept in touch with him by letter but couldn't believe my eyes when I saw him waiting for me on the ship," said Joyce.

"He was stationed in Colombo with the Meteorological Office and had been following the ship by plane for the past few days.

"He came on board by 'bumboat' but someone pinched his wallet on the way."

Unfortunately for John, Joyce already had an admirer - a Welshman called John Hall who she had met on the ship.

It didn't take the new John long to realise he was wasting his time and he soon left with his tail between his legs!

The ship's next stop was Fremantle, Western Australia where Joyce and John visited a milk bar, ordering steak, eggs and chips.

"You couldn't get a steak in England, and there was also lots of chocolate and other goodies, it was unbelievable," said Joyce.

In Wellington, Joyce said her goodbyes to John, who was going on to Rotorua, and caught the train to Auckland where she and Eileen were met by Phil at the station.

"Phil had rented a duplex in Tarama Road, Royal Oak, with the landlord, Mr Chitham, living in the other half," she said.

"When we reported to Immigration about work, Eileen went in first and couldn't believe her luck when she landed a plum job in the Health Department."

Joyce finished up with a boring job at Maori Affairs but after nine months, she moved on to a much better one working for a plastic surgeon, Mr Manchester, at Middlemore Hospital.

And it was while working there - and boarding with Eileen at Mrs Rowe's in Mount Albert - that Joyce first met Peter on New Year's Eve 1950 at the New Settler's Club, but that's another story.

THE END