

My Life and Memories

Extract from Paul's story

I was born in 1920 in Wandsworth, London the second of five children. I had an older sister Eileen and three younger sisters: Margaret, Theresa and Cecelia. Our father was an Irish Roman Catholic, and although he was killed by a motor car when he was only 30, his faith was handed down to us all. Father had recently qualified as a teacher of English when he died and his death had a major bearing on our childhood. Mother was pregnant with my youngest sister when father died and found herself widowed with four and a half young mouths to feed. There was no social security in those days.

My sister Margaret, to whom I was very close, was disabled from an early age due to polio – her legs were “in irons” as a child. She was a pretty girl and always down to earth and full of fun in spite of her physical difficulties. Margaret and I were sent to an orphanage soon after our father's death. In those days the girls were kept separately from the boys and it was awful to be separated not only from mother but also from my sister.

The family was soon reunited and mother worked tirelessly to provide a good home for us all. Although we were poor we learned good manners and were well educated. As the only boy my education was given the greatest priority and, with help from the local priest, I was sent away to a catholic boarding school in Burwash, Sussex. I hated it and often tried to run away. To me, there is no worse feeling than being separated from those you love.



Paul with great grand daughter Louisa

During the war I worked as a Sergeant in the RAF and, in all due modesty, I was good at fixing aircraft. Margaret worked in the Admiralty as a typist – a very good job in those days. Once when I was home on leave, Margaret and I narrowly escaped death when a doodle bug landed close to us. We had a special bond and looked after one another whenever danger was close. Margaret and I had another narrow escape when spectators at the Farnborough Air Show in the 1950's. A crash caused many deaths close by and I feared the worst for Margaret. I eventually saw her instantly recognisable little legs and leg irons protruding from under a car and thanks be to God she was uninjured....

My greatest joys? Having a family of my own and my grandson becoming a pilot; this was something that I had always wanted for myself. Also my “second chance” in my relationship with Rene. My greatest regrets? Never knowing my father and any hurt and pain that I may have caused to others.