



The First Thirty Years



I have always felt my life really began at the age of thirteen when I started my first classes in bookbinding. I was in fact born on June 13, 1935 in London at the Princess Beatrice Hospital. I weighed all of three pounds. Now, at the age of seventy-two I have managed to gain, on average, three pounds a year since!

Frequently I am asked how I entered the field of bookbinding and conservation, and the response is always the same: there is a vague connection with early instruction; as a three-year-old tot I began my regular schooling under the tutelage of a wonderful lady, Miss Blades, who taught copperplate penmanship. This early schooling was probably the first seed planted in my head that would lead me to fifty years of growing in and learning the wonderful crafts of bookbinding, binding design, and book conservation. Or maybe I was influenced when I was eleven or twelve and visited Hatchards, the famous London bookshop established in 1797 near Piccadilly Circus. I was visiting the store with my father, who was painting the inside of the shop, and I stopped to look at a display of bindings in the window. It is still a mystery to this day the exact moment when that seed was planted.

I remember the blitz of London during the Second World War, when my school was destroyed during one night's bombing. Other buildings within our apartment complex and our own apartment suffered severe damage. The blocks of apartments were in West Kensington, very near the Olympia Exhibition Centre. The school was practically next door to the apartments. Sadly more than seventy people, mostly those who were sleeping in a bomb shelter, were killed. My sister Irene and I were sleeping in another shelter nearby. Fortunately we were safe although rather shaken up because some of those lost that night were classmates and other children who attended my school. It was a tough night, but as kids we recovered so quickly that sometimes we would go out after a night of bombing to find pieces of shrapnel with German markings. I formed a collection, which I kept in my bedroom much like collecting baseball cards.

The movie *Hope and Glory* is eerily close to how my life was spent at the time of the Blitz. Once, a group of us went through a bombed-out house looking for any kind of trinket we could find. Suddenly the police arrived in a Black Maria and

started to yell at us to come out, but of course we just ran and hid in various parts of the house. The police finally rooted us out, placed all of us in the van, and took us to the police station. I was considered the ringleader as I was the eldest (I was ten at the time). Our parents all had to come and fetch us. Mine were furious, but in retrospect it all is rather amusing. One other time I got involved with the law was when as youngsters strolling the streets we would look for houses where the milkman had recently delivered bottles of fresh milk. We would open them and drink the cream that had settled at the top and then replace the caps. At one of these houses, a policeman was laying in wait, so I of course was caught and dragged up to our flat, crying all the way. As we reached the front door the policeman let me go with a stern warning. The fear he instilled in me must have worked, as it was the last time I stole cream.

Irene was thirteen years older than me and practically raised me during the war years in London, though for one year I was evacuated to Leeds in Yorkshire as part of the government's program to remove children from the bombings over London. We were equipped with gas masks and placed on trains by our parents, who remained behind. On arrival in Leeds we were taken to a church in the center of the city and handed over to ladies who had offered to take children into their homes. They were paid by the government to help with the extra expenses. A lady named Mrs. Wilson selected me, so for nearly a year I lived in the middle of Leeds, in a fairly poor neighborhood. We shared outside toilets in the alley behind the house. In that year we never had sugar or butter because of cost or rationing. Spartan living, I must say.

The photo shows a victory party being held in our apartment complex celebrating the end of the war.

Second World War
victory party at our
apartment complex





ABOVE: Soccer team
in 1950. I am
holding the ball

LEFT: My mother
at age nineteen

RIGHT: Playing cricket



My father, George William, was a fairly heavy drinker and often lost his temper with my mother and me, especially during the weekends after spending time at the pub. He had joined the Coldstream Guards in 1914 at the age of eighteen and went to Europe in the First World War. He was captured early and spent nearly four years in captivity, which my mother said transformed him into a very hard man. It was only when I started bookbinding classes in 1948 at the Central School of Arts and Crafts that he began to show interest in what I was doing, and he soon became very supportive of my studies.