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Dear Mr. Petty,

As a result of being sent a cutting from the Cambridge News this week I feel impelled to send you a few memories of my own ...

CHILDHOOD at Hills Road, CAMBRIDGE 1937-1945

I was born at the Brunswick Nursing Home, which faced Midsummer Common, during an afternoon snowstorm in March 1937, a momentous year for my middle-aged parents, as I was to be an only child, and for the whole nation celebrating with great optimism the Coronation of a new king after the Abdication crisis. I was taken to our newly occupied home at 6, Hills Road (now Carter Jonas), a three storied elegant dwelling with steps up to the front door, high ceilings, large windows, and with a semi-basement entered by more stone steps next to and below the front garden. My mother used the downstairs front room as a fitting room, for she was a "Court Dressmaker" with a high-class clientèle, which included peeresses, and the wives of college dons, town businessmen and many a spinster lady. Elsewhere was a workroom with several seamstresses. The name of my mother was spelt out in gold letters across the façade of the building. The rest of the house was entirely ours, and a nursery was prepared for me in the basement front room. My mother's busy life was made easier by a daily housemaid and cook, who lived elsewhere. My father was employed in a merchant bank in the City of London, travelling up to the capital and back six days a week by train, which was partly the reason for living near the railway station.

I cannot claim any unusually early memories, apart from having happy, sweet-producing meetings with my grandfather who used

to slip into our back garden unannounced by way of a door in our garage facing Union Street. He had been a chimney sweep with his own business, dislodging the soot from many of the college chimneys. Now he lived with his sister Rose and her husband Joe Fairweather, who ran the "Oak" public house opposite the Catholic Church.

Obviously the outbreak of the second World War occurred, but passed me by at such a tender age. I do remember that blackout curtains were made for the nursery windows, enlivened with stencilled scenes of Dutchmen and windmills. Apparently for a short time I was removed from the nursery to make way for my father's sister and two children from London, when enemy action seemed likely, but failed to occur (until later!) Anyhow, my nursery was restored to me, and I was found a live-in full time nursemaid who had been professionally trained for the job. She came from Ockington, has kept in touch with me ever since, and now joins some of her memories to my own. She tells me that she saw, through the window of the nursery half-way below ground the tramping feet and legs of the care-worn soldiers marching towards the town from the railway station, returning from Dunkirk.

Next to my nursery was the dank and narrow brick lined wine cellar, covered with flaking whitewash. Into this claustrophobic place the whole household would descend in dressing gowns, whenever there was an air-raid warning. I never really understood what was going on, but was very bored, whenever looking at the stored bunting and decorations which had survived the Coronation.

My nursemaid was treated as one of the family, and slept in a box-room at the top of the house. But she was downstairs with me on the night of January 16th, 1941 when the bombs fell on Hills Road. We were not in the wine cellar but in the nursery when the blast blew out the plate glass windows of the house facing the main road, and she threw herself over my bed to protect me, as shards of glass showered over us, and embedded themselves

in the bedclothes. Outside in the street, and in views from our house, the Perse School was burning fiercely and I claim to remember the horrific scene. St. Paul's Church was damaged, we later learned — the place where I had been christened in June 1937 and where I would be married in 1963.
Next day we were among the first to learn the full extent of the damage along the road, with graphic details about the victims and the destruction. My mother knew the publican of the "Globe" quite well — a Mr. Ward who was a "sporting man" with a taste for horse racing (and betting), hare coursing and dogs. He left his wife to run the pub, and they kept exotic parrots, with mixed vocabularies, in the bar room. After the war they moved to a pub opposite the railway station at Hunstanton. I recall the unique beery smell he exuded, which was foreign to my experience.

The day arrived when we could hardly have got nearer to wartime action. Out for a walk my nursemaid was wheeling me near Mill Road bridge in the middle of the day, when a German bomber flew overhead, so low that she actually saw the pilot's head in the cockpit. Later the citizens of Cambridge were only too well aware of what happened to the houses beside the bridge.

From June 1940 my father, though still working in London, had joined the Home Guard (5th Battn. Cambs Regt.) and disappeared every Sunday morning for, as a child, I knew not what reason. But I have bright memories of his return home in uniform for a ~~Sunday~~ traditional Sunday lunch, seated at the dining room table with all the cutlery and glass shining. I was glad to have his company, since London and the Home Guard took up so much of his time.
In 1942, to his great chagrin, he was called up to the regular army, though aged 41, and served in the Royal Corps of Signals in many parts of England, followed by Northern France and Belgium. Being involved with signals and codes he devised a very ingenious system of hiding in the text of his letters home the exact location he had

reached on the Continent. I still have all his letters, and the method of cracking his special code which out-foxed the censors. Back home in Cambridge my mother became an air raid warden for the Cuttis House stretch along the main road, and I remember the cache of stirrup pumps and sand buckets.

My small world was still concentrated entirely on Hills Road, where my mother's workpeople often included seamstresses who had fled from Nazi Vienna and such places, when the talk I overheard included allusions to a happier life under Franz Joseph and the waltz kings. One of my mother's "girls" was killed in a Brighton hotel while on a weekend visit.

When the time came for schooling I merely crossed over to Hills Road to the Shrubbery School opposite, and when on one occasion I was kept at home because of a childhood illness the headmistress personally delivered to me a jelly to cheer me up. This proved to me that, although she looked like a witch to me, wearing her black teacher's gown on all occasions, she was well disposed towards me.

As time went on the town became full of American servicemen — they were colourful and loud. My younger cousin was not averse to begging for chewing gum, which they readily handed over. On one memorable day I joined an eager group of Cambridge children for a party at the "Bull Hotel" organised by the Americans, where every kind of toy and food was available for our delight. There were presents and parcels and items we had never seen before, such as linen discs filled with beans, which were to be thrown about like quoits. It was so bright and colourful, after all the prevailing drabness.

In 1945 with the coming of Peace the world changed for most people, and also for me. My parents decided to move to a large terraced house in Bateman Street, which had lain unoccupied throughout the war because the German architect tenant had been interned or fled back to Germany. We moved into our new dwelling on V.J. Day, and became acquainted with our new neighbours by dancing round the bonfire which had been built in the middle of the road, regardless of traffic.