

## CHAPTER 12

In the meantime we lived life steadily and as happily as most families - better than most as we also had our cat and dog contingent to keep us contented! We continued to caravan many weekends in the year and for our summer holidays although the weekends got a bit more involved than before, when Eric was eleven. It came about like this.

I used to play our piano a lot and we made friends with a couple of people who liked to come and play with me, plus Myrtle on a little drum kit that we managed to scrape together. One of the friends, Tony Burns, was a saxophonist and clarinetist and Eric liked the sound of that. He was always asking when 'Misser Buurns' was coming again. One day we had all gone to the Royal Festival Hall to see a ballet (on the fit-up stage that was never supposed to be installed over the hallowed concert hall marble slab!). It turned out that there was a choice of the cheapest seats - either at the back or right at the front next to the orchestra 'pit'. We naturally chose the front and were right next to the double basses. Eric was fascinated by the look and sound of them and on our return home, demanded to be allowed to have one to learn to play. As Eric was, and is, rather small like us, we thought that that was not a practical idea, so took him to see a friend, Bob North, who played the trombone, thinking that that was at least in the right sort of register! Eric liked the sound and managed to get some notes out of it straight away, but his arms were too short even for the first position, so that idea was out for at least a few years more. That left us in a quandary - it was obvious that Eric had perhaps some talent to be encouraged but needed a smaller instrument. The usual young child's (he was just seven) small school instruments were not looked on with much favour. The try out of the trombone gave us an idea - he had managed the note production quite well at his first try, so how about a trumpet? He agreed to consider it, so we found some advertisements in Exchange and Mart and telephoned around. One elderly man still had not sold his, so off we went to have a look. It seemed in reasonable condition and Eric managed to get a few notes out of it, so for £ 7 he at last had an instrument. Surprisingly, seeing that none of us knew anything about brass instruments, he kept it for many years and with a bit of later renovation and different, better, mouthpieces, he did not change it until he could afford to do so from his own earnings.

The next problem was how to teach him? I bought him a trumpet tutor from the local music shop and between us - me reading and trying the odd demonstration and he playing - we managed to get a few simple tunes going reasonably well. Well enough that it was obvious that he should have proper lessons. Back to Bob for advice and he put us in touch with Al Winnett who both played for a living and gave lessons. Eric got on well with Al and progressed at great speed. In fact, so well that after a year Al told us that he couldn't, in all fairness, give Eric any more lessons until Eric could read the words on music scores as well as he could read the music! Unfortunately, Eric is dyslexic and did not get any recognition of it at school and any remedial teaching until he was almost ten. So, a year or so later, after a hard struggle by Eric with just some help from us, he was able to go back to Al for some more lessons and progressed so well that he became a member of the older schools orchestra - the music teacher really loved having a trumpet to arrange for as well as the usual gaggle

of squeaking violins and recorders! He did so well that she persuaded the headmistress to put his name forward, despite his age, for consideration by the county for one of the junior exhibitor awards given out every year. They agreed to do so and he passed his audition to go to the Saturday morning exhibitor studies at the Royal College of Music - thus four very proud people - his parents and both his teachers. Now what to do at weekends if we still wanted to caravan?

Eric and Myrtle tried out the normal LT bus route from Finchley to Kensington but then realised that the Green Line route passed right through Finchley and by the front of the Albert Hall - the RSM lying directly behind. That route was hardly more expensive than the normal bus or tube and very much quicker and one went through Finchley at a good time for me to give Eric his breakfast and then get him to the RSM in plenty of time for the 9 am start every Saturday. The county agreed to pay the standard fare a term at a time so that covered most of the travelling expenses. What was also good was that that particular route also passed near to many of the areas we regularly caravanned to north of London, so just an earlier wake-up in the caravan gave me good time to get him to the nearest coach stop to where we were, so he could still catch the same coach. So every year we got the new timetables from Green Line. We found out that several of the routes used the coach stand outside the Albert Hall as a main stopping point for West London, so we could press several routes into service depending on where we were that weekend. As the routes were so reliable, we could also practically guarantee to meet the right coach for his return on the Saturday afternoons. I don't think that Eric missed one Saturday for the six years that he went to the RCM, although several times the bus conductor would have to wake him up in time to get off on his, by then, well-known journey!

Thus the usual and not so usual changes in family life. caravan holidays and weekends: Michael and Eric growing up and changing schools; Myrtle and I working at the Tower Theatre in the TRC; the cats growing more mature and two of them still enjoying their caravan outings, until, all of a sudden, some rather unusual changes came about.

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