

I get relations

We had Sunday outings to Lyons Corner House in the Strand. We'd all get dressed up and go across the road to the bus stop in Dalston Lane. I always held my dad's little finger for crossing the road. If there was a queue, we always went to the front, because dad used a crutch. This was due to a childhood accident (resulting in amputation above the right knee), but it seems that people always assumed it was a war injury. (I suppose, in a way, it was since he was knocked down by in a street accident.) Anyway, we'd be first on to the 38 bus, and, with any luck, we'd get all four front seats upstairs. So the panorama would flow past for the next 15 minutes - Balls Pond Road, Rosebery Avenue, Theobalds Road, Shaftesbury Avenue. Then a walk down to Trafalgar Square, and Lyons Corner House. A string trio playing, we had sardines on toast and silver service tea.

At other times we visited relatives, mostly living in flats in a tight community in Tenterden Street in the east end, near Commercial Street. (This was on top of Petticoat Lane market, but we never went there.) Auntie Nellie (dad's sister) and Uncle Mark. She of the mad staring eyes, he of the velvet voice. Their kitchen (scullery?) turned out to be a bathroom as well - the "table" was a wooden top over the bath. They had one son, Ronnie - a very smooth sophisticated person, or so it seemed to me. Then there was Auntie Eva, a great coarse woman, and Uncle Dave, who was a bus driver. They had a son Laurie who wore pebble-thick glasses and spoke very enthusiastically. In the flats in Dalston Lane was a sister of Auntie Doris, "Auntie" Gertie. I think maybe she was divorced and she used plenty of make-up. Certainly, she had style. Her (second) husband was Jack Salt, always referred to by his full name to distinguish him from dad. And last, and gloriously larger than life was dad's brother, Uncle Morry and his wife Auntie Doris.

They had two daughters, Maureen (who had a soft spot for me, and I for her) who I called "Warmy" and Helen who was incredibly tall. Morry had pop-eyes and an infectiously happy nature, combined with a loud voice. Doris was tall, stylish and had the most expressive voice (in the Jewish style) I've ever heard. Doris and mum would go shopping together in Ridley Road market - they were known there as "the tall Mrs Schuman and the short Mrs Schuman". On mum's side, there were sisters Sarah and Esther and Jessie. Auntie Sarah was a cor-blimey cockney from Bethnal Green, married to Uncle Lew, a taxi-driver. They had three children, Irene, Maurice and Sheila, who was much younger than the others. The visits I remember were to their new home in Hendon, they having been "bombed-out" of East London. This seemed like paradise - a house (not a flat) with a garden. To go there meant a long journey by train (Dalston Junction to Finchley Road & Frognal) and bus (113). The atmosphere there was always exciting - occasionally Sheila made me sit still while she combed my hair. Auntie Ettie (the maiden aunt) lived with them - after having lived with her sister Jessie until her sudden death. I never met Jessie, but mum used to talk about her in a way which suggested that Jessie was the most cultured of the four. (Now, I think it may have meant that mum was.)

And then there were the grandmothers (the grandfathers were both dead before I knew anything about them, partly because mum and dad waited such a long time before having children - mum was 40 years older than me). On my father's side, a large coarse-featured

woman who suffered from asthma. Consequently, she was always associated in my mind with towels, steam and strange smells. On my mother's side, a tiny, charming white-haired old lady who smiled a lot and had a soft voice who we called booba. Neither of them could speak a word of English, both of them having been well into middle age at the time of immigration, and perhaps felt no need to make the effort, leaving that sort of thing to their children.

There was another Uncle Dave (Herman) but his precise role escapes me at the moment. I think, anyway, that he and his family moved to South Wales during the war. So, by necessity, it was dad's side of the family that we saw most of, since we all lived near each other. Indeed, with dad, Morry and Doris, Gertie and Jack and sometimes Eva and Dave, there were frequent and noisy get-togethers in our flat. [Woe is me - I forgot Auntie Leah, another of dad's sisters, who later moved to Sidcup.]