

Baden Ethelbert Frank Miller

I was born on 25th May 1926 at Covingham Farm, Swindon. My father was Jesse Ethelbert Miller who was born on the 8th December 1902. My mother was Ethel Miller (nee Embling) and she was born on 7th February 1907.

My father was a farm labourer and moved to Pennyhooks Farm in Shrivenham in 1926. My mother's parents, Mr and Mrs Frank Embling, and my uncle, Mr Francis Embling, owned the farm. My two brothers were born at Pennyhooks Farm- Percy on June 28th 1928 and Tony on 9th September 1931. The nearest house was about a mile away either at Shrivenham or West Mill Farm the other side of the brook which ran along the bottom side of the farm.

I started school when I was 5 years old and had to walk down the farm lane to get to Shrivenham School in all winds and weather. When the time came for my brothers to start school we all walked together. The Headmaster was Mr Dance and the teachers were Mrs Dance, Mr Brooks, Miss Goater and Miss Gregory.

We really enjoyed life on the farm. There was no stress of any kind and of course we had the animals. We had cows and Bill the Bull, 2 cart horses, Windy and Blossom not forgetting our mongrel dog Bob. Farm life was always interesting whether it was driving the tractor, ploughing with one horse or milking the cows. We used to take our corn to be ground at West Mill where Brian Lane lived. We used to make our own cheese and butter. We had neither electric gas nor running water and only an earth toilet. In winter we used to have to thaw out the water pump to the well when it was always frozen with ice.

In 1936 Dad bought Hillside Cottage in Watchfield for £100. It was a small, 2 bedroomed, red cottage with a thatched roof. . We had a long garden of about 75 yards in length with an earth toilet at the end of it. We had gas lighting and every Saturday night my mum got the galvanised bath tub in and filled it with water from the wood fired copper so that we could have a bath. I was always first, being the eldest, and the followed by Percy and then Tony. We used to listen to "In Town Tonight" on the radio which was powered by a Wet Battery. This battery we had to take it up to Tyres Garage in Shrivenham to be charged up. It cost 3pence. The children from Watchfield had to walk to school at Shrivenham, but Mr Knapp took the 5 and 6 year olds in his covered wagon which of course was horse-drawn.

When I was 11 to 12 years old I got a part time job delivering milk for Mr Frank Cox who lived at the back of Shrivenham Church. I used to have 3-wheeled trike with a large box on the front, into which we put a churn of fresh milk. People used to put a milk jug by the door with a note and I would measure out with a pint measure the milk they required into the jug. Then about 6 months later I got a Saturday job with Mr Harris the Family Butcher. I used to deliver meat on a cycle to Bourton, Bishopstone, Ashbury, Longcot, Shrivenham and Watchfield no matter what the weather was like. When I left school at 14 years of age I worked full time for Mr Harris. I used to have to call him "Sir". Mrs Harris was very nice to me for she gave

me tea and cakes for my lunch. The tea was in a china cup and saucer. My pay then was 10 shillings a week – in today's money that is 50 pence.

The Second World War started in 1939 when I was 13 years old. At 14 I joined 214 Squadron Air Training Corps at Highworth with Frank Benford, Tudor Thomas, Jim Lyford, Allen Pope, Harold Pope and Alec Chambers. I used to put on my uniform and on Sundays I used to go up to the aerodrome at Watchfield about 200 yards from home and go for a flight in a Tiger Moth, Airspeed Oxford or Avro Anson. It was really good. Then at 16 I left the ATC and joined the Army Cadet Force in Shrivenham. Les Judd and Tom Gleave were the Officers. I was made Staff Sergeant and we used to go to camp living in tents for training. I stayed with them until I joined the Army in 1944 when I was called up. Previous to that at 16 I had started work at the Royal Military College of Science which of course I saw built in 1937. There I was employed as an Electrician's mate working with Mr Jack Beard, Mr Bert Lester and the Foreman, Mr Harold Woolman. I enjoyed my time working there until I got my call-up papers.

I then reported to Meanne Barracks in Colchester, Essex. Come to think about it I had only ever been to Swindon and once a year on a school outing to Weymouth, so going to Colchester was like going to another country to me. After my primary training which lasted for 5 weeks I was then posted to the Royal Infantry Regiment but still at Colchester. My Army number was 14895326.

I did 8 weeks advanced training during which I was given a rifle Enfield 303. We did street fighting at Great Yarmouth amid the bombed buildings. I also took a course on laying and diffusing mines and booby traps at Happisburgh near North Walsham, Norfolk where I was stationed until posted to Italy. Later, in 1945 I was sent to Trieste in Italy, travelling there by train through France and Austria. We were not in carriages but in cattle trucks which were filled with straw to keep us warm. It was a most unusual journey for we would stop at stations and get out to queue for food in our mess tents. I was transferred to the Queen's Royal Regiment in Italy and promoted to Lance-Corporal, unpaid. We used to have a badge with a black cat on our sleeve so we were called the Black Cats 56th London Division. I was on guard duty on what was called the Morgan Line, the border between Italy and Yugoslavia, then in January 1946 my mother had a car accident with my brother Percy so I was sent home as she was not expected to live. Thankfully she did.

I was posted to Green Lane Stratton at the Food Supply Centre which was near home. I was a driver so I used to take the 15cw truck home each night. After about 6 months my mother improved and I was then sent to Stoughton Barracks, Guildford where I was a Sergeants' Mess waiter and also Barman for RSM Harcup. For this I got an extra 10 shillings a month (950 pence now).

While on leave in May 1946 I met at a Shrivenham Memorial Hall Dance the lovely lady who became my wife, Eileen Joyce Doyle who was 18 at the time. We got married on the 27th September 1947 at the Swindon Registry Office in Milton Road. For our honeymoon we went off Braunton near Ilfracombe in Devon. We stayed in a guest house and I think it cost us £7 for the week and that included the train fare from Swindon. After I was de-mobilised in 1948 I got a job at the Royal Military College of Science as a driver/fireman. My friend, Dick Cooper, was also at the fire Station.

At this time we were living at Pennyhooks farm with my uncle as my Gran and Gramp Embling had died by then.

Our first child Sandra was born the following year at the Kent Road Maternity Hospital in Old Town. She was followed by Chris the next year. We rented a farm cottage, 53 Rhymes Cottage at Swanhill Shrivenham which was just across the fields. This belonged to Captain and Mrs Colledge of Stallpits Farm and we paid 10 shillings(50 pence) a week on condition that I helped out on the farm during harvest and haymaking etc. I used to cycle to work at the Fire Station. I did 60 hours a week for £5.15 shillings a week.(£5.75p now). I worked there for 9 years. I had known Bob Maw in the Army and he worked with me on the fire pumps. As an aside, my father, Jesse Miller, an energetic man who would turn his hand to anything and do it well, had bought a house tucked away on Shrivenham High Street with an orchard. He rented the Railway carriage next to "Knapps Dairy" as well and used it to carry out his shoe repairing business for the village.

Later Tom Timms got me a job with the farmer at Beckett Stables, Gordon Cox. I helped on the farm for a 2 shillings and 6 pence per hour (12.5 pence now) ploughing and looking after the pigs and chickens. Gordon then decided to build a 9-hole golf course on the farm. Both Tom and I helped with this and my friend Bob Maw used to come along after work to help as well. It took about a year to build this course with all the fairways and the trees we had to plant. When it was completed it was known as Bremhill Park and we acted as green-keepers mowing the greens and fairways etc. and doing regular maintenance work.

I worked at the Fire Station until 1957 before getting a job at Vickers at South Marston as a time clerk for 3 years. I then applied for a job at Normans Furniture in Swindon. However I did not start it because after thinking about it I found I did not fancy it. I then started at Express Dairies in Faringdon with Charley Elbrow as a lorry driver, collecting milk in churns from the surrounding farms twice a day. But when winter came with the rain, wind and frost I found I was always wet through. So in November 1960 I went back into Vickers in the Invoice section. Meanwhile I had already had an interview at Deloro Stellite for a Security Officer. Eventually I got the job in May 1962 and worked there until 1969 when I was offered a job in the surgical part of Deloro making joints for hip replacements and so on. In 1971 Sam Medcraft, Ron Bateman and Norman Hibbins formed a new company called Metallo Medical at Barnfield Road, Swindon and asked me if I would like to join them. I became their first employee on 2nd August 1971. In 1987 we became Biomet Ltd, producing all sorts of implants and moving in 1987 to new premises purpose built for us in Murdoch Road, Dorcan, Swindon. I was made Stores Controller in 1985 and stayed with Biomet until 1991 when I retired at 65 years of age. I did about 20 years' service which I enjoyed and for the last 2 years of service I was on the staff and paid monthly.

Eileen and I have had a very happy life together. Altogether our large family numbered 9 children and all our children have remained close to us. After Sandra and Chris came Brian, Glenys, Melvin, Suesy, Stephen, Debra, and Wayne. We moved to Maskelyne Way in 1995 and 2 years later celebrated our Golden Wedding. It was a very special and happy occasion. Sandra and Suesy emigrated to Australia but both returned with their own families after a few years. In that time Eileen and I visited them in Australia several times.