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About the Author

"Mum" is a 93 year old with a razor sharp memory and the gift of gab.

How did Mum and Arthur feed the family of seven during the war years? Her story, [Let Us Eat Cake](#), and ration recipes are featured with the mmm MAHALITM stories.

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THE NIGHT YOU WERE BORN, CHRISTINA

Kathleen "Mum" Kirby



It was wartime in 1940. In early August my husband, Arthur, was in the British Mercantile Marine when he was shot in the leg and in hospital for five months.

Arthur was discharged from hospital on December 19th and joined our four children, my brother, his wife, and me in a two-room flat. Times were bad. Money was tight. And I was pregnant again.

Christmas night, I was in the throes of labor. My brother and his wife were away, so Arthur said he would go for the midwife. Because his injured leg was four inches shorter than the other, Arthur walked with two wooden canes. Yet, he was determined to go.

First he had to go down a long flight of stairs. Outside, there were three or four more steps leading to the path. The path led to more steps before the gate. The house next door was exactly the same: more steps.

I watched from the window as Arthur made his way in pitch darkness – no moon. No light. He was not familiar with the place and walked ever so gently with his two sticks. The right hand stick went into the next gate. He lost his balance, fell down the steps, and landed on his back.

Frightened, I ran down the steps and raced to him. I tried to get him up. "It's all right. I'll get up," he said.

Once up stairs, I made a fire and some tea. Arthur warmed himself while I woke up 6 1/2-year-old Michael. In preparation, we moved furniture, laid out the newly laundered baby clothes, and set up for the children who would be stirring the next morning. Everything was ready for the baby.

Meanwhile, the midwife had to be got. I wandered up the dark street, knocking at doors. No one was home. Then, I saw a dull, faint, light. I knocked and waited. After a while, a lady in a dressing gown opened the door. I mentioned what I had gone through. In shock, she couldn't believe it. "Stop worrying. I'll take care of everything," she said and sent her husband for the midwife.

There were no phones and street phones were few and far between. The midwife arrived a couple of hours later. By then, everything was ready to produce the infant and the fun began!

At daybreak the children stirred; Arthur took care of them, making sure they were dressed and fed.

I was expecting my brother George to return any minute. Whilst I was in the throes of labor, the midwife suggested we have a cup of tea. Hearing a knock on the door, she called, "George, would you make a cup of tea for us?" It wasn't George after all, but a good friend on leave from the Mercantile Marines. He was about to bring the tea upstairs, when the baby came. Tea was postponed. You were born, Christina!