

Evacuees at Rusko House



Back: May Munro, Aunt Mary Munro, John Munro, Jessie the maid and James Lindsay
Front: James & Alex Alexander, Cathie and Annie Munro & Nessie Alexander



Mrs. Alexander, Nessie & Alex

1939 - 1945

The Inhabitants,

Rusko House, near Gatehouse of Fleet

The Cochrane family: Commander and Mistress

Miss Molly, Miss Evelyn, Miss Sheila and Miss Cecilia

Mr Stubbs (Miss Sheila's husband)

Master Peter and Master Hamish

The Evacuees, from the Knightswood area of Glasgow:

Alex, James and Nessie Alexander

James Lindsay

Joyce O'Neil

Stanley Fensom

Ian McDade

Tommy and Alex Greig

May, John, Cathie, Annie, Ruby, Donald and Harry Munro

Harry Darroch
(for a few weeks)

Maids:

Jessie Shaw (Pickthall)
Greta Bryan

On 4th September, 1939, the day after the Second World War was declared, my two brothers and I left our home in Glasgow. We were being sent to stay in a safe place, away from any possible danger which might occur in our large city should there be an air raid. We joined hundreds of other children on a train which took us to Gatehouse of Fleet, a place nobody had heard of. Buses were waiting when we arrived in the darkness at Gatehouse Station. We clambered aboard and were driven to the Rutherford Hall in town.

The children and a few mums were tearful as we waited to be chosen by strangers and taken to live in their homes. Few people were wanting three children and we were among the last to be chosen. Eventually Mr Easton, minister of Girthon Church, rescued us and so we went to live in the Manse.

Miss Haugh the housekeeper looked after us. After school my two brothers went to play with the Taylor boys at nearby Disdoo Farm. I was miserable and lonely as I only had Miss Haugh for company. She didn't know what to do with a little seven year old girl. I was so unhappy.

When we had settled, mum came to visit us with some new winter clothes. Mr Easton told her he had volunteered to go to the army as a padre. He promised her he would find us a good home first.

After having us living in his home for six weeks, he had found us another. This was why, one dark October Friday night in 1939, we found ourselves in Mr Easton's car, arriving at Rusko House.

There was a shaft of light as the front door opened and a lady appeared. Mr Easton said, "Good evening. Miss Cochrane." They had a short conversation while six other children (including the gardener's daughter) crowded around us in the darkness, asking our names. Mr Easton said goodbye to us and the lady led the way into the house.

She introduced herself as Miss Evelyn as I was noticing the stag's head on the wall. I thought, "Poor stag." We were led through to the kitchen to meet Miss Molly - who was busy - and would always be busy in there. I noticed she was small and I thought she was so beautiful with her dark, shoulder length hair. Miss Evelyn was taller, with lovely reddish gold hair. They were both smiling at me and I just knew I was going to be happy living at Rusko.

Miss Evelyn led us out the kitchen along the passageway to the large room which was known as the Servants' Hall. This was where we would play and have our meals. There was a large table, and chairs. A large cupboard on the far wall stored our books and any games or toys we possessed. A large black pipe and little grate were a form of heating. A shelf on a wall held a radio. We still had plenty of space to play. Miss Evelyn led us upstairs to the Servants' bedrooms.

The far end one was occupied by three Munro sisters; next door was occupied by two boys, and the next by my two brothers, Alex and James. As there was not any room for me there, I was led through the swing door. I noticed eight towels hanging over the banister as I passed. "Lovely" I thought, as Miss Evelyn told me the first room on the left was mine, but I wished I had

someone to share it with.

Just outside it, Miss Evelyn had a table where she left our individual piles of clothes ready for school. On returning from school we lifted our play clothes and returned our school ones in their place. It was a busy comer.

In October, 1939, my first day living at Rusko began by the other evacuees showing me the grounds. We began at the side of the fish pond - we always referred to it as the "front" of the house.

Through the eyes of a seven year old it was vast. We stood at the top of the stairs looking into the orchard at all the apple trees. We could see Commander's bee hives at the bottom. There were huge plant holders decorating the lawn. Our favourite thing was the ornamental fish pond. The fountain ran into it and for a time there were beautiful fish swimming around. We wandered around to the other lawn with the two large trees. We would all have many happy hours playing there.

The children took me to the Gardener's Cottage next, to meet Mr and Mrs Stevenson. Their family consisted only of Joan, who was another playmate and the same age as me. Later they would be joined by Lois De Banzie, an evacuee and also in our age group. Her brother Ian was at Cally Palace (which was like a boarding school) for Secondary Education.

The evacuees then kindly took me to Keal Cottage where the gamekeeper, Mr Campbell, lived with Mrs Campbell and sons David and Alan. David was older, but Alan was in my class at school. Rusko Lodge was occupied by Mr and Mrs John Menzies. They did not have any family. Along at Pulcree Cottage was the Telfer family. Mary, the youngest member of the family, was also in my class at school. Mr and Mrs Telfer, their two sons and two daughters, all worked the farm for Mr and Mrs Grierson. Another two farm workers were Mr Shields and son Jock. They lived in the last cottage before Commander's dam. My first weekend at Rusko was very enlightening and I felt very happy.

I first saw Commander as he walked across the lawn. He wore fawn trousers tucked inside his Wellington boots, a checked shirt under his pullover, and a battered fawn hat. This was the way I would always see him dressed, except the pullover would get holes at the elbows. Miss Molly would always have to plead with him to let her wash it. He would finally relent, but he would not let her darn the holes !

On my first Monday at Rusko, I walked a different way to school. Instead of walking on the opposite side of the road past Cally Palace entrance from where the Girthon Manse used to be, here I was going past the farms towards school. Joan Stevenson was walking with us and Mary Telfer joined on at Putcree. Alan and David Campbell passed us on their bicycles. Sheila and Margaret Shaw who stayed near Ornockenoch also passed on their bicycles. May Munro (the oldest girl evacuee) carried a basket of sandwiches for our lunch. There would be jam or honey on them, made by Miss Molly. It would be the following year when we would be able to get cooked lunches at school.

On returning home to Rusko from school on my first day, I learned that

Blackloch was the first farm we passed. There was a pond beside it at this time. In winter it would freeze over and people would skate on it. One of them was Commander. I didn't see him myself, but seemingly he was very good at doing a figure eight.

I learned the next farm was Goatend. Mr and Mrs McWhirter lived there. They had a land girl working on the farm. She was from England, and we admired her in the uniform which she wore as she worked in the fields. I would think, "If the war is still on and I am old enough, then I would like to be a land girl." I loved animals and the uniform !

After passing Goatend Farm I loved to stand on the gate at the road's bend. There I had a clear view of Rusko House. Even although I was seven years old I thought it looked so majestic in the distance. When our family came to visit, how proud I felt when I showed them the view of where I lived !

I never liked being on my own on the road through Bambastie Wood. The wind would be blowing through the trees and I didn't like the noise. I would get past as quickly as I could. As I passed Pulcree Farm, Mr Grierson might be either turning his car on to, or leaving, the road near the farmhouse. He was not a friendly man. He was one of the few people who ever passed us in a motor car. Mrs Murray Usher might be in hers, to visit someone. Also, very occasionally Miss Evelyn or Commander might be going an errand in the car.

My first day walking home to Rusko was interesting and didn't take too long. Other days would take longer depending on the seasons. If there was wild fruit growing at the roadside then we would spend time gathering some, and ate it as quickly as it was gathered. Just over from Pulcree Cottage we watched sheep being dipped. On another occasion we stood fascinated as they were being shorn. Sometimes the boys would find a dead animal or bird and we would all need to have an inspection.

On arriving home to Rusko we all had a look at the Hall table. If any mail had arrived for us then Miss Evelyn left it there. Occasionally there might be a letter for a family, with a postal order inside. Sweets and everything else required coupons so we could only spend money if we had some coupons. We went upstairs, changed our clothes and played in the Hall until supper at 6pm.

Sometimes some children waited at the scullery door for Mr Campbell, the gamekeeper, to appear. This huge man would come in with Commander's gun dogs, Oliver and Flash. We watched fascinated as he produced a pheasant, rabbit or hare from the large pouch pockets in his jacket. He would then proceed to pluck feathers and gut and clean them. We all knew what we would be having for next night's supper. Oh how we all hated hare soup ! Mr Campbell would tidy up after letting us watch. In winter we waited for him. In summer - well, we were all too busy enjoying the outdoors !

Miss Molly did all the cooking and she was an expert at making cakes. Miss Evelyn attended to all our clothes. They both carried huge bundles of clothes across the lawn to the wash house on Mondays and Thursdays. There would be a mountain of sheets alone.

This was the war work they were doing. It was a priority job having to look after evacuee children. Therefore they did not get called away for the Forces or an ammunitions factory. Or even the land army. Commander claimed all the weekly allowances which were paid out by the government. I just hope he paid Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn as they worked so hard looking after us.

Miss Molly would have on a long rubber apron to work in the wash house - and also Wellingtons. There was a washing machine for most things. Each week, however, she washed all of our woollen jumpers and socks by hand. There would be thirty two in winter ! (School and play ones each week.)

At the beginning of the war there were two maids. Greta Bryan and Jessie Shaw did alternate shifts. Greta or Jessie would make our porridge in the morning and serve it in the Hall. We would all be there, dressed for school. After our tea and toast we raced to lift our shoes from the two large racks at the other side of the Hall door. What a scramble as we hurried to see who could get out the door first. Some of us went upstairs to clean our teeth or lined up for Jessie or Greta to comb our hair. By the time there were sixteen children it was not unknown for a little boy to walk to school with two odd shoes on. The maids did household duties during the day.

Our first Xmas was approaching. Master Peter had been home for a short visit and had returned to Canada where he lived. Master Hamish was home at Xmas from university. Miss Sheila would soon be joining the W.R.N.S. They both had the same reddish fair hair colour as Miss Evelyn. Miss Cecilia was home from boarding school wearing her uniform. The estate was covered in snow. When we threw snowballs to her, she didn't mind throwing one back.

Our mum had been to visit and left our presents. I got a beautiful doll which looked like a real baby and was dressed in a real baby suit. I named it George because I liked the name. Miss Evelyn gave us some decorations for the Hall. We brought in a piece of fir tree and made decorations for it.

It was Xmas Eve, 1939. Like a few of us younger children, I wondered if there was a Santa Claus. I hung a stocking at the end of my bed anyway. Miss Evelyn was working outside my bedroom and I was hoping she would see the stocking.

The next morning I was disappointed because my stocking was empty ! As I started to dress I could hear footsteps running down the stairs and whoops of delight from the Hall. When I reached it there was great excitement as each of us had a pile of Xmas presents on the table - books, games, sweets. What a lovely surprise ! I said, "Santa found us after all !" My brother (three years older than me) said to me later, "It's time you knew that there is no Santa." I was seven years old. Later the same day we had a lovely Xmas lunch with venison (supplied by the gamekeeper). Miss Molly made some trifle, which was lovely, as usual.

Joan came over from the cottage with a little present for each of us, from her mum and Mr Stevenson. The boys all got a handkerchief. The girls each got Palmolive soap. What a joy this soap was for us ! We kept smelling the perfume of it. What a change from the red or white hard soap everything got

cleaned with, including all of us children. The skin on our faces was so sore in winter and Miss Evelyn was unable to get cream from Stark's the chemist - everything was scarce.

We girls guarded our own soap. We brought it out when it was bathtime. We used it only on our hands and faces. We then carefully wrapped it in the paper and hid our own away again. We made it last as long as possible, as toilet soap was such a luxury during the war.

I have to say, the red and white soap did make the floors nice and clean when Greta or Jessie used it on them.

Back in Glasgow, air raids had started, and so more children started arriving at Rusko. One of them, Joyce O'Neil, became my room-mate. It was good. Eventually there would be six girls and ten boys all roaming around. The youngest boy was five year old Little Harry Darroch, and he was on his own, like seven year old Ian McDade. Another two boys were brothers of six and five, Tommy and Alex Greig. Their mum had died and their father was in the Royal Air Force. The Munro family consisted of three brothers and four sisters, plus their cousin, James Lindsay. Stanley Fensom was in the older group with my two brothers, Alex and James Alexander. Stanley's mother was also dead. His father visited him occasionally. When he became twelve years old, Stanley joined his sister at Cally Palace. My room-mate Joyce and I were happy while we were together.

Now reorganisation was required, for so many children. Six camp beds arrived. Three were put at each end of the day nursery. A long table in the middle held our precious belongings. I chose a bed at the window side, where I could look out at the fields and sky. We six girls were now sharing the same room.

The night nursery next door was the bedroom for my two brothers Alex and James, and also Stanley. We started using the bathroom in this wing. Now, in the evenings, the three older boys were allowed to go into the attic to do their homework, away from the noise downstairs of children playing. With the sleeping arrangements reorganised we were all settled.

This was mostly a happy time, although when we heard an aeroplane droning overhead we felt a bit nervous. At all times everyone had to be careful not to let any lights show through windows or doors. Everywhere was in complete blackout. We had to make sure any shutters or curtains were completely closed.

Everyone was using the bathroom on our wing. Bathtime started at 7pm in winter, 7.30pm in summer. The little ones went first (two at a time). As one got out the front, another went in at the back. It carried on like this until everyone had their bath. On Sundays Miss Molly washed the heads and afterwards we lined up in the night nursery, where Miss Evelyn had an electric hair dryer to dry them. During this time the little boys had great fun running back and forth chasing each other through the swing door.

As we got older, some of us liked to help in the kitchen by peeling

vegetables or polishing cutlery. Jessie the maid had left to marry Archie Pickthall as he was called up for the army. Greta was the only maid now. She had a lot of porridge and toast to put out for sixteen of us in the morning.

At weekends when we were not at school, and if it was really cold, some of us liked to go into the Stoke Hole beside the scullery. The Stoke Hole was a cosy little room with a unique smell. If I remember correctly I think there was a boiler in it. The leather, polish and heat maybe created this smell. Three girls and two or three little boys would crowd in. As well as it being warm in there we liked to look at all the different kinds of shoes. If we found some polish then we would clean some. All kinds were there: golf shoes, riding boots, very large-

sized gents' ones, fancy ladies' ones. We all agreed we had never seen such large gents' shoes as Master Peter and Master Hamish's size 12s. The girls would imagine being grown up and wearing the ladies' shoes for various occasions. Later on at bath time we would be asking Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn who belonged to which !

Other jobs we did included tidying all the towels over the banister, which the boys kept throwing on the floor of the landing. Also we tidied the children's shoe racks and threw away any worn ones. We put the others in pairs (which never lasted very long).

The three older boys usually went to Pulcree for eight pints of milk after school. As we all got a bit taller and stronger, three girls went at a time, taking turns at carrying the can until our arms were tired. In the mornings Miss Evelyn would go on her bicycle to Pulcree Farm and collect another eight pints.

While we waited for Janet Telfer to set up the steriliser, Mrs Grierson might open the house door to have a little chat with us. She didn't have a family, nor good health. She was a nice gentle lady. We loved to watch Janet doing her work. Or sometimes we had a look in the byre where Mrs Telfer was sitting on a little stool, milking the cows. Mr Telfer once let us watch a cow giving birth to its calf. When Janet had the steriliser ready she climbed up to put the milk in the top. We loved watching it ripple down. It was nearly time for our can to be filled and for us to get back across the fields and into the house, where everyone was waiting to get supper started. The evening six o'clock news would be starting by this time.

Springtime was a joy. We had never seen so many daffodils. Our relatives visited us when there was a coach trip planned - and it was always a Sunday. Mum could not face the walk to Rusko, so we would meet her at the Anworth Hotel and take her to Campbell's garage (beside the Angel Hotel) to get a taxi. Miss Evelyn would kindly give her a lift back to town in time for the coach home.

When dad came to visit and realised the distance we walked to school, he decided to buy us bicycles. A few weeks later my two brothers and I were delighted when three brand new shiny ones arrived. When the weather was bad we kept them in the coal shed, which was opposite the scullery door. In good weather we left them under the Hall windows.

Because of the seasons our school holidays were split to allow school

children to help on the farms. We got holidays in summer, autumn and at Xmas. The older boys worked at either Pulcree or Goatend farms in the holidays. They got a little money in return. The other thirteen of us played on the lawns and wandered around the Estate.

It was great fun using my new bicycle. Returning home from school I would be with my two brothers, MaryTelfer, Joyce and Stanley (evacuees), the gamekeeper's two sons, and Sheila Shaw from Ornockenoch, all on our cycles. We would be spread all over the road while we laughed and chatted. There was hardly any traffic in 1940. When I reached the front drive at Rusko I had to be very careful cycling down. Mrs Cochrane (the Mistress) liked a daily walk at this time and she had bad arthritis. Because of the high bushes it was sometimes difficult to know she was there.

The Mistress was very slim and elegant, and wore her grey hair in a chignon. Her clothes were light grey and lilac. She always wore long necklaces. Like Miss Molly she was a smoker, and they both used cigarette holders.

The flat above the garage was usually occupied by Mamie and Drysdale Bennett and little Sheena. As Drysdale was serving as a soldier in the army, Mamie sometimes stayed in town with relatives. Drysdale had been employed by Commander before being called to the army. We first saw this handsome man when he was back on a short leave. I can only remember something serious happened to him. He returned to Rusko after his discharge from hospital. He never recovered his good health and died as a young man. Sheena was just a toddler. Mamie, who had worked at Ardwall before her marriage, stayed on at Rusko until Sheena was starting school. Only then did she arrange to go back to work at Ardwall.

The bothy in the comer was used sometimes by a woodcutter, Will Chisholm. We liked when he appeared from time to time. All of us girls, including Joan and Lois at the Gardener's Cottage, liked to play ball against the garage door. If Will was in the bothy he would be out chatting to us all and telling us silly jokes. The young boys liked to listen to be able to pass them on at school.

We called this part of the grounds 'the Square'. Miss Evelyn would carry the dry washing from the wash house to the laundry above, and do the ironing. We played in the hay shed. In summer evenings the Square was sunny, and we would be calling out to each other as we played.

This all changed when Commander employed more men to fell trees, and the area of the Square became a hive of adult activity. Commander turned the hay shed into a sawmill. Large trees were pulled on chains by a tractor, down the back drive and over to the sawmill. They were cut into even-sized logs, which were then piled high around the three walls of the Square. Large lorries would come and take them away. We were told they would be turned into charcoal and then ammunition needed for the war. Instead of the noise of children calling out to each other, it was the high pitched sounds from the sawmill. We could not play in the Square any more as Commander warned us it was too dangerous.

In summer all of the children decided to walk to Gatehouse Station. It had been in darkness when we arrived there as evacuees in 1939, and we wondered what it was like. We never reached the station when we discovered the ruin of Rusko Castle. We were amazed to find a real castle. On our first visit only very few of us reached its top because of stairs missing - and fear ! After a few visits, and with our legs having grown a bit, we all managed to the top by pulling the smaller boys over the gaps ! It was nice to be up on the battlements. We would lean over and call down to others who had gone back to the ground. I remember being told young Lochinvar was supposed to have spent a night there when he was fleeing with a young lady. We did get taught the poem at school. It was always a favourite place for us to play - and I never fulfilled my ambition to walk to Gatehouse Station !

On other days we would walk towards Pulcree and collect Mary. We always enjoyed the biscuit Mrs Telfer would give us. We would start towards Commander's dam. Sometimes we would walk through the fields instead of on the road. An evacuee mum lived with her family in a farmhouse on the left for a short time. Past it, we made our way to visit Mrs Shields in the cottage before the dam. She always stopped feeding her hens to give us all a lovely home baked scone. She looked after Mr Shields and Jock, who were out working at Pulcree. The other son Jim was away to the forces. She would have a little chat with us and warn us to be careful if the water was high. If we discovered it was, then we didn't wait. We always marvelled and thought Commander was so clever to make the dam to have electricity in Rusko. Commander kept a motor boat and a row boat there. Master Hamish and our older boys sometimes had a little sail.

Strangely, we never at any time thought about going further than the dam. Although we knew Margaret and Sheila Shaw we just never ever went over to see them at their cottage near Ornockenoch. Because Mrs Murray Usher passed us sometimes in her car, we thought she lived in Ornockenoch, and we didn't like to trespass. We later discovered she was on her way to visit Mrs Stewart and her twin daughters who lived in the house. Eventually we got used to Mrs Stewart and the girls (who would be about seventeen) waving to us if they passed in the car.

Families kept visiting from home. Our mum always brought us new clothes. It could be difficult as clothing coupons were required by everyone. Also coupons for sweets, and Miss Molly had our ration books for our food - sugar, margarine, tea, etc. Miss Molly always had a chat with the parents and they would be told what clothes we were growing out of. She would return mine to mum as someone at home then could wear them.

According to the seasons we made our own entertainment. We liked collecting birds' eggs and pressing leaves and flowers. We sat on the lawn making daisy chains. In autumn we collected chestnuts to play conkers. In spring and summer we explored the grounds and fields. Another evacuee arrived and stayed at the Gardener's Cottage with Joan and Mr and Mrs Stevenson. The girl's name was Lois.

During our summer school holidays some of us children went up the stairs to the laundry, which was above the wash house, to speak to Miss Evelyn. We

had always wondered what was in there. What we saw was a treasure trove ! Everything the Cochrane family had owned was there. Miss Evelyn stood in a little space, doing the ironing surrounded by boxes piled high. She asked us not to pull anything out. Because of all the clothes and hats we asked if we could dress up for Halloween.

"Yes/⁷ she said. "I will leave things in the Hall when ifs time."

The one thing us six girls wanted was a beautiful blue hat which had satin ribbons to tie under a chin. Unfortunately, there was only one ! We counted the days until it was time. Then we all got dressed in what Miss Evelyn had left out. We told her we would go out first and then get supper later. One of the four Munro sisters was wearing the blue hat !

The three older boys went ahead and the others followed. It was so dark as we went to Pulcree farmhouse. No luck as Mr Grierson did not open the door. We called in at the Telfers' cottage. We were lucky there, and Mary joined us to call in at the farm and cottages until we reached Mrs Shields near the dam. It was a dark road for young children, and we were trying to be brave. It must have been a funny sight for the adults looking at a gang of children all dressed in too long dresses, big jackets and hats nearly covering our eyes. We did our party pieces and were rewarded with pennies, nuts and fruit. We also visited Mrs Campbell, Mrs Menzies and Mrs Stevenson. Tired and happy, we returned to Rusko.

Each year we were all allowed into the drawing room to do our party pieces. Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn would have our goodies ready and listen to our attempt at singing. They always were so patient with us and smiling. We would look forward to the next year. My big disappointment was that I never got a turn of the blue hat: four girls were the Munro sisters and Joyce O'Neil, who were all going to have a turn before me. I was away home to Glasgow before my turn.

Each year we knocked on the Griersons' door. The last time, we heard Mrs Grierson say, "Bring the children in." The poor woman was lying on a couch and looking so ill, yet she was kind to us and smiling. We sang our songs and she thanked us. A few weeks later we were told she had died. We felt so sad.

While most of us were out wandering during weekends and holidays, the three older boys were busy with Commander. Around the beginning of June they burned heather. They mended fences and helped plant new trees behind the Campbells' cottage in Knock Tinkle wood.

On the 12th of August they worked as beaters along with others, for the grouse shooting. There would always be a buzz of anticipation at Rusko. Commander's friend, Mr Peck, and other gentlemen, would arrive from England. Mr Campbell and the gun dogs would be ready; Oliver and Flash would do a good day's work. At the end of the day there would be an array of grouse, pheasants and partridges on show outside the front door. If I remember property the shooting took place on the moor at Barharrow. Later in autumn Commander organised shooting of foxes and deer.

In between working with Commander, the three older boys took all of us children to the River Fleet to teach us to swim. We walked down past the orchard and turned left. When we reached the Fleet there was a little island in the middle. We called it "the Orchard". Some children learned to swim there.

On other sunny days we walked past the fountain and straight into the field. We walked over to the left until we reached the sand pit. We loved to look at the marks on the sand, which the wheels of the lorries had made. We played about in it, thinking it was wonderful. Lorries would come to be filled up with sand. It was then taken to be used for sandbags. These were needed as protection from the blasts and fighting going on in air raids.

In autumn it was time for peeling the bark from the felled trees. Some ladies came from the town for that - fewer men were available as they were away to the forces. I used to feel sorry for the ladies when I saw the mess of stained skin on their hands and faces.

It was winter again, 1940, and Xmas was approaching. Every time we were in the bath (two at a time) was when we really got talking to Miss Molly as she washed, and Miss Evelyn as she dried, the bodies. We were talking about a turkey in a pen near the Gardener's Cottage. On Saturday mornings some of us would go and talk to it. It strutted about proudly and made noises as if it was talking back. I became attached to it. Miss Molly would ask if it was getting fat. We called it Noel. Because we were talking of Xmas, Miss Molly told us we could all go to Sinclair's (which was a newsagents and gift shop) near to the then Town Hall. We could all choose something to the value of 3/- each (15p). The lady was to put the presents, with our names on them, in the back shop. After we had all chosen, Miss Evelyn would pay and collect them.

I ran out of school at lunchtime the very next day, and went to Sinclair's. I didn't take much time to choose a colouring book and two packs of coloured pencils. The price was less than 3/-. These were what I loved. I was first to choose, and from then on all the evacuees were going into the shop, choosing and checking up that nobody went beyond 3/-.

When Xmas Day arrived the presents were on the table at breakfast. We played happily until Xmas lunch was being served. Some children shouted excitedly, "Oh, it's turkey !" As we started to eat, my brother said, "Noel tastes lovely." I started to cry because I hadn't realised this turkey was Noel. I loved him like a person and thought he'd always be there. I could not eat him. One of the others soon did.

In 1941 some of us girls started to help in the kitchen after supper. Miss Molly was always working in there. She had twenty people to cook for, and more if all the family were home for a visit. Sometimes there might be visitors too. There was a large square white bin beneath the hatch window. All of our $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs of sugar ration was put in there. It was Commander's favourite place for standing when he had something to tell her - usually about something he had heard on the six o'clock news. I did the job of returning things she'd been using on the long kitchen table back into the pantry. I liked to see all the different provisions. One night I discovered walnuts and ate one. I liked it. From then on, every time I was in the kitchen I had another. I was found out when Miss

Molly wanted to make walnut loaf.

"Children," she said, "where are the walnuts?" "Nessie ate them !" shouted a chorus of voices.

From then on, to my utter shame, I was always called 'the Walnut Queen'. Joyce O'Neil, who I had shared my bedroom with, was always telling tales to Miss Molly about one evacuee or another. She was known as 'the Clype'. I thought to myself, "Oh well, I'd rather be 'the Walnut Queen'." I *never ate* any more !

Miss Molly was always busy between the range, cooker and long table. With the saved sugar she made each of us a birthday cake with our name on it. She made lots of jam with the fruit from the garden and orchard. She made honey from the honeycombs.

In summer, 1941, our mum arrived to stay as a paying guest with Mrs Bennett above the garage. She felt she needed to be near my two brothers and me for a week or so. Our house had been destroyed in an air raid. Miss Molly gave her photograph albums to look at, belonging to the Cochrane family. Commander was so handsome in his naval uniform, and the Mistress was beautiful. The family were all beautiful children. The man who now loved going out looking like a tramp used to be this handsome man. The previous Xmas he did get a new hat to replace his oil-stained one. However, Miss Evelyn said he wasn't happy until it was oil-stained too.

Anytime he passed us in the car he would slow down so we would think some of us were getting a lift. We would run to catch up and he would start up again. He always called, "Come on, fat Messie !" - not even Nessie but Messie. I was not fat anyway - nobody was during the war. I knew he was teasing.

At bathtime one summer Friday evening, Miss Molly told us that Mrs Murray Usher was coming the next day at 12 o'clock to collect us all. She borrowed a shooting brake from someone and wanted to take us to Mossyard beach. Miss Evelyn had prepared our sandwiches and a can of water. Off we went, on our best behaviour. As we piled into the car Mrs Murray Usher asked us not to be sick, as someone had kindly lent the car to give us a treat. It was a lovely day at the beach, only, when she returned to collect us four hours later, she found us all red with sun burn. Nevertheless, when we arrived back at Rusko we all thanked her nicely just the same - and nobody was sick ! But we were all in pain ! We were always aware that Mrs Murray Usher was somehow an important person in the town, but at the time we didnt know why.

We played on the lawn after supper in summertime. Joan and Lois (from the Gardener's Cottage) would be there too. We might see an unfamiliar car at the front door and wonder who it belonged to. Not many people had a car. The boys would be trying to climb the huge tree on the lawn. James Lindsay, who was the best climber, would get up the highest. All of us would be yelling, "Higher !" and he would !

Occasionally in the summer evenings we went a walk along to the burn bridge near Pulcree. We might meet Margaret Shaw there. She'd walked down

from Ornockenoch. She would tell us about her two brothers - John, who was away in India in the forces, and Bobby, who was taken a prisoner of war by the Japanese. He would eventually spend three years as a prisoner. John had worked for Mrs Murray Usher as her chauffeur for a time, before he was in the forces.

Also at this time another family from England had arrived to stay in the house at Commander's dam. On one occasion while some of us children were sitting on the bum bridge, a car stopped. Two ladies accompanied by three children stepped out to speak to us. One lady was Mrs Copley-Smith and the other was the nanny, along with Phillipa and two little boys. Mrs Copley-Smith was out with the family to view her surroundings. She explained they'd had to leave their home in the south of England because of air raids. Phillipa was a beautiful girl, and would be accompanying us to school. Mrs Copley-Smith felt very sad for us that we had all to leave our homes. She must have missed her own home too much, as the family did not stay long at the dam cottage.

We all loved the summer evenings because we were allowed out a little later, and we knew to get the younger children back in time for bedtime starting. After the little boys were bathed things were easier for Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn as the rest of us were growing and able to bathe ourselves (still two at a time). It was a wartime rule that everyone should only use five inches of water in the bath. We were fortunate to be able to use more, as Commander's own dam was supplying us with it. After bathing we would scrub our teeth using Gibbs dentifrice (which tasted vile). Our teeth were shining, though.

Master Hamish had been home on leave before being sent to Burma. He was so tall and smart in his officer's uniform. It didn't seem terribly long since he had finished university. One cold miserable morning, Miss Molly came into the Hall while we were having breakfast. She said, "Children." We were all silent because we knew it was something serious. She told us Master Hamish had been killed in action. We were all so sad. It was so hard to believe. We would talk of him pretending to chase us on the lawn not so long ago, or standing in the kitchen asking whafs for supper.

At a later date Miss Sheila brought Mr Stubbs home. He was in the Navy. They had a wartime wedding. No big celebration.

On school holidays we girls liked to go and speak to Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn. On sunny days they would sit in the drawing room with the French doors open. They would be sitting there mending clothes. There was a nice glass case near them and we would ask if we could look at the little Limoges inside it. This was a treat for us girls to look at the little treasures. While they darned and sewed patches and buttons on mostly boys' clothes, they might tell us of their school days and being taught by nuns. They did the repairs so perfectly that they were hardly noticeable when finished. All of our clothes had to last us as long as possible. All clothing required coupons - footwear did not require coupons though. Everyone was allowed a certain amount of clothing coupons a year. Only ladies who were having babies were allowed more.

While we girls were in the drawing room, we noticed the long heavy curtains at the French doors. These gave us an idea ! We asked if we could

have a concert and invite the neighbours. Any money we received would go to the Red Cross to help the wounded soldiers.

The answer was "Yes !"

We told the rest of the evacuees at supper of the plan. From then on we started to organise and practise what sixteen of us children would be doing. This was to be our contribution to help the war effort; everyone was to do what they could to help.

On rehearsal night we went through to the Drawing Room together. A little boy was at each side of the curtains to pull them to and fro. This area was our stage. Commander was in a comfortable chair with an eager look on his face. His eyes were twinkling. The mistress was smiling. I felt ill as I was trying to sing ! The next day I was in bed with mumps ! I missed the concert.

The neighbours accepted the invitation and attended. Mr and Mrs Campbell with Alan and David, Mr and Mrs Stevenson (Joan took part), and Mr and Mrs Menzies were all with Miss Molly, Miss Evelyn, Commander and the Mistress, as the audience in the Drawing Room. Sixteen children were entertaining them, although there should have been seventeen including me ! They all put money in a tin and the children also put in pennies we had. Altogether the total sum was £1-12-6d. It was a good sum in 1941, and Miss Molly sent a cheque for the amount to the Red Cross. While she gave tea to the visitors, some children came up to my room to tell me about the good time they'd had and the sweets they had received from the visitors. They assured me Miss Molly would keep my share until I was better, and she did !

In March 1941, our house in Glasgow had been destroyed in the Clydebank Blitz. It was now December 1941, and my brother Alex had his fourteenth birthday and could choose to go home. Mum and Dad were rehoused and he did go. Around the same time Little Harry Darroch's mum took him home. Next it was Stanley Fensom, who turned twelve and could join his sister at Cally Palace. He would be joining the pupils, from the fee-paying schools in Glasgow for secondary education. They were all twelve years and over, and the government paid the allowances due. Now that there were three less around the table at mealtimes we had more space for sitting - and bigger helpings.

Mum had always been a regular visitor to us when she could. In spring 1942, mum was on one of her visits to James and me. We were walking up the back drive to see Mrs Campbell, as she and mum had a regular chat whenever mum came. Also, if Mrs Campbell had any spare eggs from her hens, mum would buy some. As James, mum and I walked, accompanied by other evacuees, we saw Mr Menzies and Mr Stevenson wearing khaki uniforms and rifles on their shoulders. They mounted their bicycles and left for town. We all made our way to Keal Cottage. When we arrived Mrs Campbell was pulling and putting in place all the straps and buckles on Mr Campbell's uniform. He was so tall his head almost touched the ceiling. She had started at the top and worked her way down to his gaiters. He was ready to lift his hat and rifle and leave on his bicycle. He was away to join the others in town for a parade of the Home Guard. This was to let everyone see there were still people to defend should

any Germans arrive. I know Germans didn't, but some time later Italian prisoners of war did.

Meanwhile back at Keal Cottage, Mum was visiting Mrs Campbell who was busy counting the heads of all the children who had walked with us. We all knew that when we went to Mrs Campbell's cottage she would produce a piece of peppermint rock for all of us. Each time we received it and it was delicious. I believe she must have made it herself. She never failed us !

On the way down, mum would call in to say Hello to Mrs Menzies. Mr Menzies was employed by Commander at this time. We children (the girls) would go in to the lodge sometimes for a chat with Mrs Menzies. She would show us her latest catalogue, to admire the pictures of all the articles. When she no longer wanted it, we took it down to the Hall, where we had hours of fun playing, cutting out and pasting pictures in a scrapbook.

Mr and Mrs Menzies left Rusko Lodge shortly after, as he was changing his employment. They moved into a house in the High Street near "Sinclair's". The new tenants at the Lodge were Mrs Hogg and Evelyn, who were French. Evelyn and my brother James were good friends from the same class in Gatehouse School. Mrs Hogg was very elegant even though it was wartime. Her husband was in one of the French forces. Both she and Evelyn had managed to get out of Europe in time, at the beginning of the war. They were living in a house out in the direction of Cardoness Castle until they moved to Rusko Lodge. They had previously visited Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn at Rusko, having got to know each other at their chapel services on Sundays. They would return to France as soon as they found it possible.

In January 1943, mum wrote to Miss Molly to say James and I would be returning home on the 17th. We would be leaving on the visitors' coach, opposite the Anwoth Hotel, when it was returning to Glasgow. From then until I was leaving I said goodbye to people I had known for 3 years and 4 months. Some of the evacuees walked to town with us. Miss Evelyn had left our belongings at Campbell's garage for us to collect. And so we returned to the big city.

Our dad had wanted us home. Whether he had a premonition I don't know. Although he worked hard at the docks he never complained. Suddenly he was ill for ten days and had to stay off work. He died and a tumour had caused it. James and I had been home for only three and a half weeks. I was ten and a half years old.

I loved being with my mum again, although I did find it hard to adjust to the city. Mum would have relatives and friends to visit us after dad passed away. They would ask me if I'd liked living in the countryside, which I did -very much. Mum would say how she had never needed to worry about James and me because we were in such a safe place and away from the air raids. I thought about the times when we had hung over the top of Rusko Castle, played about, and could have fallen over; we'd stood at the edge of the dam when the water was high, and could have fallen in; we climbed trees for eggs out of birds' nests - and could have fallen. Or at the sandpit - as we played we

could have been buried under tons of the stuff. It was a miracle that not one person among the sixteen of us ever came to any harm.

I could not get Gatehouse out of my system. I had spent a third of my childhood there. I wrote letters to Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn and sent Xmas cards. My mum wrote to Mrs Bennett who was still staying above the garage until Sheena would start school.

Alex and James kept in touch with Mrs Campbell because they had enjoyed the company of David and Alan while they were all doing jobs with Commander. In 1944, Alex and James were the first to return to stay as paying guests for two weeks with Mrs Campbell. Commander made good use of their voluntary work while they were there. My brothers loved it. Miss Sheila, who was now Mrs Stubbs, and Mr Stubbs, were staying at Rusko with their little girl, Penny. My brother James and Mr Stubbs discovered they both loved fishing. From then they both took the opportunity when they could. It just so happened that Mr Stubbs was on holiday. Normally he was in Glasgow during the week and at Rusko during weekends.

In spring 1945 I had been home two years when mum and I returned to stay as paying guests with Mrs Bennett and little Sheena. Mr and Mrs Shaw were now staying in the Gardener's Cottage - Mowatt left his job at Ornocknoch to replace Mr Stevenson. Their daughter Margaret also lived there. (She and I are still friends in this year, 2005.) I was nearly thirteen years old at the time of this holiday. Margaret was sixteen. She and I would go to Pulcree for milk about 5pm, in time to see the Italian prisoners of war walking up from the fields where they worked and into the truck which was waiting on the road. It would not be long afterwards when they returned to Italy. The war in Europe was almost finished (May 1945).

At Rusko, of the eleven evacuees who had remained when James and I left, another three had reached fourteen years old and gone home. Now I was back on holiday and felt as I mixed with the remaining eight children that I'd never been away. They would only have a few weeks and everyone would go home. I was back in the kitchen speaking to Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn. Miss Molly was asking about Alex and James. She said Mr Stubbs was so happy to have the company of James the previous year. He could not praise James high enough - he thought he was a great lad. (I thought, is this the same James I know - who is always bullying me?)

Mum had invited Mrs Bennett to stay with us in Glasgow. They had become really good friends. After a time Mrs Bennett left Sheena with her mum and visited us for a week. The city life was strange for her. She and mum corresponded with each other for some time afterwards. Mrs Bennett was still working at Ardwall as Housekeeper.

In 1946 my brothers Alex and James went back again as paying guests to Mrs Campbell. As usual they followed Commander to do jobs. David the elder Campbell son was doing his National Service in the RAF, and Commander asked my brothers to stay and work for him. James returned home but Alex stayed. He used the bedroom which was mine when I first arrived at Rusko as a little seven year old. He was happy for a time, working with Mowatt and

Commander - wherever he was needed. During this period an older brother of ours, John, decided to visit Alex. Commander never missed an opportunity and asked John to stay on at Rusko for a week to paint the Hall. He did, and what a job he took on, after six years of children scribbling on every part they could reach. (Well, paper was scarce during the war !) John did go around it and around it - six times with undercoats and paint. He returned home exhausted and not much money to show for his efforts. Commander would not have much money left ! Commander used to enter the Hall on a Sunday while the evacuees were there. He knew that was the day for any relatives visiting us. Should there be any, Commander would be complaining to them about the amount of money the damn government was taking from him for Income Tax !

Alex got homesick and returned to Glasgow after eight months. He was seventeen years old, a tall slim lad whom mum always worried about. He should have stayed in the healthy environment he was in at Rusko. Good food from the land and fresh air. A few years later he developed tuberculosis. It was at a time just before a cure was found for it. Alex died in 1952 at twenty four years of age.

In 1948 when I was seriously ill with pneumonia a new wonder drug, Penicillin, saved my life. As I had always kept in touch with Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn they invited me to stay to get healthy again. They kept me for four weeks. They had not seen me for three years, so now at sixteen years old I had grown quite a bit.

I asked about all the evacuees who went home in 1945 when it was officially decided it was safe for them to do so. Two of the Munro sisters were the only children who had been at Rusko the complete time of evacuation - nearly six years. I had felt strange at first when I had returned home in 1943. It must have been very strange for them at their ages, after having spent almost half their lives living in the countryside. Sixteen children had played, dined, laughed, and cried, over a period of almost six years, in the Hall. When everyone had gone it must have been so strange and still with an eerie silence. I am sure if the walls could have feelings, tears would have been running down them.

Evacuees Going Home

Everything must have seemed strange to the Cochrane family when all the evacuees went home. It would be so QUIET ! Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn would not have the same amount of work. They had started with eight children in 1939, and another eight had arrived over a period of time. Eight were still at Rusko when it was deemed safe for them to go home in 1945.

All sixteen of us children had been very lucky to live at Rusko. Little Harry, the youngest, was the only one who stayed only for some weeks; he was actually the seventeenth evacuee. Occasionally there might be a disagreement among some of us. Mostly we were like a large family and loved going out together, looking for an adventure in the vast grounds. The older children watched out for the younger ones and kept them safe. Most of the time we stuck to the rules and discipline we had to abide by. We were as happy as it was possible to be, without living with our parents.

I can only speak on behalf of my two brothers, Alex and James (now both deceased) and myself, Nessie, to say our evacuation to Rusko House left us with happy memories which remained throughout our lives.

The End of Evacuation

I arrived at Rusko in July 1948 to a different type of noise. Little Penelope (Penny) was three years of age and a miniature of Miss Sheila. Penny became my little companion and a right little chatterbox she was. Miss Sheila was pregnant again. They and Mr Stubbs were temporarily living at Rusko while he was working in Glasgow during the week. I played with Penny while Miss Sheila worked in the wash house. Disaster struck one day when her wedding ring fell off in the area between the wash house and the green where the washing was hung, in front of the hay shed. It was lost. We looked many times to no avail. She was a fun person. As I had reached the age of boys and girls noticing each other, Miss Sheila gave me good advice. She said, "When I used to go out with a boy, Mummy always told me to keep walking." I took her advice ! Miss Sheila's new baby was another girl. The Cochrane's family pram which we evacuees had seen in the laundry all those years ago was put to good use by Miss Sheila !

During my visit to Gatehouse in 1948 I was able to find plenty of familiar faces in town. I didn't lack company when Miss Evelyn kindly lent me her bicycle to get about. I spotted Miss Haugh and her sister (who had both retired) at the door of their house in the High Street. As I was passing I spoke to them both. Miss Haugh was amazed that I was the grown up version of the little timid seven year old she had looked after for a few weeks away back in 1939. Here I was, nine years older. She was so pleased I had spoken to them, and they asked me to tea for the following day. I gladly accepted, and got fussed over. We had such a lovely chat. Miss Haugh was not a terrifying figure to me any more ! I tried to forget the rustle of her black silk dress with its many buttons on the front, right up to her chin. In 1939 she hadn't allowed Alex, James and me to read anything on a Sunday except the Bible. We were at three services in Girthon Church on a Sunday. Mr Easton, the minister, was a lovely kind man though. Once we'd moved to Rusko it was Anwoth Church we went to for Sunday School - if we felt like facing the hilly road up to it. We did like going into the old graveyard and finding the Covenanters' headstones.

As the Telfer family had moved through to Kirkcudbright I took a trip to visit my friend Mary. It was nice to meet up and see how we had both changed. Our childhood was over and we never saw each other again.

At this time in 1948, Mr and Mrs Shaw, with John, were still living in the Gardener's Cottage. Mrs Shaw was working as Housekeeper in Rusko. Margaret Shaw was now married to Billy McLeavey and their home was in Edinburgh. I was lucky to meet her again as she was through to visit her parents, accompanied by her little son Billy - a lovely little boy.

There was so much happiness in the Gardener's Cottage when the Shaw family lived there. Mrs Shaw would be bustling about making tea and attending to John's dinner. He would be watching the clock to be in time to go and meet his girlfriend Winnie from her work at one of the hotels. Some years earlier

Sheila had married Jock Shields who had only lived along the road from her while the Shaw family had lived near Ornockenoch. Jock had always been a fun person to us evacuees. We ran about after him while he and his dad worked in the fields. He would laugh and shout, "Get away, you wee BUGGERS !"

Miss Cecilia was home on holiday from university. An admirer of hers appeared every evening, carrying a rabbit which he was supposed to have shot personally ! He seemed to spend a lot of time in the kitchen while Miss Cecilia had disappeared. Miss Molly duly cooked the rabbit, and who had to eat it for supper? - ME !

I ate my dinner in the kitchen. Miss Molly would still be working at the large kitchen table well into the evening. While we chatted Commander might come in and lean against the large sugar bin near the hatch, as always. Of course he would tease me - still with his eyes twinkling ! After the war finished and things began to take on some kind of normality a bit of social life had begun. Commander attended country dancing in the Town Hall. He was enthusiastic, according to what Miss Evelyn told me.

I'd had a lovely holiday meeting up with teenagers I had known at school. It was time to go home and I was saying goodbye. Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn were saying they were proud they'd helped in my upbringing.

I had a coincidence happen while I was working in 1953. I worked in a factory (a nice one) called Remington Rand. The Personnel Officer was a Miss Muir. We got friendly because we travelled the same way on the ferry over the river at the same time. Through our friendly chats (outside work) I told her I recognised her from our childhood in Gatehouse of Fleet. She was billeted in Cally Palace although her sister Muriel was not. Muriel and I were in the same class at school. From then on I got seeing all the pictures of Muriel with her young family. I was honoured when I was one of the four females chosen from the factory staff to represent Remington Rand at an exhibition in Glasgow's Kelvin Hall. We had this friendship for a few years until she moved to another company. I missed the chats we'd had about our childhood in Gatehouse of Fleet.

In 1954, after six years, I returned to Gatehouse of Fleet to stay in town as a paying guest with Mr and Mrs Menzies. While out looking for familiar faces I met Mrs Bennett and Sheena. They were on holiday from their home in England, visiting their relations in Gatehouse. At sixteen years old, Sheena was a beautiful slim and tall teenager. She looked so like the father she would hardly remember.

As we chatted Mrs Bennett asked if I would like to walk to Ardwall with them later in the day. They were going to visit Major and Mrs McCulloch. I was delighted to accept. On the way we had lots to talk about and she was surprised I was a 'married woman'. When we arrived at Ardwall the McCulloch family were in the grounds. They were delighted to see Mamie and Sheena, Mamie having worked for them for many years as Housekeeper. Meantime Sheena was getting admiring glances from the three boys.

The Major was interested in their new life in England, where they had

moved to after leaving Ardwall. Mamie told the family of her work in a factory which made television sets. At the time television sets really only had 14 inch, and occasionally 17 inch, screens. The Major was exclaiming, "I would love one but the screens are so small for the size of our rooms'. At that time 17 inches was the largest being made.

The McCulloch family were going for dinner, so Mamie, Sheena and I said our goodbyes. We were invited to help ourselves to strawberries from the garden - and delicious large ones they were. As we strolled along Mamie spoke to her lovely daughter and me of the happy times she'd had at Ardwall. She sat again on the tree stump where her husband had proposed to her. Sheena had also spent part of her childhood at Ardwall, playing with the three McCulloch boys.

During the holiday we saw each other again, going to the beach at Mossyard or the Cally Hotel for afternoon tea. We'd had a lovely time before we returned to our own busy lives. Mamie and Sheena would return to Gatehouse while they had relatives living there.

It was on a Saturday morning later in 1954 when I met Mr Campbell (the gamekeeper at Rusko) in a large department store in Glasgow. Alan, his son, was now a policeman in Glasgow. He lived in lodgings not far from me, and his dad had come to Glasgow to visit him.

I returned in 1955 - again to stay as a paying guest with Mr and Mrs Menzies. This time I was waiting for my husband returning from Canada. After the ship docked in Glasgow he arrived in Gatehouse as soon as he could. It was his first ever visit to this place I'd told him so much about. I wanted him to see everything I'd known as a child.

While I waited for him I rode around all the familiar places on Mr Menzies' bicycle. I found Miss Molly in the garden at the hot houses. She loved potting plants. It was a change from seeing her in the kitchen. Miss Evelyn was in the kitchen being busy with the jam jars. Of course, they told me to bring George. While at Rusko I could not leave without going in to the Shaw family's cottage. Mum, dad, Winnie and John, Margaret and little Billy were there. Winnie and John had married and were the tenants of Rusko Lodge. As always it was lovely to be among them and catch up on each other's lives.

Mr and Mrs Menzies, who had become like an aunt and uncle to me, kindly lent us their bicycles and the first place I took him to was Rusko. I had been there days previously to ask if I could bring George to meet them. George and I walked into the kitchen where they were always so busy. It was so natural to sit down beside Miss Evelyn. We helped her cover and label all the jars of jam on the table over at the kitchen window. Miss Molly was busy at the long kitchen table as always. Soon George and Miss Evelyn were in deep conversation while Miss Molly and I listened. George was talking about the countries and ports the ship docked at while he was away at sea. (He was a chef.)

Miss Evelyn then spoke of her experience in Milan, Italy, while she was a governess. This had taken place after the war finished in 1945. The evacuees

had all gone back to Glasgow and Miss Evelyn thought she would try a new experience for a year. She joined an Italian family. The man was an industrialist. His wife and child were learning English from Miss Evelyn while she was improving her Italian. She had enjoyed her experience very much.

My husband George was so happy to meet these two ladies who had been such an important part of my life. Before we said goodbye I just *had* to put all the jam in the cool pantry as we evacuees had all wanted to do all those years ago. At that time it gave us a feeling of importance if we could help Miss Molly. Now I knew it would be my last time and I was sentimental !

We cycled back to Mr and Mrs Menzies feeling happy. I didn't realise it would be the last time I would see any of the Cochrane family. My brother James took his own family to meet Miss Molly and Miss Evelyn. I never managed to with mine.

It was a very strange coincidence that, in 1956, two years after we had bumped into each other in Glasgow, Mr Campbell and myself again met at the exact same place in the same Lewis's department store - again where he was choosing a gift for Mrs Campbell. We laughed so much at first, then he told me they were moving from Keal Cottage as he was going to another job. Mrs Campbell missed her sons and was lonely; Mr Campbell told me Lake Windermere was a lovely place where she would not be so isolated. The job would suit him until retirement.

As I shook hands with this huge man with the lovely shiny complexion I remembered how I'd always looked forward to him coming through the scullery door at Rusko all those years ago. Somehow he helped give us children a sense of security. I felt a twinge of sadness as this was the last time I would see him.

Some years later I was watching a movie called *Tootsie*. Dustin Hoffman was the star. At the end of it, Lois de Banzie's name was on the credits. I am almost certain she was the same one who had stayed at the Gardener's Cottage with the Stevenson family. As her aunt was Brenda De Banzie the famous actress, if possible. When Lois left the Stevensons she went to Cally Palace, where her brother Ian was, for Secondary Education. I saw an article printed in a newspaper once with his name beneath it. Their parents were journalists when we were evacuees. I saw *Tootsie* a second time and I am certain this was Lois who was at Rusko. Now she was in Hollywood !

During the next forty one years when I did not manage back to Gatehouse of Fleet I did not lose contact with it completely. I came in contact with two of the evacuees about 1962. I met John Munro by chance on the street. He had a little boy. I asked if he had ever returned to Gatehouse - he had not at that time.

Around 1978, Ruby Munro (John's youngest sister) and I happened to be working for the same company. She was the mother of four daughters and two sons. We had busy lives with our families and work so did not arrange to meet again. I had enjoyed meeting them both.

During the 1970s I came home from work one afternoon and a programme

was almost finished on the television. The familiar face belonged to Major McCulloch. He had been speaking of Gatehouse of Fleet and Mrs Murray Usher. I was so sorry I'd missed most of it. He did say how she had the foresight to put rules and regulations into place to preserve it for future generations.

In 1981 I started in another job. (This was my last and best employment.) It was a small company with two directors. One had the name of H.R. McConnell. He and I were having a conversation and getting to know each other. I was to call him Ross. He had mentioned he had a kilt, and that he had done National Service. He also mentioned that he had been evacuated - to Gatehouse of Fleet ! All of a sudden this tall man in front of me became a tall slim boy at Gatehouse School gate. I asked if the initial 'H' was for Hector? He said yes ! I replied, "Ross, I remember you ! You were known as Hector and you wore a kilt then." He was amazed. From then on I could do no wrong as we had this bond ! He also told me that a girl he met while at Cally Palace eventually became his wife. I must emphasise this was a *newer* kilt he now owned !

Every time my brother James and I were together he always made the conversation about Gatehouse. He had taken his family for car runs to let them see it. After 1955 I didn't get back for forty one years. James was newly widowed and depressed when I discussed going back for a few days with him. I always dreamt of getting back to Rusko - just to see it again and relive the memories about everyone I'd known. What I did know was that it would need to be him and me 'only and together'. My husband's health was not perfect, but I left him for a few days in August, 1996, and James and I arrived at the Bobbin Guest House in Gatehouse.

Previous to our departure I had contacted John Shaw to ask where Margaret was living. He arranged to take us to visit her in Kirkcudbright. James and I couldn't wait to see all the familiar places. Josie Gilchrist, whom we had known along with her brother and sisters as children at Ornockenoch, was an employee in the Bobbin. She was very helpful to us, giving us information about people we had known.

The first thing we noticed was the Town Hall was gone. I remembered being at a big Xmas party in there at the beginning of the war. All of us Rusko evacuees had been absolutely wet through by the time we walked there, but we didn't care and enjoyed the party.

I walked into the shop where we had chosen our Xmas present in 1940. The young Sikh shopkeepers were looking at me. I could not explain to them how emotional it was for me. I looked at the shelves which now seemed so low - this was where I had chosen my colouring book and pencils. There was no 'back shop' now as it was all opened up. James found some people he had known, so he was happy.

John and Winnie came and picked us up at the Bobbin and took us to Margaret in Kirkcudbright. She had lost her husband Billy a few years previously. Her lovely little boy who I had known came into the house. Now he was 'big Billy'. We enjoyed our visit to Kirkcudbright so much and had so many stories to tell. She and I sat beside each other at school lunches all those years

ago. Our friendship goes back so far. John and Winnie kindly dropped us at the Bobbin and we thanked them for such a happy day !

In the evening Josie had offered to take us over to the Community Hall, which had long ago been the school we attended. She had keys to open up. How delighted I was to have a picture of myself taken, sitting in front of a beautiful tapestry. I was back in what used to be two of the classrooms I'd been taught in. The windows were so familiar to me. I was well taught in school, but it didn't stop me gazing out and sometimes wishing I could get home to my mum !

At breakfast the next day in the Bobbin, Susan Hunter asked what we would be doing afterwards. I said, "Walking about, only what I really wish is that I could get back into Rusko House to see my little room again !"

She replied, "Mrs Gilby is a friend of mine (we are dancing partners). I'll telephone and ask, for you !" Euphoria does not even describe how I felt when Susan told us we could go. It meant so much to me.

The Hall which we had played in for years was transformed and looked so lovely. The stag's head was still inside, near the front door. These were the two main things I noticed. I popped my head into what used to be my little bedroom. I could imagine myself playing with my doll, while Miss Evelyn worked outside.

James and I were so happy and grateful we to be allowed in for a look. We walked along the familiar path to the back drive; we had decided to carry on walking - right around the Fleet. Walking past "Campbells' Cottage' as we had always called it, I was half expecting Mrs Campbell to come out with a piece of peppermint rock ! The Castle was in sight and we marvelled at the restoration. We paused to have a good look, but two dogs were barking very loudly. Mrs Carson had been sunbathing and stood up. We would like to have spoken to her, but decided against it.

We proceeded across to the other side of the Fleet. I sat for a short rest on a bench dedicated years before by Mrs Murray Usher - near Moriton where she had lived. I felt so grateful to Mrs Murray Usher for providing this seat. As I thought about her I could remember her so clearly, dressed in her thick tweed skirts and jackets. She had a 'presence'. Her hair was always cut very short, and her build was heavy. She had a smiling face, and was always so pleasant. She always had a really nice car and drove herself. For a time during the war I think she lived near the Murray Arms Hotel in town. We children had a question about her to ask Miss Molly - if we wanted to know anything then Miss Molly would be asked for an answer. Why did Mrs Murray Usher have two names? The answer was that her maiden name was Murray and her married one Usher, but she decided to keep both ! We also learned she owned so much land in and around Gatehouse of Fleet. That was why she wanted it all to be kept nice and not spoiled in any way.

After our rest, every step James and I took was so familiar. As we passed the houses we read the plaques above some of them. Gatehouse of Fleet had produced quite a few famous people. Then we came to Hamish McInnes's.

He was the one who was so familiar to James and me. When Alex, James and I arrived at Gatehouse school, Hamish was a little older than Alex but in the same class, and they became friends. The four of us would walk up the left hand side of the High Street after school. At least, they walked - I had to run to keep up with Alex and especially Hamish's long legs. Near the town clock Hamish turned in left to his home, while we carried on straight up the road to the manse. Who would know he would become such a famous person for leading rescue parties in the mountains as well as everything else he did? It so happens I passed through Glencoe recently with nothing but mountains and only the house he lived in.

James and I felt pleased we had managed to achieve so much in the same day, and planned our route for the next one. We had not walked far towards Blackloch when John appeared in his car. He had come out to collect us and drive us wherever we wanted to go. We had intended just going to Anworth Church, but we both said, "Oh, could we go to Commander's dam?"

John did even better and drove us up to the 'Station' first - rather, where it used to be. We chatted about the Castle as we passed - and how we had played in it. John kindly continued up to the dam. I lost my spectacles, with all the excitement ! From there we went to Anwoth and into both graveyards. We were pleasantly surprised to find the Covenanters' one neat and tidy. We also went in and paid respects to the Cochranes.

John drove us straight on into town, after arranging that we were to go to the Lodge later and have tea with Winnie and him. We were walking there along the road and had reached Bambastie when John appeared in the car. He was so surprised. We were enjoying walking, so it was no hardship. He was being so considerate towards us.

Winnie and I had a good natter while we prepared the meal. Afterwards, as we were settling, James and I got a wonderful surprise when Jock Shields and Sheila arrived ! She wasn't very well but she had made such an effort. Jock

just looked and spoke like he always did, and had us laughing. Also he still mentioned, "You Rusko evacuees were wee BUGGERS !" We still laughed !

As I sat in the Lodge it was so cosy inside and turning dusk outside. I looked out at the front drive and I could see part of the roof of Rusko. I felt, apart from family affairs, I will never feel as happy as I am this minute on 8th August, 1996.

The next morning while James and I waited for our bus to return home, I had a short conversation with Mrs Gilby. Maybe it was fate ! It has taken years but this is the little something I promised I'd scribble about the Estate ! - and thank you for finding my spectacles at the dam !

Nessie Corewyn (née Alexander),

December, 2005.