

If overwhelmed by the size of the letter, read the last page first.

47, Fitzjohn's Avenue,
Hampstead, N.W.3.

1
Wednesday, May 9th.

Dear Mummy & Daddy,

Doesn't it seem wonderful to think that it's all over now? It's almost incredible isn't it? I expect you are feeling very thrilled, even tho', as I read in the papers, you can't have the black-out lifted yet. Still that will come & at the moment the main fact is that there will be no more bombs & no more fighting in Europe now. We still feel here as tho' all the celebrations & excitement we have seen are just a dream & that we'll wake up & find the war is still on. I am writing to you today as I expect you would like to know what we have been doing to celebrate, and as I have simply masses to tell you, I thought file-paper would be more convenient than proper writing-paper.

You will probably remember that I said in the vac., that I would just stay at home & work on V. Day & not be infected by the "mass hysteria" of London. But by 6 o'clock on Monday evening we were all getting excited here & were drinking sides in anticipation. We were disappointed at the 6 o'clock news but heard the news flash at 8 & were thrilled to bits. Somehow, nobody could stop herself being excited. We had a short service in the common-room & then everyone decided to go out. Even tho', before, we had said we weren't going to join in these "hysterical celebrations". Bee & I & three other gals managed to get as far as Oxford Circus on a 'bus, but were wondering whether anyone else had heard the news as nobody seemed to be unduly excited in the street & there wasn't a crowd. However, when we had walked down Regent St to Piccadilly, we found such a crowd that obviously everyone had heard it. All the buses had stopped as they couldn't get by the crowds, &

tho' there was none of the hysteria we had expected, everyone was obviously terrifically happy & excited. The great attraction about 9 o'clock was servicemen, who climbed on to the roofs of buses & danced with each other & blew kisses to the crowd, while everyone roared with delight. One bus had on its roof a N.Z. sailor, a British R.A.F. pilot, an American soldier, an Aussie soldier & a U.S. seaman who were all hugging each other ecstatically, and when the bus finally managed to move off, ^{they} went sailing down the Haymarket on its roof, looking as pleased as Punch. Moving with the crowd, we went down the Haymarket, having picked up another of the hostel crowd, as far as Trafalgar square, where the crowds were equally dense. They were dancing the Conga round Nelson & singing. We joined up with some more Bedfordites & other college students & all in a ring, chanted our college yells, which seemed to amuse the crowds. The people were very orderly & really were very quiet. There was no hysteria at all. 10 of us in a line then marched down the middle of Whitehall behind some other students, singing "Gudeamus Ignis" (the student national anthem) and various other things. There were huge crowds round Downing St., but nobody could go in. When we got to Parliament Sq. we left the other students & sat by Westminster Bridge till 10 o'clock, when the dial of Big Ben was illuminated. Shell Mex building across the river was lit up & a band played on one of the barges. The crowds here weren't very thick, so we walked back to Trafalgar Sq. where there were more people and where community singing was going on. Planes came over & dropped coloured flares, & everyone cheered & shouted as if the pilots could hear them! Up from Trafalgar Sq. we went to Leicester Sq. where the Warner cinema had all its pre-war lights on & was as bright as day. People were dancing & singing "Knees up Mother Brown" with great hilarity, but no-one was drunk & very few people even merry. So far we had seen nobody drunk at all. As it was getting late we marched from Leicester Sq. to Oxford Circus via Piccadilly, where the crowd was very thick. All the lamp-posts were decorated with servicemen & civilians, who wildly waved the union jack or Old Glory or the Red flag. We managed to get the last

but one tube from Oxford Circus & finally arrived home at midnight. There was no curfew on us, & Mr. Stoyt had left all the doors open so that we could get in whatever time we arrived home.

Well, that was Monday night, leaving a general impression of happiness & excitement, but no disorder, drunkenness or hysteria amongst the crowds. It was really rather amazing, as I think everyone had expected London to go frenziedly mad at the first hint of peace - but I suppose everyone was too thankful to be more than quietly happy.

Yesterday, Tuesday, of course was the day, and we knew it would be. We were all happy & couldn't stop ourselves being excited - The news, combined with the general spirit of London, had worked us up, & we decided to go out & see what everyone in London was doing to celebrate the peace. Our flagpole had its Union Jack, & small flags decorated the front of the hotel, and all the other houses in the street had blossomed forth in decorations since last night. Flags had ~~begun~~^{started} to come out all over London on Monday in anticipation, but of course by Tuesday morning there were masses of them.

Bee, Nancy & I packed ourselves a good lunch & took a very crowded 'bus as far as Oxford St., where people were collecting. All the buildings were decorated with Allied flags. We walked as far as Oxford Circus, where a lot of students were marching along chanting their college yell, then down Regent St, besieged by sellers of flags & rosettes & red white & blue ribbon, to Piccadilly, crowded again of course. Then we went to Trafalgar Sq, which was beginning to fill up with people, who encircled themselves for the day on the steps of Nelson's column, or perched cozily on the ear of a lion or just stood around & sang & talked quietly. This was about 11.30, so we went over to St. Martin's in the Fields, where, as in other churches, 20-minute services were being held every hour. We joined in the queue & went to the 12 o'clock service. The church was packed long before 12. The short service was conducted by Eric Hordley, the vicar, & was very pleasant & moving. People were queuing for the next service at 1 p.m., when we came out and were sitting on the steps

& pavements eating their lunch. Only a few cars & buses were about in Trafalgar Square & nobody took any notice of them. If a car wanted to cross the square it had to wait for a gap amongst the pedestrians on V. Day - not vice versa as is usually the case! We thoroughly enjoyed walking across the streets that we usually have to run hastily across through a mass of vehicles. We had decided to eat our lunch by the Embankment, so we walked down Whitehall towards Westminster. Crows were thronging the streets and had already taken up position around & opposite Downing St, waiting & hoping to see Mr. Churchill when he made his speech at 3 p.m. They all looked thoroughly happy, but very hot, & the luckiest ones were those sitting on the kerb, eating their lunch in dust but comfort. They all wore some kind of red white & blue emblem, & the usual crazy hats, & most of them had hooters & rattles & kept up a constant ear-splitting din with them. There was an air of expectancy & every time a car came out of Downing St, they were silent with anxiety. We were now no longer walking down Whitehall, but battling our way through or being pushed down the street. It was better on the Embankment by the bridge so we had our lunch there, with loads of other people and then, as we had arranged to call for Tamara at 1.30, had to bash our way through Whitehall again, which was getting so crowded that there was only room to walk on the street.

Having wheeled Joan, we started out again for Westminster. It was terribly hot and of course the crowds made it worse, so we had to walk hand in hand through the masses of people in Chang X Rd, Trafalgar Sq. & down Whitehall again. We clung to each other like grim death as we barged through the crowds, as we knew we shouldn't find each other again if we got lost. We knew the Commons were going to St. Margaret's for a service after Churchill's speech, so we wanted to go somewhere where we could hear him speak & then see him as he went to church. Of course there was hardly any space by then for anyone to stand in the vicinity of Downing St, Parliament Sq, St. Margaret's or the Abbey, but we eventually found a few inches

of spare pavement on Parliament Square opposite the Abbey & the Houses of Parliament, & we took up position at 2 p.m. People were perched all over the statues in the square, on the gables & walls of the Houses of Parliament, up trees, in windows, on roofs, & a few on cars. The movie camera outfits were there, plus innumerable press photographers who took photos of the crowds. The police had a hard time to keep the crowds off the street & eventually the mounted ones came along to help. It was terribly hot, as we waited, squashed in a few inches of space, for Winnie's speech, but at 3 o'clock it came, relayed in loud speakers & everyone was absolutely silent, till they cheered at the end. Then the question was, which way would Winnie come to the Commons & then to church & where could we see him? Suddenly a crowd of mounted police came into the H.P. courtyard, & tho' we couldn't see a thing we assumed it was Winnie. Everyone broke loose, & we got separated, Bee & I, from Dan & Gary. At first no one could make out which way they would go from Parliament to church, but as it didn't seem he would come past where we were, Bee & I dashed down to the entrance of Parliament opposite St. Margaret's, but were too far back in the crowd to see much. After a long while there was a shout, & the Commons came walking out across the street towards the church. By standing on tip-toe, & craning my neck to the utmost I managed to see the top of Winnie's head as he came by, preceded by the mace-bearer & the Speaker in their robes, & followed by the rest of the Commons. Everyone cheered Winnie & stood silent as the rest went past. I recognised Beveridge, Tom Dineberg, & Josephine Lucas, but no others. After they had gone in, the crowd around this entrance dispersed & Bee & I felt rather disappointed at not seeing much of Winnie, & had almost decided to go home, but, following the crowd, went round the other side to the Abbey, where the movie cameras were obviously waiting for the Commons to come out. We got fairly near the gate & heard cars which seemed ready to receive the P.M. & the rest. We could hear them singing in the church, & then as they came out, got a really good view of Winnie at last! Instead of going into the cars, they walked back to Parliament, which meant they went straight past us. The mace-bearer & Speaker

went first, then came Winnie flanked by two tall men, one of whom was Bevin. He looked a funny short squat little man, his face pink & creased like a baby's, as he grinned to the crowd, who roared "Good old Winnie" at him. The rest of the comrades came along, this time followed by remarks from the crowd, who were getting more hilarious, and cheered according to the member's popularity. Someone shouted, "a drink for lady doctor please!" as she came past! Feeling terribly tired, but hugely pleased with ourselves, Bee & I decided to go back to Sam's to see if the other two had got back - but what a shock we got! Whitehall was literally impassable, it was choked with people all over the pavements & the street. There wasn't a spare foot of space to get through. I have never seen people hove like sandwiches in my life - and all perspiring with the heat. We couldn't think what they were waiting for. We didn't know that Winnie was expected to appear on the balcony of the Fin. of Health at 5.30, or we might have stayed. However, being hot, dirty, dusty & thirsty we decided to get to Sam's, but how we ever pushed our way through the crowds without having all our clothes torn off I don't know. Following a stream of people trying to get past the crowds near the top of Whitehall we jostled & battered & pushed & pulled, & was grabbed & thrown all up the street! But everyone was so good-humoured & we only laughed. Planes were diving over, throwing down coloured flares, & green, yellow & purple smoke was coming from a tower or one of the offices. Winnie's speech seemed to have been the signal for everyone to let off steam & the crowds were getting much more jovial & noisy than before. There were queues all over Trafalgar Sq for the tubes, so we knew we couldn't get home for tea, & of course none of the buses were running ordinary routes because of the crowds.

He had tea at Sam's & the other two came in a little after us, not having seen as much as we had. People in the streets were beginning to let off rockets & fireworks & there were constant bangs like the blitz again. Ambulance bells accompanied the bangs & what with the shouting & singing & the hooter-blowing & rattle-shaking, you can imagine the din in Charing & Rd.

After tea - about 7 p.m., we decided to go to the

Palace, so hanging on to each other more tightly than ever, we walked across St. James' to the Palace, & took up position in the crowd about 7.30, quite near the railings.

Queen Victoria's statue was decorated with people, & the crowds got thicker & thicker after we got there. The radio programme was relayed through loudspeakers on the Palace gates, and everyone sang the songs in the musical programme & cheered loudly through the "salute to the King" programme. The time seemed to go very quickly as we stood there & soon the King's speech came on. The crowd was very quiet as it came over, & then burst into the Nat. Anthem at the end. Then everyone chanted "We want the King" louder & louder, & a Canadian soldier sitting on the head of a female statue conducted the cheers & shouting. Finally about 9.30, the door onto the balcony opened & the King & Queen & the princesses came out and there was wild cheering and finally singing of "He's a jolly good fellow", while they waved to the crowd. When they went in, the whole crowd - thousands & thousands of people, all surged away & we were carried with it willy-nilly. We were again highly pleased with ourselves as we hadn't seen them before, tho' in afraid we had gone more out of curiosity than out of patriotism or love for the Royal Family, & had only wanted to see them & watch the crowd make a noise.

Our next aim was to go & see the floodlighting which was now coming up all over the place as it got dark. We were carried through the park with the crowd, while rockets & squibs made a noise & a good display on every side, & went up to Admiralty Arch, which was a beautiful sight, lit up as bright as day, & people on the top were letting off fireworks. The crowds were denser than ever, & everyone seemed to be singing & dancing & there was such an air of real happiness without any drunkenness or over-noisy disorder. Down Whitehall we went again (goodness knows how many times we went down there yesterday!) to see the floodlighting in Westminster. & everyone else seemed to have the same idea. The streets, normally so tidy, were strewn with newspapers, bags, wrappings, flaps & other rubbish. Oh

looked just like peace-time again. Not many of the government buildings were lit up until one got to the top of Whitehall & to Westminster. The Ministry of Health was floodlit & lit by searchlights from the other side of the street & all its flags. The flag of the allies with an enormous Union Jack hanging out in the middle over the balcony - looked marvellous in the light. The crowds were thick but not like the afternoon ones, so we could walk fairly easily. It was about 10.45, and we had just turned right to look at Westminster Hall which was beautifully floodlit with flame light, when there was a terrific cheer & I shouted "Get it Wainie!" so dragging the others after me, I raced back to the Ministry of Health and we joined the crowd, which was not so big, as no-one had expected this to happen, so we got very near the building, but people soon thronged the street behind us. And up there on the centre balcony, lit by searchlights from across the road, stood Churchill waving to the crowd, who cheered & cheered - the biggest cheers of the day. He did all his tricks to please the crowd - got out a cigar, lit it, & puffed forth clouds of smoke, made the V-sign & waved his hat. He was grinning broadly & obviously enjoying himself. There was a band in the street below, and it started up "Hail of Hope & Glory," & the whole crowd - thousands of us - picked it up & sang it with more fervour than I had heard anything sung all day. The best part of it was Wainie too, for he stood up there on the balcony singing away lustily, & conducted the crowd with his arms - and when the song ended what a cheer went up! The crowd shouted & shouted, & even we, who, not liking the shrieking kind of celebration, hadn't cheered the King or Queen or anyone up to now, shouted hooray for Wainie. He was the hero of the day - even if he did know it himself. No crowd could have shown more movingly or sincerely the appreciation & gratitude it had for Churchill. He made them keep quiet with his hand & then made a short impromptu speech - and a very good one - of the kind to appeal to a crowd. He called them "My dear friends" and said - "This is your victory" at which there was the most enormous cheer. They just cheered everything he said. It was a funny speech. He said "The lights went out & the bombs came down" and then ~~spoke~~ quoted Terryson with his "jaws of death & mouth of hell". When he spoke of Japan, there was terrific boss

so he said, "I'll give 'em much more than that!" There was a terrific laugh when he said how glad he was we could have a night off today. It was a very spontaneous, natural speech and, I suspect, all the better for his being a bit "lit up" himself! - tho' not very obviously. He got more serious towards the end - I expect you've read the speech - and then when he said "God bless you all" everyone replied "God bless you, Winnie"; & the band played "It's a jolly good fellow" which must have echoed the length of Whitehall, for everyone sang so loudly. He waved, & puffed his cigar, & made the "V" sign, while the cheering went on & on. It was really rather moving, for it was so sincere and spontaneous - and much more fervent than that for the King & Queen which is more formal. For us that quarter-hour in Whitehall was the high-spot of the day & I don't think we shall ever forget it. I know that sounds rather stodgy, but unless you were there, you can't understand how thrilling it was amongst a huge crowd of thousands of people all cheering one man because they believed he had done so much to bring peace to the country. Anyway we were terribly pleased & congratulated ourselves on our good luck at being there then.

When we managed to get through the crowds we went up to the top of Parliament which were flooded by us. Big Ben was lit up by two great searchlights and there was a row of smaller floodlights round the tower. It was terribly bright & the house of P. looked really beautiful. The flag on the Abbey was flooded & seemed to hover in the sky in a halo of light. There were lights on the river, & the R.C.C. buildings were lit up in white & a sort of greeny-blue light. The city hall was flame-coloured & the Min. of Health white, with all its flag fluttering - the light. Westminster was really the most beautiful place of all with its floodlights; & rockets & fireworks kept going up in orange & red at the back of it. Down Whitehall again, to Trafalgar Square, which was also bright as day. Large floodlights - cum-searchlights of an electric blue colour played on Nelson's statue, and the National Gallery, S. Africa House & all the other buildings were lit up with a sort of mellow-creamy light with a few coloured ones interspersed on them. The crowds were getting rowdy, there were dancing & going mad all over the place. As we left it about 11.30 they were just lighting a bonfire at the bottom of the steps. People just littered the streets & pavements, sitting in the road, on the kerb, on the top of shelters, bus waiting -

shelters, or stables anywhere they could find, if they were tied, or dancing madly if they weren't. Some houses had lit braziers or torches on their balconies & every house or shop in the West End had some kind of floodlighting on it. We went back with Dan about midnight, simply battling our way through the crowds, which just grabbed hold of us & waded us down in their carousals. But we were getting tired, & as we knew we'd have to walk all the way home, we thought it'd better get going - which was easier said than done, as we had to go through the West End to get home. The people were madder & happier than ever & were dancing all over the place, so that we just couldn't get through, and you couldn't ^{even} walk on the kerbs, as because officers & men & girls just sitting there in exhaustion. Not a lamp-post was free of at least one man on it. Bonfires were being lit in the streets; there was one near Piccadilly, & as we went up Regent St. people were just breaking up the shutters of a shop to make another! Any car that came along had people inside & outside it, & nobody bothered about the right side of the road or one-way streets. We got terribly tired after so much walking all day, & had to take our turn at resting on the kerb in Oxford St! The three of us tramped all the way home & finally got in about 1.30 am - tired, dirty but very happy. We kept wondering what our fond parents were doing - (thought of you probably in bed asleep, & wondered what you'd have said if you'd know your daughter was chasing round London at 1 o'clock in the morning! But it's an occasion which will only come once in a lifetime (we hope) and it would have been a pity to miss it all, when we were in London - which has been the centre of things throughout the war - and especially when we were young.

We really enjoyed ourselves yesterday, & I think we shall always remember it, as it will be something to look back on. I wish you could have been up here to see the crowds. There's something about a London crowd that you don't get anywhere else. and tho' we didn't go mad or dance & sip a lot, we just enjoyed watching everybody else, & the lights & buildings, & the searchlights that played about in the sky making a sort of dappled pattern. Today is a day of rest for us, & we're all staying in - & not gone that far out so far, tho' we may go & see St. Paul's lit up tonight. We don't feel so tired now, but all last night's events still seem very dreamlike & unreal.

we are all writing long epistles to our parents - they are more like chronicles now - to tell them what London was like on Peace Night.

I'm sorry I've written such a long letter. (I doubt if you've managed to get as far as this, as you're probably bored stiff by it all. I intended to tell you what I'd been doing, as I usually do in my letters, but I seem to have got carried away by my "subjects" & have written far too much for a letter - it now approaches & sounds like an account for a newspaper. (I thought you would like to know what I did, & what London was like on Peace night from something ~~the~~ other than a newspaper but didn't mean it to approach such proportions, and accordingly I apologise. I'll excuse myself by saying I have enjoyed writing it & "recording my impression" as they say - the newspapers, and I suppose it's as much ~~benefit~~ for my benefit as yours in a way! I don't really know whether to lend it to you after all, as, knowing you, I expect you'll say 1) it's interesting 2) it's getting sentimental about peace 3) I'm silly to have gone in for this celebration business 4) you could have read it all in the papers anyway & 5) you're bored stiff by it. However, I'll take the risk & send it to you & ask you, however much you feel like it, not to throw it in the fire, in case it should be interesting in later years.

Probably all the other girls' parents will suffer from the same deluge of rubbish from their daughters' pens, so don't think yourselves alone in your suffering. Bee has written 11 sides too. I think that if you had been in London, you might have felt like we do, & been infected by the spirit too, so forgive all this trashy letter & write & tell me what you did to celebrate. & for heaven's sake don't write back & say you wonder why I did it. - I'm hoping you may find the letter interesting, from the parental interest point of view, if nothing else, but if you're bored, I shouldn't be surprised.

I have no more time to tell you about my visit to Brunley on Sunday, which is rather outside the pale here anyway, so will reserve that for a future occasion (don't worry, I will write ~~you~~ soon) and close at long last -

With all my love to you both - Betty xxx