

**(This is the talk given by Islwyn Griffiths
at the Get-Together at the St.John's Community Hall on May 12th. 2007)**

Welcome to everyone. It's marvellous to see so many here. Some months ago I felt really depressed and had given up hope of being able to hold any sort of meeting. After a great deal of correspondence and detective work I had discovered that of the 52 host mothers and fathers who had looked after the refugee children, only three were alive and living in the vicinity. It would have been much easier to have arranged this meeting in heaven.

For a short while we must all, this afternoon, try to go back in our minds fifty years and more into the last century, a terrible century, which saw during its first fifty years two of the most cruel and devastating wars in the history of mankind, which left in its wake great tragedies. That is the background of this story.

I have been calling this meeting a Get-together rather than a Meeting in order to suggest that it should be an informal gathering. I am certain that there are some here who haven't seen each other for a long while, and this will be an opportunity to renew contacts. I haven't lived here since 1965, unfortunately. We shall be going back fifty years, half a century, and rediscovering an interesting episode in the history of the Dock, and in the history of your families, and one which I think we should be very proud of. You will only fully appreciate it later, I feel, after thinking about it all in the light of your own experiences of living since that time.

I spent a few days in Pembroke Dock last year and went to Llanion to look up an old friend, Dennis Lloyd, whom you will all know. I knew the road where he lived but not the number of the house. There was someone in the road washing a car and I asked him if he knew where Dennis Lloyd lived. "I am Dennis Lloyd," he said. I then asked him if he knew who I was. He had no idea. So just in case you are also wondering who I am, I'll tell you. I'm Islwyn Griffiths. I hope that we'll all get to know each other better during the afternoon and that we'll all have opportunities to meet each other and roll back all those years. I should have mentioned that Vicki, Dennis' wife, recognised me immediately, opened the window, opened her arms and declaimed; "Islwyn! Do you remember an inn, Miranda.? Do you remember an inn.?" They were the opening lines of a poem I taught my class for an eisteddfod over fifty years ago.

You may be wondering what brought this Get-Together about. Last year I met two people, whom you may know, - Ann Parcell, who is now Ann Cole and lives at Lamphey, and Joyce Calver, who is now Joyce Griffiths and lives in Hawkestone Road in Pembroke Dock. Ann had heard that I had an album of photographs of the scheme involving children from the camps for displaced children in Europe which operated once in Pembroke Dock. Her mother had looked after one of them, Sonja, during two summers. When Ann returned the album we had a long chat. She spoke of her life as a school teacher and head-teacher, of the years she had spent as a teacher in Germany, and she described what a tremendous influence the visits of these children, and her attendance at other events, during her youth at Pembroke Dock, had had on her attitudes later on in her life. They had broadened and deepened her understanding of the world. I was surprised and shaken to hear Ann speak about these matters with such earnestness and enthusiasm.

And then I met Joyce. It was she who opened my eyes and reminded me what looking after these children meant in a little family at that time. Maydy stayed with the Calvers during two consecutive summers, and then there came Katerina and in 1960 Annelore. It was a four year commitment. And to have Maydy for the second year, they paid her fare here. This happened with all families where the children spent a second year or more with them. Joyce

remembers the strain and the joy of having these children. She spoke to me with pride of the efforts of her parents. It was no mean feat to be a host-parent and a host-family. The contact with Maydy lasted up until recent years and Joyce has visited her in America where she settled.

I had kept not only the photographs but also, as its secretary, all the details of the operation of the scheme during its five years of existence. I went through the correspondence etc. and rediscovered it all for myself. And after fifty years I was seeing it in a different light. I began to understand where its strength lay, why it had lasted five years, and why it had influenced Ann Cole and Joyce Griffiths. And it thrilled me to realize what we had accomplished and to see that this little slice of a story, which is fifty years old, was, in reality, a great story of a small town's reaction to a major European tragedy, and it deserved to be remembered.

I began to compile a portfolio or record of it which I hoped to place for anyone to see in the Pembrokeshire Records Office in Haverfordwest. It is a bare, unadorned story consisting of the minutes of committee meetings, lists of children and their host-parents, the trips and birthday parties they attended, lists of people who helped with collecting the necessary money, several cuttings and lots of photographs. Nothing has been added to the story by myself. Many matters have been left out because I have no record of them and they have been forgotten. The contents have all been copied from records which I kept, except for a few pages at its end which contain reflections by three people, David Hay, Bill Harries and Joyce Calver, who were children at the time in homes where the refugee children stayed.

But it would have been incorrect to place this record in the Records Office without giving the hostparents, you, their families, and friends of the scheme in the locality an opportunity to see it, because it is their story, your story, and in most cases it is their names and photographs that are in the record. **That is the reason for the portfolio and for this get-together today.**

I shall show later a few slides which I took at the time. They are not outstanding but they exist so we might as well look at them. Don't forget that they are fifty years old and so is the equipment I am using to show them. I am also showing a few slides of one of the camps. Afterwards there will be an opportunity for you to see the portfolios. One is a copy of the other. And afterwards there will be tea and biscuits.

Most of the hostparents, as I said, have died. Most of their children and other relatives have been informed of this get-together, where this was possible, and many are here this afternoon. The refugee children were looked after in 26 homes in all in Pembroke Dock, Pembroke and Carew. **Forty-eight 10-week holidays were arranged by the Committee during the five years the scheme was in existence.** Some children returned to spend a second ten-week holiday here, and some a third holiday in the same homes. The first arrived in 1957 on May 7th and the last in 1961. Last Monday was the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the first children

How did it all start? A Mr. Barclay, the Secretary of an organisation called International Help for Children, gave a talk at the Bush School describing the scheme. It had been operating in some English towns but nowhere in Wales. It aroused a lot of interest amongst the children in the school. My wife and I could see that placed in the correct homes it could be a success here. I spoke about it to Fred Morgan, the Coal Merchant of Hill Street, Pennar, who was an active supporter of the scout movement and a friend of mine. If Fred decided to support it, it would mean that a large active group of ladies, the mothers of the local scout troop, and many of their friends would also probably support it. Fred was the key to its eventual success.

The more I read and thought back over the scheme, the more I was surprised at the breadth and depth of these people's commitment, and we should, I feel, besides finding pleasure and satisfaction in their achievements, be proud of them, celebrate them and pay tribute to them.

To illustrate the commitment of these ladies, and the spirit that they shared, I shall tell you of an incident which involved my wife and I. We had no children of our own. We were both working full-time but were anxious, naturally, to take a part in the venture and look after one of the children. Sonja, who was from Poland, came to stay with us. But we were, of course, as we soon found out, hopelessly under-equipped to think of looking after her. We had no children of our own and we worked all day. She played with other children during the day and went to school and was quite happy, but at home there was no one to play with except my wife and I. After spending about three nights up until three o'clock in the morning doing jigsaws, we realised that this was fast becoming a disaster, and Sonja's face was getting longer by the hour. Something had to be done immediately. So I went up to Lewis Street to see if Mrs. Sherlock had some advice. She was one of the ladies on our committee. She opened the door and took one look at my face and roared with laughter. "Don't worry, my boy," she said, "we've been waiting for this. But she can't stay here. The only spare place we've got here for her to sleep is with gran. And she's over 80. But we've arranged for her to go to stay with Mrs. Parcell." And to Mrs. Parcell she went. (This was Ann Cole's mother.) She already had three largish children of her own and a husband who was not well. He died within a few years. That was the quality of the humanity that the scheme brought out in people. It was magnificent. And it has taken me a lifetime of living myself since then to fully realize what this all meant. In compiling the portfolio, I have been continually reminded that this is great, great stuff, something Pembroke Dock should be really proud of.

I am now going to read out a list of the names of the hostparents. These are the people whom we are celebrating, they are the ones who made it all possible. They are not listed in any special order.

Mrs. Rossiter, Ashlea, West Williamston, Cressely, Kilgetty. Martin Tomsons - 1958/1959. Stefan Haryung – 1960.

Mrs. Eynon, Crickchurch, Carew, Tenby. 1958/1959/1961 – Veldze Tomsons. 1960 – Melanie Becskei.

Mrs. Griffiths, 44 High Street, Neyland. 1959/1960 – Anne Maria Kroflisch.

Mrs. Calver, St. Andrews Road, Pembroke Dock. 1957/1958 – Maydy Buhle. 1959 – Katerina Dorner. 1960 – Hannelore Bryat.

Mrs. Evans, 27 St. Mary's Road, Pembroke. 1960/1961 – Kathie Ringert.

Mrs. Maureen Colgan, 42 Castle Street, Pennar. 1960 – Johann Ringert.

Mrs. Fred Morgan, i Hill Street, Pembroke Dock. 1960/1961 – Gertrude Baumann.

Mrs. Neville, 6 St. Mary's Road, Pembroke Dock. 1957 - Ian Kyran.

Mrs. Harries, Grocery Shop, Bush Street, Pembroke Dock. 1957/1958/1959 – Kurt Doblentz.

Mrs Horn, 7 Greenhill Road, Pennar, Pembroke Dock. 1957 - Zbigniew Potenek.

Mrs. Lloyd Williams, Hawkeston Road, Pembroke Dock. 1957 – Nina Nikejenko.

Mrs. Williams, 48 Milton Terrace, Pembroke Dock 1957 – Lidia Komorowski.

Mrs. Hay, The Nutshell, Queen, Street, Pembroke Dock 1957/58 – Dorda Ivkovich.

Mrs. Lomax, Tŷ Gwyn, Argyle Street, Pembroke Dock 1957 – Amelia Lobosny.

Mrs. Pilgrim, 8 St. Mary's Road, Pembroke Dock 1958 – Marion Rasmussen.

Mrs Welch, Holyland House, Pembroke 1958 - Gerard Lutz.

Mrs. Lalley, Pembroke Road, Pembroke Dock 1959 – Maria Haryung.

Mrs. Thomas, 9 Merchant's Park, Monkton, Pembroke. 1959 – Friedrich Baumann. 1960/1961 – Franz Kiss.

Mrs. Nicholas, Carew Newton Farm, Carew Newton, Cressely, Kilgetty. 1959/1960 – Stefan Gerber.

Mrs. Griffiths, The Bungalow, Monkton, Pembroke. 1960/1961 – Friedrich Baumann.

Mrs. Morgan, Belmont, Woodbine Terrace, Pembroke. 1959 – Elisabeth Symczycz.

Mrs. Lloyd, 85 Park Street, Pembroke Dock. 1957 – Heidimarie Stowe

Mrs. P. Lloyd, 17 Prospect Place, Pembroke Dock. 1958 – Margita Beeze.

Mrs. Parcell, Milton Place, Pembroke Dock. 1957/1958 – Sonja Juric.

Mrs. Idris Evans, 31 Bush Street, Pembroke Dock. 1957 – Detlef Klar. 1958/1959 – Ulrike Doblentz.

At the end of the portfolio you will see accounts by three of the children of the families involved.

Bill Harries, the eldest son of Mr and Mrs Harries of the Grocery Shop in Bush Street, has written about Kurt Doblentz, who stayed with them during three consecutive years.

"When Kurt arrived in Pembroke Dock," he writes, "he was a shy boy who spoke no English. He soon settled down and became a member of our family. He even called my parents 'Mum' and 'Dad'. He was very quick to learn and soon understood what we were saying, and started to learn English. Because I was a scout leader, he came with me to troop meetings and joined in with all the boys in the troop in all the games and activities.

"We had a family grocery business and he liked helping in the shop and in particular helping me to deliver the orders in the van. He liked to come to the beach with us especially to Freshwater East where he spent a lot of time.

"He came back to us three times under the scheme and when he left school he came back on his own to see us.

"He told me on one occasion he was in London Paddington Station waiting for a train and he struck up a conversation with someone who was also waiting for a train. This person asked him where he had learned English and when Kurt told him, he said, "I thought so. You are a German who speaks English with a Welsh accent.

"And we still keep in touch with him to this day."

I came into e-mail contact with Kurt recently. He is now about sixty years of age and has fairly recently got married.

David Hay, the son of Mr and Mrs Hay of the Nutshell in Queen Street, writes about the little boy who stayed with them.

"It was 1957, I was eleven years of age and a pupil at Pembroke Grammar School, and, together with my parents and sister, were waiting at Pembroke Dock station. We were there with other local families excitedly waiting for the arrival of the steam train. This was not just any train from Paddington, but was the Pembrokeshire Coast Express with very special passengers aboard. They were Polish children from a displaced persons' camp who were going to stay with families in the area for several weeks.

"We were introduced to Bartu, a young Polish refugee, who was to stay with my family in Queen Street over the coming weeks. He was only about eight years of age and did not speak a word of English. I remember at our first meal, all Barty kept saying was "cartofal " or something similar. My mum pointed at everything on the table to him, and realised that we hadn't given him any potatoes.....

"Having now retired after teaching for nearly 40 years in various secondary schools in Britain, I have met thousands of children from different cultures and backgrounds. I would be interested to know if he and the other children look back on their time with Pembrokeshire families and say,"It was a great experience."

Lastly, Joyce Griffiths, the daughter of Mr and Mrs Calver, writes about Maydy, Katerina and Annelore, the little girls which Mrs Calver hosted.

"The visits were a big part of my life for four years so that I have never forgotten them. Maydy was everyone's favourite. I can remember going to the railway station to meet her and being quite in awe of this exotic creature with her dark skin and earrings. She charmed everyone with her little curtsy when she was introduced to people. My father was in the Fire Brigade and we had an alarm bell in the landing window which alerted him to fires. The alarm always awoke the whole household and Maydy used to get very excited about it and would run up and down the landing shouting, 'Fire Alarm!' 'Fire Alarm!', making us all laugh.....

"I also remember my parents saving £10 so that Maydy could come a second year....

"This was my first experience also of what could be interpreted as a sort of racism or self-hatred regarding the colour of her skin. I remember her scrubbing her skin in the bathroom as she wanted to be white like me. I couldn't understand this because to me she was a beautiful girl. I later saw a photograph of her father who was a Korean with the same dark skin as she had. She emigrated to America not many years after visiting us. I visited her out there later and she had dyed her hair blonde and had changed her name to Elaine. I had always thought that Maydy was such a pretty name...."

Some of the children must have had difficulty in adapting to a new way of life away from their parents. The hostparents were experienced mothers and fathers and if there were difficulties they must have discussed them amongst themselves. They never seemed to reach me. What did I know of bringing up children, anyway? But it happened once, I remember, in the middle of a lesson at school, that the headmaster's secretary came in with a message that I was wanted urgently on the phone. It was someone in a panic, she said. It was Mrs. Thomas, one of the host-parents from Monkton. "Wolfgang's on the roof of the kitchen again," Mrs. Thomas said, "and he won't come down. and he's peeing on to the garden." I suggested to her as I had done in other circumstances, that she phoned Mrs Harries at the Bush Street grocery shop. She had brought up a houseful of boys.

Rarely were we given the background of the children. I'll summarize one account we were sent. It was of Stefan Gerber's background. He came from the well-known Kapfenberg refugee camp which is near the town of Graz in southern Austria. He was staying with Mrs Nicholas of Carew Newton and was 10 years of age.

"Stefan's father fled to Austria in 1946. His wife and family had been in a forced labour camp in Yugoslavia until 1947 and an elder child died there as a small child. They came to Kapfenberg and both parents worked for the British Occupation Forces. Stefan's mother has died and the old grandmother looks after the family. The father has a regular job but drinks heavily. It is important to get Stefan away from the camp. He has been attending the English conversation classes regularly even though he had little hope that he would be included. He has one older sister."

There was never any contact between the parents of the children and their hostparents, as far as I remember. I cannot remember either any unfortunate incident or ill-health amongst the children either, which was remarkable when you remember that the scheme involved 48 ten-week holidays over a five-year period, away from home and from parents and in a foreign country, whose language they did not at first understand. This is, of course, a reflection of the care and attention and patience they found at the hands of the hostparents and hostfamilies.

Before I end I must pay tribute also to the support the scheme received in the locality. The scheme would not have survived without the support of the schools, the school-children, the teachers and headteachers, as well as the education authority. I have no memory of even asking permission that they should attend the schools. But the support they gave also included considerable financial help. Help also came from the Rotary Club of Pembroke, the local W.I. from the scouts, football matches, endless whist drives and raffles, and from various individuals and other sources around Wales which had just happened to hear of the work. One of the largest amounts we received was £77 from the village of Blaenau Ffestiniog in North Wales. This was a lot of money in those days and this village was one of the most depressed of the slate-mining areas. But most of the financial help came from Pembroke Dock and the district around and from local raffles. Mrs Idris Evans, of the fruit-shop in Bush Street, who also hosted two refugee children, organized so many raffles during these five years that it earned her a nickname. Graham and Suzanne, her own children, have confided to me that she was known locally then as "Charity Flo".

I have now finished this summary. The record will be placed in the Pembrokeshire County Record Office next week. It will stay there as a reminder to the future of this small but important effort in Pembroke Dock to counter the inhumanity which stalked the world of the first half of the twentieth century and produced two World Wars.