

Long ago I lived in a small house (known as a back-to-back because, oddly enough, it had another house at the back) and was one of a terrace of four. It was strangely comforting because we regarded the folk in the other houses as relatives. Indeed some of them were, but all grown-ups were Aunties and Uncles and acted in that capacity, taking an interest in our doings, scolding us if we were naughty but praising us if we were good. Our houses looked across at four similar dwellings with a wide brick path separating the tiny gardens and this path was our communal playground where we could safely play while being over-looked by several pairs of eyes. This was a "plus" and I must admit there weren't many. Each of the four houses had two lavatories between them so it was a matter of luck if you shared with a small family or one with three or four adults - children always came last since it was considered quite in order for them to use a potty if necessary. The opposite houses also shared wash-houses' (called by the old name of brewus' ((brewhouse)) ,while we, on our side had to do the laundry in the house. This meant that the copper, known to us as the boiler, occupied a big corner of the kitchen, next to the old brownstone sink and on wash-days it was stoked up early to provide hot water for the actual washing , then stoked again to boil "the whites". Since the kitchen was also the family living-room there was never really enough room for the four of us to do our own thing, which might be the reason Dad spent many evenings in the pub whose large garden lay between the first of our four houses and the street. We did have another room downstairs which was "the parlour" but was only used on high days and holidays - I never fathomed why. Perhaps some of the folk lucky enough to have the extra room were too poor to furnish it and it was considered polite to ignore it. Mother was very proud of her parlour. It had a brown rexine three-piece suite, a large sideboard with mirrored back, a rather nice drop-leaf table and a china cabinet containing prized china - mainly dishes won by Dad in fishing contests. Later on a cabinet gramophone was added and Dad was able to indulge in his passion for "silver" bands and records of his favourite tenors. Mum was happy with Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy but Midge, (my sister Miriam), and I liked practically anything. Although friends and relations were all acquiring a wireless we didn't get one until late 1939. Upstairs there were two bedrooms which were, fortunately, large enough for Midge and I to have separate beds when we grew into our teens. By and large we didn't do too badly compared with some of our neighbours with larger families.