



A Family History in Upminster



Jo Masters (nee Levy)

Eighty years ago, at the age of nine, Josephine Levy moved into a house her parents had built at the corner of Corbets Tey Road and Gaynes Park Road. Jo had been a sickly child but, with the move from Goodmayes into the clean air of Upminster, her health improved immeasurably.

Jo's father, George, ran a dentist's surgery from the house. Jo went to school at Hill House until she was 14, sometimes running home at lunchtime to teach piano for a shilling a lesson. At 26, she married Morris Masters, who was a pattern-cutter and dress-maker. They had two daughters and continued to live happily in Corbets Tey Road for many years.

In the fifties, Jo ran a ballet school from that house. Then, in the sixties, she opened a ladies' boutique, "Reprise", in St Mary's Lane. The shop was well known locally for stocking the Mary Quant fashions of the day and for its 'fun-furs' - 3/4 length

synthetic fur coats, which Jo used to put on a rail outside the door to tempt people in!

Notwithstanding her venture into retail, Jo's first love was music and over the years she has written nearly 100 songs. During the Second World War, with her good looks and excellent singing voice, Jo was Upminster's own Vera Lynn, entertaining the troops across the world with ENSA. In 1959, she wrote a full length musical, "What Katy Did", which was performed at Ilford Town Hall by the Bush Davies Dancing School.

Jo and Morris have now been married 64 years. Their daughters emigrated, one to Canada and the other to Australia, and Jo and Morris downsized and moved to Barkingside.

As she approaches her 90th birthday, Jo has lost none of her zest for life and continues to compose and sing her own songs. She and Morris can be seen performing in videos of her songs on YouTube and this year her song "House of Tears" was shortlisted in an Oldie Composers' Songwriting Competition, organised to raise funds for the Dr Barnardo's charity. In an interesting footnote, as a result of the competition she is thrilled to have gained fans in Australia, where, championed by her youngest daughter, her songs are finding a brand new audience.

If you were one of Jo's (Miss Levy's) ballet pupils, back in the fifties, Jo would love to hear from you. Email her at jo@croozy.com. And if you would like to listen to her music, visit www.croozy.com/jo