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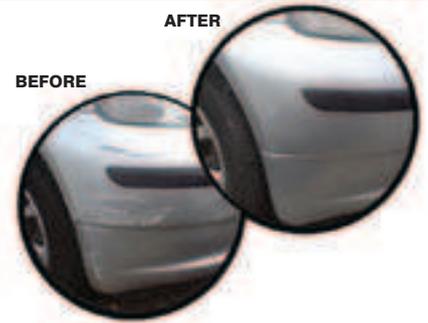
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## The final part of our serialisation of Geoff Andrews' fascinating book, *Memories of a Lifetime Past*, about the life and times of Parkgate fishermen, Chris and Jim Peters

We would sit in the living room, soaking up all these stories, then I'd get up and make a pot of tea, as I knew where everything was. The little dog would sometimes break wind and run under another chair. If Annie was tired she would excuse herself and go to bed, but we were family in their eyes so she knew we would not mind in the least. Chris would take the chance of talking to us of anything that was on his mind. He was getting anxious again about Annie and the housework. He asked Pat if she would come once a week to clean for them, they agreed on a Wednesday morning start till 2pm.

When we got up to leave, Rex would come with us to the door and go across the yard to his bed in the shed, which Chris had made for him, snug as a bug in a rug.

Chris would comment on the weather before he bade us goodnight. Sometimes he'd walk to the end of the drive to see all the Welsh lights twinkling. "Looks like we're in for some wind," he'd say and that's fairly accurate – when the Welsh lights twinkle, more often than not, it does blow later.

During our tea and biscuits one night, I asked Chris how he came to have the *Ethel* built. "Well, the Thora was getting done, my dad had finished in the boats, our Jim had the *Zilla*, me and our Albert had worked Sundays, so we went down to Conwy and asked them to put the *Ethel* on [start to lay the keel] after paying a deposit. Then they would make a half model and you could change it to suit yourself, if you wanted to. Our Henry advised me to have the bows a bit higher, so we did.

"After a while I would have to go down there and pay them some more money, than they would build some more, till they finally completed it ready for the engine and ballast. We sold the Thora to someone in Conwy, minus its engine and ballast, because they were to be put in the *Ethel*. The engine was a 14/16 Britt. Our Henry, Monty and I took her to Conwy on the night tide and when we got off the heads (the Great Orme) it blew and lashed down and we had to stay outside because everywhere was as black as a bag and it was low water, we just couldn't see a thing. Come morning it was still pouring down and we moored up outside Crossfields yard, they came and put us ashore. The foreman of the yard said: "By hell you've had a good drumming out there last night, haven't you." Chris said they were soaked through to the skin, cold and hungry.

They walked to Llandudno Junction to catch a train to Chester, the water still squelching out of them. Monty said: "Let's get in this carriage," so they sat down, and very soon there were puddles of water on the floor. At this point, Chris started chuckling and laughing, then said to me: "Do yer know what Monty said then, as people were looking for a seat?" "No," I replied. "He said, no one will bother us Chrissier because they'll think we've pissed ourselves. And he was right too."

The *Ethel* was completed and cost, I think, £198 with mast and spars and blocks. It's funny how things turn out, this nobby was built in 1937 when I was born. Chris used it most of his working life, a life I've had the privilege to share, a life I've learned so much from, then the agony

of selling it. I'd go down to Heswall sometimes, where the Mealors had her moored, and walk around her, touch her, and dream if only I had the means to have bought her. Then she is sold again and she's gone for years, only to turn up in a warehouse in Liverpool, owned by Donald, who lavishes love and affection on her, who was also born in 1937 – great!

Then Joy and Alan's new bungalow was completed and they moved in. It was becoming obvious that Chris and Annie could no longer cope; he'd said as much on one of our visits. He had also said that Joy and Alan wanted them to go and live there. Alan was also staying with them at night, till bedtime. We'd arrive and Alan went home, knowing that we'd see them alright. The last straw came when he said that he just couldn't cope anymore and didn't know how to tell Annie, who simply loved her cottage. Pat and I were destroyed; we knew it had to come, there was this gentle old man, asking us how was he to tell his wife that they had to go. We knew it would also put a strain on Joy and her family but they were prepared to take them. So we said, tell her exactly what you have told us, that you can't cope anymore, that Joy wants you to live with them and, so long as you are together, it will be alright with her.

The following week it had all been arranged that they were to move. Chris, a little relieved, Annie a little apprehensive, she did so love her cottage. Chris insisted the move was only temporary and they took their immediate belongings and furniture needed in the bungalow and, of course, the little dog as well. Rex would have Joy's King Charles spaniel, Crom, as a mate, and I nearly forgot, the budgie.

For Pat and me, it was never ever the same. Although we still went to see them and although Joy made them as comfortable as possible, it wasn't the same as being in the cottage. It must have been a tremendous wrench for them, after living in the cottage for over 50 years. One day Alan phoned us. Chris had fallen and broken his leg and was in Arrowe Park Hospital. Well, of course, we went to visit him, including the twins, Ann and Carol, and Donald. Donald would always jolly him along. It was remarkable how quick he got on his feet; he was back home again in around seven weeks. He managed quite well with a walking frame and succeeded in doing without it altogether.

Annie was only too pleased to have him back, so she could make a fuss of him again, sometimes to his annoyance. Our fears and worries as to how long this lovely old couple could stay together were realised on the 19th May 1991 when Alan phoned us telling us that Chris had passed peacefully away. I can't describe how I felt when the news sank in. You know it has to come sooner or later but when it finally does, there's nothing but a big void left. I wished he could go on forever and ever, but now he's gone and that part of my life has gone with him.

Pat and I thank god for the life of Chris and also for being a small part of that life. We felt we owed it to him to help Annie in any way we could this we did, as she also passed away on 5th February 1993. We will always remember her last words to us, as we left her side to go home: "Give my love to Susan," (our daughter). We visit the grave in Neston Parish Churchyard, where fond memories are all that are left.