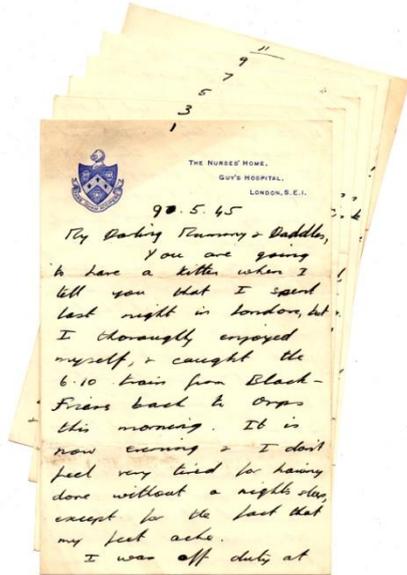


Robin's VE night

At the time of VE Day, Robin Tanner was a 22 year-old nurse who had started her training at Guy's Hospital in July 1941 and worked there through the remainder of the Second World War. Although selected to become a matron at Kings College Hospital in 1960, she chose instead to marry – then considered incompatible with the demands of being a matron – and, with her husband, started an infant school instead. Through her drive and leadership, the school was hugely successful, with 240 children and 40 staff by the time they retired, 26 years later. She died in September 2020, aged 97.



The Nurses' Home
Guy's Hospital
London SE1

9-8-5.45

My Darling Mummy & Daddles

You are going to have a titter when I tell you that I spent last night in London, but I thoroughly enjoyed myself & caught the 6.10 train from Blackfriars back to Orps this morning. It is now evening & I don't feel very tired for having done without a night's sleep, except for the fact that my feet ache.

I was off duty at 4.30 yesterday & I went straight up to Charing X. I walked through Trafalgar Square into Piccadilly, down Coventry Street, through Leicester Sq, back to Charing X tube station. The crowds were terrific, & in some places you just had to move with the crowd. I took a tube to Aldgate & went down to West Ham to the thanksgiving service. It was a wonderful service. The choir sang the Hallelujah Chorus beautifully. The whole church was full, right to the back of the gallery.

At nine, just after Paul had finished his sermon, he turned on his radiogram which he had put in the church for the King's speech. Paul had only spoken for about 10 mins but he was very stirring and the King just sounded inspired after him. They ended the service with 'Abide with me' & it was really very moving. After the service the organist played 'Land of hope & glory' for people to walk out, but instead of that, suddenly everyone stood up and started to sing it. Eventually he had to play another tune to get rid of them.

I then went to supper in the Mission & after Paul, Hugh, Sister Helen & I went out to see the sights. It was most extraordinary, in contrast to the sophisticated fun of the West End. All the streets were

decorated & nearly every house had some kind of decorative lighting, mostly fairy lights. Absolutely every street had a bonfire in the middle of the road & some had as many as 3 fires in one street. The people had taken their pianos & wireless sets out into the streets. The children sang at the tops of their voices, old couples were sitting in their doorways, others were dancing; some just looked bewildered as if they didn't quite understand what was happening.

We walked solidly for 2 hours up & down & in & out of the streets. Paul took photos of all the best fires which caused great competition among the children, all of whom wanted their photos taken. Some air-raid wardens had put their incendiaries, for demonstration purposes, on the fires, which sent up a terrific white light. I didn't see one drunk the whole evening which surprised me very much. There was a really happy atmosphere.

The sky was red, just as it had been in the blitz, only with the numerous bonfires that were literally everywhere. At midnight we climbed up on to the Hall of Youth to see the fires from above. The searchlights were everywhere. Obviously the people working them were thoroughly enjoying themselves. We went down to listen to the midnight news.

Then Paul began to worry about my getting back. Eventually he insisted on driving me to Blackfriars. Hugh and some others came to see what the West End was like. As we passed the Bank we saw St Paul's. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. The whole church was lit up with rather dim lights & two searchlights crossed, floodlighting the cross which stood out brilliantly against the sky. It was quite indescribable, but I shall never forget that gold cross shining up above the City.

We drove on over Charing X Bridge, along the other side, over Westminster Bridge and back along the embankment to Blackfriars. Big Ben stood out, beautifully illuminated, and all those buildings along the river, especially Westminster, were floodlit, all their beauty being reflected in the river below. Oh honestly, it looked wonderful.

I had told Paul that the trains ran once an hour which was quite true, but I found when I went up to the station that it was Sunday service & there wasn't a train till 6.8 in the morning. I said good-bye to them about 1.30 so they couldn't have got to bed before about 2. I bet their mother thinks I had a mighty bad influence over them!

Well, I wasn't going to waste the rest of the night, so I set out for St Paul's, which I think was the best sight of the lot. From there I went up Fleet Street, which was covered with papers like leaves in Autumn, up the Strand, through Trafalgar Sq into Piccadilly & then into Hyde Park. My feet were beginning to ache after that, so I went back via the embankment, which was lovely, to Blackfriars, which was closed. I talked to the foreman at the gate for some time & eventually he let me inside, unlocked the cloakroom, gave me a cushion for my head, & I slept there till 5.30 when he woke me with a cup of tea, as the station was about to be opened. I caught the 6.8 back here & just got on duty in time at 7 am.

I thoroughly enjoyed myself & don't regret it one little bit, so I hope you won't be cross. I shall never forget VE night as long as I live, but I pray we shall never have to celebrate another.

All my love,

Robin.

I was too tired to finish this letter last night, so I finished it today.