9. Hendred Street, Cowley.

I came to Oxford in 1955, at the age of one. Fate plopped me down in Hendred Street, Cowley in east Oxford. Small, brick, terraced houses lined the beginning of the street, changing into detached, moderately sized houses further down. My dad had secured a job in the nearby factory of Pressed Steel Fisher. We lived in a single rented room. My mum befriended a woman, Ada Ody who lived at the far end of the street, number 43. She became an important figure in my life, one whom I knew until her death in the late 1980s. My mum would take me to her house as a baby and leave me there while she shopped. Ody, as we always called her, was an eccentric woman. She used to sell fruit and vegetables from a barrow until her husband, George, drank all the profits and left her. In front of the fire place was a rug that George had made from the pelts of cats, all tabbies, except for one large ginger tom in the middle. Hendred street was, and is, a quintessential Town street. Populated by shop keepers and factory workers. And yet, even here, the Gown reached its tentacles. Later in life Ody took in University students as lodgers and I am sure, when I was there, many a college staircase scout lived on the street.



Ody had one child, Beryl. She had *crie du chat* syndrome. A rare condition caused by deletion on part of the p arm of chromosome 5. It is so called because children with the syndrome emit high-pitched

cat-like cries. These disappear with time and Beryl lived to her fifties, although she was institutionalized as a child. It was against this hard backdrop that I came to know Ody from my earliest days. My mother visited her weekly for most of her life and often accompanied Ody to see Beryl. When I emigrated to America Ody was most upset because she felt my mother would emigrate as well and there would be no one to look after Beryl when Ody died. All of this created a tense, dour atmosphere which permeated my life.