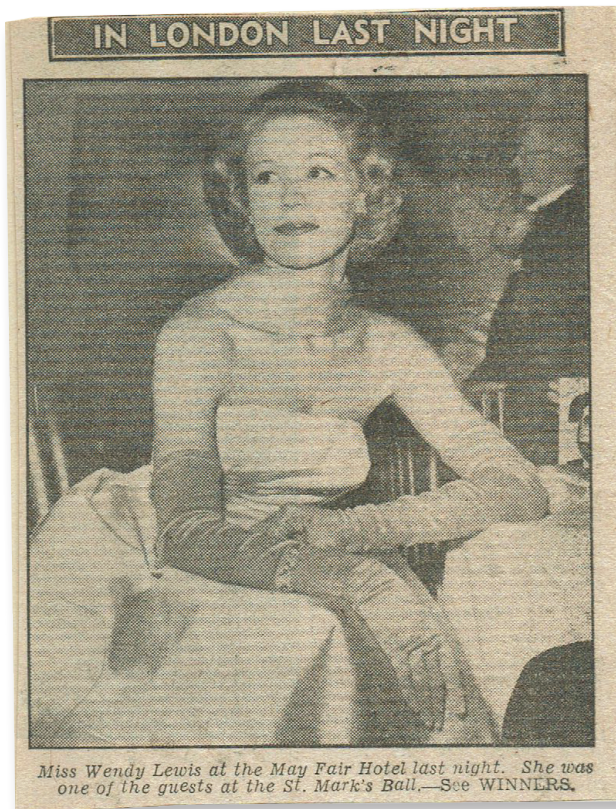


Chapter 3 part 5

Pinewood Studios...my own dressing room

By now, I was earning quite a lot of money and beginning to understand what I wanted in life. However, I was still doing the rounds of parties and balls with Tony and still seeing Peter the nights I was around. I did miss going out with my friends as I used to do when I was at college, but it seemed ungrateful to put a stop to all the endless parties when it was so important to my mother. I had become used to my new expensive lifestyle. So, my life was split in two, really, the 'show off' balls and pretending I was something I wasn't and the utter spoiling I received from being a mannequin, then back down to earth with the Wimpy and crinkle chips with Peter.



me in Jennifer's diary

Every opening of every restaurant or club, I was there. I appeared weekly in 'Jennifer's Diary.'

I loved working with the male models; they had my sense of humour, and 80% of them in those days were not 'pansy boys' as my mother called them. They were just good-looking young men and generally 'would be' actors. One boy called Steve was the rugged type and got lots of work doing road drilling adverts or truck drivers. He wasn't like that at all; in fact, he was

a pussycat deep down. We had a sort of fling, well a lot of kissing in the front room, with my mother calling out, 'I know what you are up to!' So, nothing really developed with him, which was a good thing really as I'm not sure he was going places, and I was!

Make a note: 'need flat of my own soon!' Living with my mother was very convenient as she did my laundry and cleared up after me. Poor mother worked all day and cleaned all night. We never heard from my stepfather, and I was thankful that at last my mother had come to her senses. I hoped she could have some peace now instead of the drunken abuse she received from my stepfather. I was told that my brother was working on a farm and was very happy, but I missed him. Soon after that we found a flat in Chiswick with 2 bedrooms...at last a room of my own...but she waited up for me every night, and I let her do my washing, of course! My mother now worked at Harvey Nichols in the lingerie department. Her favourite customer was Princess Alexandra, she always asked for my mother to serve her, which naturally made my mother very proud. They both had a love of delicate lingerie and until she died my mother always had beautiful underwear, unlike me as nothing ever matched and often, I never wore any anyway!

As I was well established in the fashion world by now, I was booked for all the main fashion shows at Harrods, Simpsons and Harvey Nichols. In between the shows, I would go and do a season and special press shows. This means that you go to work as an in-house mannequin for 5-6 weeks and they had various important buyers in and the press always wanted a story. There was generally some story around me, so they always hung around just in case. The press and the audiences liked me because I was very glamorous as well as a bit giggly and, of course, I was seen on the town with the most delicious males, none of which broke my heart, but I remember them with a warm smile. It was alright having a bit of 'hankie pankie' with them but never anything serious as I knew I belonged to Peter. I never stayed out too late with any man but sneaked out at every opportunity to go dancing or to eat, my two passions in life then. I went out with a man only if he could afford to take me to Wheeler's or Prunier's for Lobster Thermidor. I ate a lot of Lobsters, I remember!

My agents Michael and Celia, she had been made a partner by now, decided to promote me more by sending me to auditions for Film and TV commercials. Well, it proved an excellent decision as I got one commercial after another. I was 'the girl next door type,' and pretty silly with it. The directors liked me too as I was a hard worker and was always willing to make a fool of myself!

The other mannequins always stuck to their snooty look; pity, really, as I was making the money. I was asked if I had an Equity card, which you should have if you were going to speak in any of the commercials. But I flatly refused to speak as I was happy clowning around, and the thought of speaking in public reminded me of that chair and the poetry that I was made to recite as a child.

It seems funny now, but when TV was in its infancy, the film and TV companies had to be very careful with what they were allowed to show or do. I think Mary Whitehouse was around then, and she vetted everything, making everyone's life a misery. I remember my first commercial was for Tetley tea. I was supposed to be a wife and John, a model friend, was to be my husband. He looked about 18 in his striped pyjamas and dressing gown, and I looked nearer to 12 in a flannelette nightie with bows on and a sort of shawl thing in case any flesh showed. There was a problem, as we were supposed to be married and in bed, a double bed at that, and it was a bit risqué. The director thought they would not get away with it, so they put a big bolster down the middle of the bed so we didn't touch each other. I saw the rushes and I looked pregnant as the bolster was so big. Anyway, it was very funny. My husband had to yawn and stretch, without showing any flesh, and say, 'How about a cup of tea darling,' and I just had to smile and say 'Tetley's?' and he said, 'Of course.' Then a little jingle was played, and that was it. One hundred guineas just like that AND repeat fees, which meant every time the advert was shown, I got 2 Shillings or something like that.

Hey, I was on my way to being rich!

I loved working at Pinewood best as they always sent a car for me at about 5 am and the chauffeur would wrap a blanket around me and say, 'Go to sleep Miss. We will soon be there'. When we arrived at the gates, the doorman would salute, and I would just nod. My dressing room was fit for a Queen. A Chaise Longue if I was tired, an amazing dressing table brightly lit with light bulbs around it. In the corner, I had my own Avocado coloured wash basin. Make-up and hair was first, and this was done whilst you looked over the script, wordless for me.

I remember one particular advert was for Sketchley Dry Cleaners. I had a tan colour frock on, and I was supposed to be waving at someone. Wardrobe had a problem, and so did I, for the lights were so hot and I was so nervous that I had big sweat marks under my armpits. They tried fans to cool me down and kept drying the dress, but my nerves got the better of me, and I was near to tears.

All of a sudden, someone who had been watching my pitiful efforts came from behind the cameras with a glass of water and a pill. 'Take this dear. It will calm you down. Don't worry. I take them all the time.' It was Norman Wisdom. In half an hour the dress was dry, and I was calm, so calm I could have said one or two words if pushed.

During my lunch break, I went and thanked him, and he gave my hand a little squeeze and winked at me.

Now, lunch breaks at Pinewood were special as whatever scene you were doing, you stopped when it was lunchtime. The crew and actors all flowed into the big dining hall and soon everything was silent except for the clatter of knives and forks. The funniest thing was that at the table you could have two Roman soldiers talking to a brain surgeon or perhaps three gypsies and a couple of fairies chatting over a chocolate sundae. I was having my lunch one day when I was joined by Stanley Baker (a film star in Zulu), Dirk Bogarde with his new boyfriend, who was also his cook, and Cliff Richard. He didn't know it, but I loved him, and I stopped eating as my mouth was hanging open. Cliff turned to me and said, 'Can you pass the salt?' I froze like a statue, so he came and took it out of my hand! Like all girls of my age, I loved our film stars and even if I was pretty grand myself, I still asked for an autograph, although not this time as I think I just melted into a puddle at their feet...I was invisible!

My most successful commercial was for Windolene window cleaner. The advert was such a success it was shown at all the cinemas around the country and on TV. Soon, I was noticed by everyone and people would stop me and ask for my autograph as if I was a film star. I would be walking down the street and look up, and people would see me and start the 'wipe it on wipe it off' action that I had to do. It was rather nice although I did pretend it was nothing special as if I was indeed a film star. All I know is that for months after the last filming, I had huge muscles from the wiping off the Windolene under the hot spotlights in the studios. I had to pretend it was easy to wipe it off, but it dried so quickly, thus the biceps!

One day I was booked with my girlfriend Jill Pengelli to work with Tom Jones at the Shepherd's Bush Empire. All we two sexy little girls had to do as Tom, who was pretending to be a cameraman, moved the camera to front of screen as he sang, was to jump up and down with balloons. Easy, but we got carried away and jumped up and down in front of Tom and nobody could see him! We were sacked!

It was a good year for cars. British cars seemed to be taking over the market. I was booked along with Raymond Baxter, a commentator who specialized in promoting cars. The first commercial we did was for The Triumph Herald, square looking car, nice engine, and its only gimmick was that the bonnet opened up away from the windscreen in one piece.

Then I was booked for a photoshoot to introduce the new Standard 10. What a boring car! But I suppose I should have been grateful for the work, and I enjoyed being around cars and talking about cars. Peter had drummed it into me, so I lived and breathed cars. In those days pretty girls were supposed to just smile and be 'window dressing'. Of course, it helped that the famous car correspondent, Raymond Baxter enjoyed my company, so work poured in and I was 'in the money'.

AN ASIDE

Many years later I went to a party given for one of my daughter's friends 40th birthday and for some reason I was asked too. When I went into the house I squealed with delight. The house was owned by J. Arthur Rank and he had let his niece, I think, live in it as long as nothing was changed. In the house were the exact basins I had in my dressing room at Pinewood, the avocado ones, and the same dressing tables. It was like going back 40 years, wonderful! Actually, I think they found it a bit difficult living there as every now and again Mr Rank would appear to check everything was in its correct place and move things about a little to make a statement.