

0. ABOVE the SHOP in GRANTHAM - Story Preface

1. ABOVE the SHOP in GRANTHAM

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Margaret Roberts Thatcher grew up in a flat above her Father's grocery store in Grantham. This image depicts that store and the family's home on the second floor. Image online, courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

On the 13th of October, 1925, Alfred and Beatrice welcomed a second daughter into the Roberts household. Their first child, Muriel, was four years old. They named their new baby "Margaret Hilda."

The Roberts family lived above a corner-grocery store they owned and operated in Grantham, England - the market town where Sir Isaac Newton attended school. The girls worked in the shop which also served as a local post office.

Their home did not have a place to take a bath and the shop, effectively, was never closed:

People would knock on the door at almost any hour of the night or weekend if they ran out of bacon, sugar, butter or eggs. Everyone knew that we lived by serving the customer; it was pointless to complain - and so nobody did. (Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, 1995, page 15 of the e-book edition.)

More than the neighborhood grocer, Alf - as he was known in town - was a Methodist lay pastor who strongly supported fiscal responsibility and the rights of small business people. He believed that families could own their own businesses, if they wished, and thought that government should not hinder such a fundamental right of the people.

Both girls attended a local school - Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School - to which they walked every day. Actually ... they walked four miles every day since the school was one mile from their home (and it was cheaper to have lunch at home than at school).

Margaret started piano lessons at age five, liked science and studied Latin. Since she was able to read, before starting school, she was allowed to skip a grade. She also enjoyed hearing her father's views on politics.

A pillar of his community, Alf served on several boards and was in charge of Grantham's civil defense during World War II. The town had a munitions plant, causing German bombers to target the area twenty-one times, killing seventy-eight Grantham residents.

Since the Roberts family had no outside air-raid shelter - because their home had no garden - Margaret and her parents crawled under the table for protection. By that time, Muriel - who died in 2004 - was working night and day at the Orthopaedic Hospital in Birmingham (where German bombs were dropped on a regular basis).

From her mother - a very practical lady who was 37 when Margaret was born - the future Prime Minister learned the value of time management:

She had been a great rock of family stability. She managed the household, stepped in to run the shop when necessary, entertained, supported my father in his public life and as Mayoress [Alf became Mayor, in 1945], did a great deal of voluntary social work for the church, displayed a series of practical domestic talents such as dressmaking and was never heard to complain.

Like many people who live for others, she made possible all that her husband and daughters did. Her life had not been an easy one. Although in later years I would speak more readily of my father's political influence on me, it was from my mother that I inherited the ability to organize and combine so many different duties of an active life. (Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, 1995, page 290 of the e-book edition.)

From her father, she learned (among other things) to follow her own way. He told her:

Never do things just because other people do them ... Whatever I felt at the time [when she disagreed with Alf], the sentiment stood me in good stead, as it did my father. (Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, 1995, page 18 of the e-book edition.)

When she was eleven, Margaret received a special edition of *Bibby's Annual*. It was 1936, and the book contained a poem - "The Ladder of St. Augustine" - by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. One of the verses was important to her then, and later:

*The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*

Margaret Roberts often toiled "upward in the night." Able to get by on limited sleep, she made her way to Oxford University's Somerville College - in 1943 - where, despite the war, bombs did not fall.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ABOVE-the-SHOP-in-GRANTHAM-The-Iron-Lady>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ABOVE-the-SHOP-in-GRANTHAM-The-Iron-Lady>

Questions 2 Ponder

How Hard Is It to Keep Toiling When the Goal Seems Far Away?

Longfellow's poem, "The Ladder of St. Augustine," contains these words:

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Longfellow, in short, tells us that people who accomplish much in their lives often work harder, and sacrifice more, than others. Do you agree? Why, or why not?

What are some of the motivators which drive a person to work hard and achieve goals?

Does strong family support help a person to work hard and achieve goals? Did family support help Margaret Thatcher?

Media Stream



Iron Lady - Grantham Grocery Store

Image of the Grantham grocery store online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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View of Grantham

Photo of Grantham, by David Johnson. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Iron Lady - Margaret Roberts, Age 13

Photo of Margaret Roberts, age 13, by Mr. Lee - a local Grantham photographer.

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Margaret Thatcher - Girlhood Home

Photo of Margaret Thatcher's childhood home, in Grantham, by Thorvaldsson.

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Margaret Thatcher - Parents and Sister

Photo online, courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

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