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D-Day veterans' return

TWO American D-Day veterans yesterday made an emotional return to the British village where they were stationed during the Second World War.

Bill Galbraith, 85, and Manny Barrios, 87, fought back tears as they said hello to locals in Ramsbury, Wilts. The men from California, who were in Normandy last week to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the D-Day landings, spent nine months in the village.

Bill said: "Remembering D-Day in France was very moving and so is being back in Ramsbury. But after all these years Ramsbury has happy memories for me and Manny, which is more than we can say for Normandy." Both veterans were among 200 members of their battalion who were wounded as they took two German-held bridges near Utah Beach. Eighty were killed.

'Dad was a waster, a liar, a cheat and a thief'

John Allison knew nothing about his father until an uncle mentioned his lost memoirs. Now the hedonistic tales of globe-trotting Scots rogue Bob Moore look set to be a literary hit. **BEN BORLAND** meets his son to find out more

THERE is a black sheep lurking within most families, but their exploits usually stay hidden, discussed only in whispers whenever the clan gets together at weddings or funerals. But for John Allison, the incredible story of his father – a globe-trotting, whisky and diamond-smuggling Glaswegian, and a man for whom swindling was a way of life – looks set to become an unexpected publishing hit.

Even more remarkably, Bob Allison's memoirs were virtually lost to the world for more than half a century until a publisher stumbled upon one of just five known remaining copies.

Written under the alias Bob Moore, *Don't Call Me A Crook!* details the hedonistic, alcohol-fuelled adventures of a young Scottish ship engineer roaming the world during the Roaring Twenties. Among his many adventures were driving illegal liquor across Prohibition-era America, working on board a millionaire's yacht – where he witnessed high-society orgies, with film stars and chorus girls taking part – surviving ship disasters in the Atlantic, and confronting ruthless Chinese pirates on the Yangtze river.

But Bob Allison's story also has a darker side – he callously abandoned his Scottish wife and infant child in Chicago, he seduced and ripped off a series of wealthy older women, and he was investigated for murders in New Jersey and New York.

His reckless escapades have led some to compare him with Frank Abagnale Jr, the

charismatic conman portrayed by Leonardo DiCaprio when his own memoirs were transferred to the screen in the Oscar-nominated movie *Catch Me If You Can*.

Now many book reviewers are tipping *Don't Call Me A Crook!* to become a literary hit, with Scottish Booker Prize-winning author James Kelman saying that although Allison would have "robbed his own granny and probably did", he could not put the book down and was left wanting more.

At the end of the tale – consider this a spoiler warning if you are planning to read the book – Allison is repatriated to Scotland from Shanghai as a "distressed seaman", at death's door following years of boozing and carousing.

It was then, possibly at a hospital for alcoholics, that he met and married Grace Moore, an attractive nurse from Ayrshire. But after publishing his memoirs in 1935, he

apparently returned to his old rollercoaster life. Grace and Bob's son John – now a 72-year-old grandfather and living near Grays, in Essex – takes up the story.

"When they moved to London they lived at first in Cadogan Square, but then they fell on hard times and moved to Hackney. I was born in October 1937 and my father died of liver failure in February 1938. I never knew him, although my older brother had vague recollections of him..."

WHEN the Second World War broke out, John and his brother were evacuated to the New Forest in Hampshire. They did not return to live with their mother and stepfather until 1946. By then, she was understandably reluctant to discuss the boys' biological father.

"I was about 14 when we visited my relatives in Ayr and there was an uncle who asked me if I had read my father's book," says John. "I hadn't even heard of it, so I went straight to the public library and asked if they had it. They didn't, so I broached the subject with my mother and she flew into one. "She asked who had been talking, sat me down, and said, 'Right, your father was not a nice person. He left me with absolutely nothing. He was a waster, a liar, a cheat and a thief.' That was the first time she had really talked to me about him.

"She thought he had ruined her life – although she said he

had flashes of brilliance on the odd occasion – but they did not last long before he was reverting to type, with the drink and everything that went with it."

Although he continued searching, John was unable to find a copy of his father's book for decades.

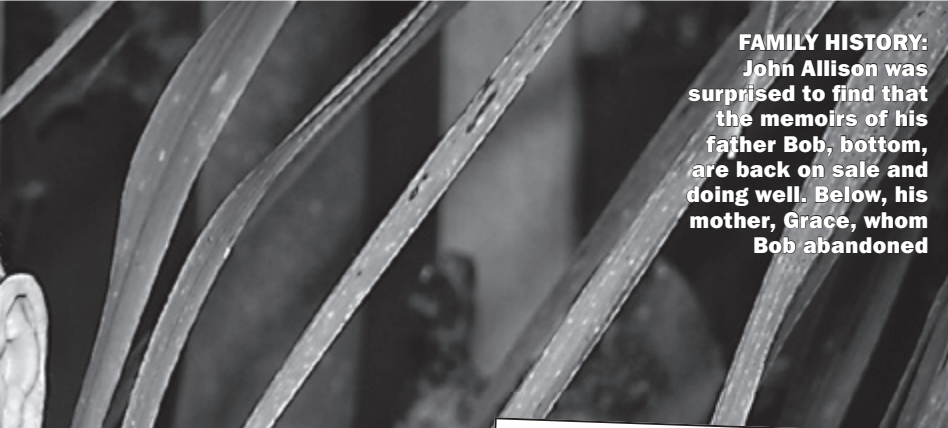
"I read the memoirs for the first time in the 1970s," he says. "I was speaking to someone who worked in Cambridge University Library and she found a copy for me and photocopied it. I had that photocopy for years, until my daughter Joanne gave me a genuine copy that she bought from a rare book dealer as a Father's Day gift.

"In 2003, my daughter gave birth to my grandson. I was over the moon, but she had a bad time and the stress resulted in me having a heart attack. Then, earlier this year, Joanne decided she wanted her son to know about his family history so she went on the Internet to try and find another copy.

"It was only then we realised that someone was going to publish it again." Asked how he felt when he read the book for the first time, John says: "He must have been a hell of a character with very, very few morals. He lived life to the full and took advantage of everybody and everything, every opportunity was taken to advance whatever it was he wanted to do.

"Yes, he can come across as a likeable rogue, but the effect that he had on people around was awful.

"I can honestly say that I've got no great feelings about him one way or the other. He's a man I never knew. He's my biological



FAMILY HISTORY: John Allison was surprised to find that the memoirs of his father Bob, bottom, are back on sale and doing well. Below, his mother, Grace, whom Bob abandoned



father but he never did me any favours. But now his book is being republished, I bet he's up there laughing his socks off."

After Joanne had discovered that

Don't Call Me A Crook! was being republished, the family set out to find out more. Their research led them to Nicholas Towasser, from Dissident Books in New York, who had been convinced the real 'Bob Moore' was lost to history. He had made it his mission to re-publish the book after stumbling across it in the New York Public Library – the only other originals are at the National Library of Scotland, Cambridge University, Random House publishers and with John Allison's family.

"I couldn't believe it when I got the call," Mr Towasser says from his office in Manhattan's Upper East Side. "I did make an effort to find out who to talk to about this but I had drawn a blank. I thought

of the book as a postcard from the past. And like a postcard there was no forwarding address. But following Joanne's call, things have really taken off.

"Sales have been going pretty good, but it is too early to say how well," Mr Towasser says. "I'm a very, very small publisher so it is nice to hear people talking about one of my books.

"People have said that it fits in with the memoirs of people on the run, like *Catch Me If You Can*, and I'd love to see it end up on the silver screen, especially if the right director kept all the nuances.

"It is not just a rollicking romp – you can be amused by his antics, but there is also a darkness to his character that makes you sit up and think."

● *Don't Call Me A Crook! A Scotsman's Tale of World Travel, Whisky and Crime*, is priced £12.95 from most good bookshops. Visit www.dissidentbooks.com for more information.

Jimmy YOUNG

We must defeat the hate-filled BNP with words, not violence

THE ELECTION of two British National Party Euro MPs is a depressing development but I doubt that it merits the almost hysterical reception it has received. It is important to put the election result into context.

Nationally, the BNP received only six per cent of the vote. Most people will think that is six per cent too many but it means that the BNP is still only a marginal, fringe political party. Moreover, had the election been conducted under our first-past-the-post rules rather than by proportional representation the party would not have won even one seat.

The limited success the BNP achieved was largely in areas that normally vote Labour. The Government's policies promoting mass immigration and multiculturalism, which are widely resented, played right into the hands of the extremists but at a general election most of those who registered a protest vote will go for mainstream political parties.

Meanwhile, we must think carefully how we confront the BNP. The sight on television of a mob shouting abuse and chasing the its leader Nick Griffin up the street may give short-term satisfaction but in the longer term be counterproductive. It enabled the BNP to portray itself as a free-speech victim and gave it the publicity it craves.

As Labour MP John Cruddas points out, the BNP Euro MPs were democratically elected. We have to acknowledge that fact and defeat their arguments rather than throwing eggs at them.



COUNTERPRODUCTIVE: Anti-BNP protesters

LABOUR'S results in the European elections were among the worst in the party's history. The SNP beat Labour in Scotland for the first time in a European election. The Conservatives beat Labour in its other stronghold, Wales, for the first time since 1918. Overall, the party sank to third place behind the Tories and the UK Independence Party.

A jubilant David Cameron declared that Gordon Brown and his Cabinet were locked in a "slow dance of political death". Labour MP Frank Field said: "Labour cannot win with the present Prime Minister."

That was the background to a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Labour Party last Monday. The question was not whether there would be prime ministerial blood on the floor the only question was how much?

Blood was shed but not by the Prime Minister. A few MPs told him he should stand down for the good of the party. Mr Brown replied by suggesting a general election would see them lose their pay and perks. Air hissed out of pricked balloons. They ended up banging their desks in undying support.

Mr Brown is the worst Prime Minister we have had for years but as an escapologist he could teach Houdini a thing or two.

● Email Jimmy at jimmy.young@express.co.uk

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PROHIBITION ERA: Bob Moore drove illicit liquor across the US