Calm
before Coffee

Children Learn What They Live

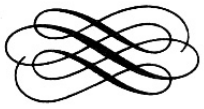
If a child lives with criticism
he learns to condemn
If a child lives with hostility
he learns to fight
If a child lives with ridicule
he learns to be shy
If a child lives with shame
he learns to feel guilty
BUT
If a child lives with tolerance
he learns to be patient
If a child lives with encouragement
he learns confidence
If a child lives with praise
he learns to appreciate
If a child lives with fairness
he learns justice
If a child lives with security
he learns to have faith
If a child lives with approval
he learns to like himself
If a child lives with acceptance
he learns to find love.

Dorothy Law Nolte

CALM BEFORE COFFEE

* * *

A child's voyage
from rejection to resolution



JOHN MUNRO

Dedicated to the
host of friends and relations
who have helped me on my way

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Why the Anger?

I WAS on a year's social work course in Croydon, Surrey. I was 44, and single. It wasn't going too well for me, yet I felt I was coping, and learning a lot. One morning at coffee break a fellow student remarked to me, 'You've got a lot of anger in you, haven't you, John?'

I was astounded. Me – mild-mannered me? I couldn't believe it.

'Do you really think so?' I countered. I was immediately defensive, yet the young man was a kind and compassionate chap, whose comment was well meant, I could tell.

But the coffee break was over, and it was time to get on to the next lecture. Later I pondered on what he'd said. 'Out of the mouth of babes…' He'd put his finger on something that was robbing me of peace and serenity – qualities definitely needed in the work I wanted to do.

So what was I angry about? How had he noticed it? Well, in one study group about eight of us were hammering out difficult family issues that arise when we visit a client – a subject dear to my heart, as my family had been far from normal. But as I contributed my opinions I sensed they weren't being received well, and I began to bristle. They don't like me, I thought to myself; I earnestly presented my argument anew, but I dug myself a deeper hole. It was as if I became the outsider, the rejected one. Oh heavens, this is awful. I settled into a quiet sulk, refusing to make any further contribution to the discussion.

So what was going on? Why was I so upset? The rest of

the group went on their merry way, probably oblivious of the steaming feelings within me. It took me some while to realise that the group had assumed for me the mantle of the 'bad mother' – the criticising, judgmental, rejecting foster-mother I'd grown up with; with whom I could never seem to have a reasoned argument, who always over-ruled what I said, and who had little time or inclination to see my point of view.

I wrote in my journal:

> *Face the pain of being unwanted – which I now strive to avoid at all costs. Which is impossible, but I dread it with a fear deep down, out of all proportion to reality.*

I didn't understand that people could disagree with what I had to say but that didn't mean they rejected *me* or that I was therefore worthless. It was simply the painful echo of childhood rejection, with an overpowering sense of impotence and anger. I found some solace in a book by Melanie Klein, *Love, Hate & Reparation* (1937):

> *Some people readily experience distress through lack of appreciation, even from people who mean little to them; in their unconscious minds they feel unworthy of man's regard, and a cold reception confirms their suspicion of this unworthiness… The reason why some people have a strong need for general praise and approval lies in their need for evidence that they are lovable, worthy of love. This feeling arises from the unconscious fear of being incapable of loving others sufficiently or truly, and particularly of not being able to master the aggressive impulses towards others: the dread of being a danger to the loved one.*

That really summed up my situation. This episode was nearly forty years ago, yet anger still bubbles up in me at times. Often it's directed against myself; I knock something

off a shelf, or bang my head against a cupboard – then shout at myself for being so stupid. I can really boil up in rage when I've done something silly, or forgotten something important. It's as if I actually enjoy the anger – it ignites a fire in my belly – like an orgasmic release. I curse and swear and pour contempt in buckets over myself in an orgy of self-destruction.

Once I harangued myself so much I got a cold. A friend remarked, 'I've never met anyone who beat themselves up as much as you do.' Another joked that I must have a degree in self-denigration.

So what is the cause of all this? And why does it persist right into my eighties? I know it's a very common problem, and I have friends whose anger can cause great stress in their relationships. One seemed to relish his anger, feeling he had a right to express it on all occasions. He lost two wives and alienated four children, but is now a different chap!

I know now that I have to try to catch the anger and deal with it before it boils up and does harm. Or gets suppressed and turns into bitterness, resentment, then hate. So much stems from childhood, but I once read that 'We all have a duty to forgive our parents' - because none of us have ever been perfect.

* * *

The end of the course came, and thankfully I passed. To reward myself I took a trip to Austria with the Ramblers Association. Being still single, they offer companionship with like-minded people, and there I met Gilly, who lived in London. She was a Cambridge graduate and a director of the British Standards Institute in London. We walked together, and on one climb she stumbled and fell, knocking out one of her crowned front teeth. She was distraught, and I felt so concerned for her that tears came; she noticed – and it may

have been then that she decided to make a pitch for me. I was slow on the uptake, but at the end of the holiday we sat on a seat at the rail station and discussed when we might meet again. I was hesitant, but she made sure we kept up contact by offering to come down to Crawley from London each week to sing with Concordia, the choir I belonged to.

But within only weeks of meeting her, my diary records:

> *I worry that I ought to tell Gill that I'm not in love with her – or at least not lead her up the garden path. Yet I would enjoy a limited friendship.*

I had never, in fact, fallen in love. But after our weekly rehearsals with Concordia, Gilly would stay overnight, and it was on one of those occasions that I lost my virginity. Unbelievably late at 45! She actually had to seduce me, but it was a wonderful experience. I felt so privileged that anyone would want to sleep with me. And Gilly certainly showed me how to love. 'Pillow talk' became a form of therapy, and she was so understanding, and also vulnerable herself, honestly admitting her own predilections and shortcomings.

Try as I might I just couldn't 'fall in love' – as I imagined I should. It just wouldn't come. I had never had that experience, although some twelve years earlier I had proposed marriage to a lovely girl – and retracted that same evening! An awful memory: a fear of being swamped, of commitment to something I couldn't carry out. Here I was, getting entangled again, wanting desperately to love, yet the emotion kept escaping me. One Bank Holiday, Gilly and I were basking in the sun in Arundel Park, and talking earnestly as we so often did about our feelings for each other. Suddenly I broke down into great retching sobs; she clutched me and held me fast, as I cried out, 'I just can't love anyone.' My misery was profound, and I know it disturbed Gilly, but she was mature enough to persevere with the relationship, for which I've always been grateful.

So what was the root of my inability to love? It wasn't until I read some of my mother's diaries at the time of my birth that some understanding dawned. I was conceived in Paris, born in New York, and raised in Surrey, England. Friends of mine who knew a bit about my story kept urging me to write it down. Not only is this cathartic, they said, and a good way of unloading grief or ridding oneself of resentment about the past, but it may help others in similar situations.

John and Jeanne Faber were having tea with me one day. They were old friends whom I'd first met in London, and recently to my surprise and delight had retired to Arundel in West Sussex where I live.

I confided my doubts about embarking on such an enterprise. 'I'm not sure about this,' I said, 'I can't think who I'd really write it for.'

'Write it for your Mother,' he shot back.

The words hit me almost physically in the chest – but I couldn't think why. She's long dead, I thought, what's the point? But those words were to have a profound effect . . .

* * *

Before she died in 1986 I asked my mother to tell me what she remembered of her parents and their forebears. She wrote me seven letters and I quote from the first:

> *We first hear of your great-grandfather, Nathan, in America. Where did he come from? To my knowledge, there's no record of his birth. He just 'appeared', owning a tobacco plantation in Virginia. Already before Emancipation he freed his slaves after seven years in accordance with Judaic law.*
>
> *This infuriated his neighbours - southern gentlemen who had inherited their estates way back in the 18th century. This upstart Jew's act was anathema. So one*

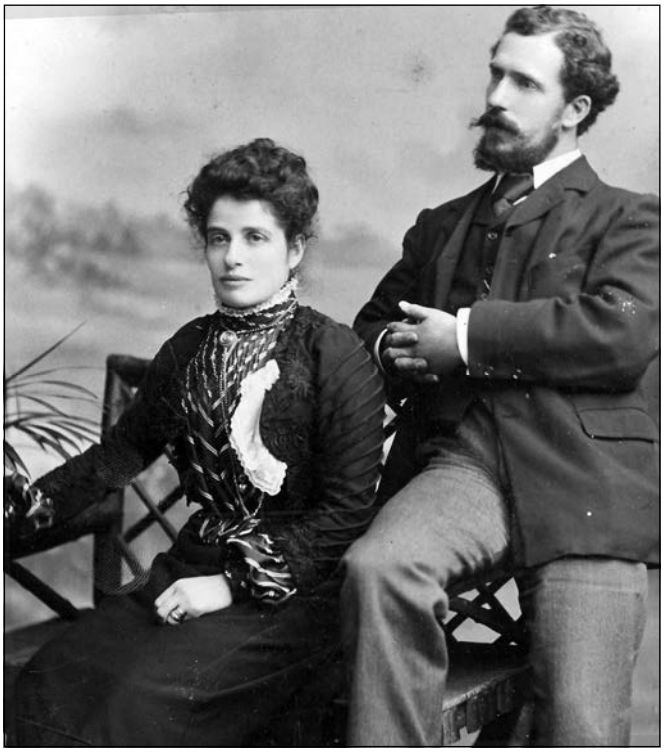
November night they burned down his drying sheds. In the homestead nearby, driven frantic by the fire, his wife Esther, suddenly seized by her pains, laboured to bring her child Leah into this world. Under the sign of Scorpio, in the stench of burning tobacco, your grandmother was born.

Probably the whole of the 'Nathan' place would have been razed to the ground by the Federals who came south in the Civil War. Harried and pressed by the responsibility of an ever-growing family (in the end he had 13 children) he sailed to Europe.

In the port of Liverpool they found a home with, apparently, Esther's relatives, so your grandmother grew up on Merseyside. We hear of the family next in London. Of the 13 children, nine lived. His favourite was Leah. Maybe he loved and understood her because she was - himself. She must have inherited, too, his manic-depressive character. Dynamic energy veering suddenly into tragic apathy.

My mother's paternal grandfather, Charles Fraser Munro, was a tanner. His wife died early, leaving motherless his seven-year-old son John, who was then sent to George Heriot's boarding school in Edinburgh. He later went to work for Stuarts Granolithic, who made paving and industrial flooring, as a surveyor's assistant, and moved down to their London office, living in Hackney. Later he became managing director and moved upmarket to Golders Green.

Early on, at the People's Palace, John was playing Hamlet in an amateur production, and my grandmother Leah was in the audience. She set her cap at him, and they later married, had five children, of whom my mother was the youngest, seven years after the others . . .and not really wanted by her mother, but adored by father, whom she adored in return.



My maternal grandparents

Leah was Jewish, and had 'married out', and was thus sadly ostracised by the Jewish community. She became very unhappy and frustrated; she took her daughter to synagogue every Saturday, and Father took her to chapel every Sunday.

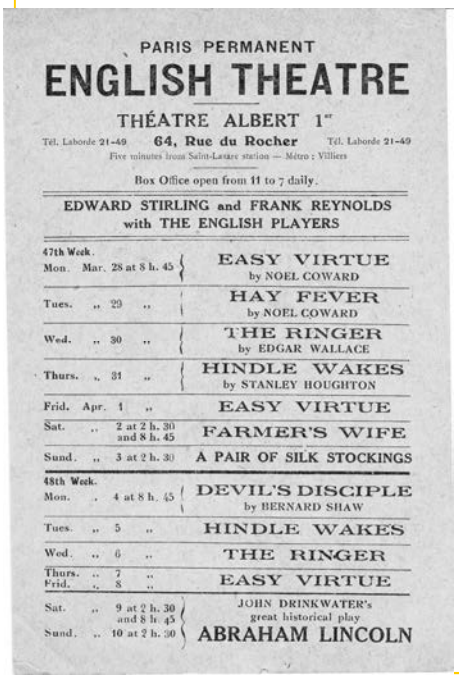
Perhaps it is then that the seeds of inner conflict were sown in my mother, and a sense that she did not quite belong anywhere. Was that why she could not provide me, either, with a sense of belonging? As Larkin says, *Man hands on misery to man, it deepens like a coastal shelf . . .* This book is an account of the deep obstacles I faced in my life from my earliest years, and my attempts at some kind of resolution. I

offer it in the hope that it may resonate with readers who have likewise suffered early rejection and struggled to come to terms with it.

2

Brave New World

MY mother was born in 1903, seven years after her two brothers and two sisters, in Hackney, London. She told me she felt she was unexpected, and surplus to requirements in her mother's eyes. Her father adored her, petite and attractive, possibly the more so because his first two daughters died, one as a baby, the other, Edith, at 22. She was a nurse in WWI, and contracted TB at the Seamen's Hospital in 1915. My mother was twelve at the time, and felt her loss keenly.



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Thurs.	,, 31 ,,	HINDLE WAKES by STANLEY HOUGHTON
Frid.	Apr. 1 ,,	EASY VIRTUE
Sat.	,, 2 at 2 h. 30 and 8 h. 45	FARMER'S WIFE
Sund.	,, 3 at 2 h. 30	A PAIR OF SILK STOCKINGS
48th Week. Mon.	4 at 8 h. 45	DEVIL'S DISCIPLE by BERNARD SHAW
Tues.	,, 5 ,,	HINDLE WAKES
Wed.	,, 6 ,,	THE RINGER
Thurs. Frid.	,, 7 ,, 8 ,,	EASY VIRTUE
Sat.	,, 9 at 2 h. 30 and 8 h. 45	JOHN DRINKWATER's great historical play
Sund.	,, 10 at 2 h. 30	ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Mother did well at school, and somehow persuaded her parents to let her go to RADA, even though at that time being an actress was still not really respectable. After which she embarked on the demanding repertory theatre circuit around Britain – performing a play each evening for a week whilst rehearsing the next play during the day. How she managed to remember her lines without getting muddled up I'll

never know; I certainly didn't inherit her excellent memory.

In 1927 she joined the English Theatre in Paris which, judging from the publicity card, produced a different play nightly, Sundays included! From there she toured with 'Rose-Marie' through France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, then over to Morocco. On returning to Paris she supplemented her meagre pay by modelling, especially for a Russian sculptor who was preparing for an exhibition of his work in New York. It was while she was being sculptured for *The Flame,* that she met my father, who came to the studio to commission a bust of himself from the sculptor, Serge Youreivitch.

News of my mother's subsequent pregnancy did not please her mother, back in London. In fact she banned her daughter from the home. So my mother decided to follow the sculptor to New York, where her statue was due to be the centrepiece; its photo was on the cover of the catalogue.

Mother in Paris, 1928

She found a cargo boat and embarked in November 1929, knowing that she had to keep her condition secret, otherwise she would be barred from entering the US. They did not want unac-

companied pregnant females.

Her diary of the voyage recalls:

> *The stewardess brings in the menu for every meal. I know I shall be ill but I try each one in turn. I must keep up the rhythm of mealtimes…I've been sick now for nearly a week and today the young doctor gave me some pills. I was afraid of what they might do so I told him of my condition. He didn't believe it…was I really sure? But horror of horrors, he's going to tell the Captain!*
>
> *The wind! Sea and wind, wind and sea. I do wish someone would stroke my neck and then my spine and massage my head. I'm wrung out, so tired, tired, every muscle shrieking to be soothed. I wish I could shriek.*
>
> *The English boy Tom is so kind-hearted and tender. He strokes my forehead and soon I'm nearly soothed into sleep, but no, for suddenly he kisses me. I can't bear it! I don't mean to be rough, ungrateful or unkind, but I can't bear just anyone trying to caress me…all I want is massage, not kisses. I wish there were someone but it's no good wishing. It's all very contrary: this life; people whom you want never want you, and those who want me I can't bear. Blast!*

Finally they arrived in New York on 12 November 1929, and docked overnight. She could hardly sleep with excitement, and couldn't enjoy the lovely breakfast as she was so nervous. She'd been ill the whole ten days. What effect did that have on the child she was carrying? 67 passengers were gathered on the main deck to await the immigration officers.

> *Ellis Island and deportation and misery, or New York? The doctor is on the edge of the crowd. He comes towards me, quite close; his lips move: 'Keep it under your hat.' In a flash he is gone. 'Well,' I reflect, 'that's going to be difficult.' Anyway, I've got my big coat on. I've*

been told so much about the immigration doctor – he looks at your nails and your teeth and your hair. I'm distinctly cheered at the thought. There's quite a lot left that he doesn't look at, it seems, thank heaven!

The official asks me, 'Who are you going to stay with?'

'Serge Youreivitch.'

'Is he married?'

'Yes, his wife is here with him, too.' (They're trying to catch me out)

'How many children?'

'Two, I think.'

'How old?'

'They're in Europe.'

'Nationality?'

'Russian, but under French protection, being an official mission of the French government.'

'Will he meet you?'

'I expect so.'

'Hand me all your papers.'

Over go my references…he realises at length that I'm not going to be a pauper and therefore dependent on the State for support for six months at least, so he lets me in to God's Own Country. There isn't any medical officer. Cheers! I've diddled Ellis Island!

I've a feeling that Serge has not come to meet me… I'm looking rather helpless. A girl who's been eyeing me for some time comes up and asks if I'm Miss Munro. In the hustle I'd quite forgotten that Daddy's friend had asked Mr Newman to meet me. And this was his secretary…

* * *

After a warm welcome at the Newmans' luxurious home, my mother found a room at the Barbizon, a woman's club in downtown Manhattan. She'd arrived just as Wall Street crashed, and witnessed the funeral of a bank manager who'd jumped from a skyscraper. Not a happy atmosphere. But she was most enamoured of the Barbizon: *I'm overwhelmed, bewildered with this chic looking place, quite like a big hotel. But I can't afford anything but the cheapest room, $15 per week - £3!*

Next day she visits Serge in his atelier:

> *Just the same shabby, furiously working sculptor, scientist, psychologist – and a model. Serge's temper is always lessened by working with a young nude girl…I sample fat oysters with Serge at 'Joe's'. As usual Serge is hard up, so in this unpretentious Italian restaurant I tell him the great news.*

She decides she has to be known as Madame Dechesne, a widow, and goes to Woolworths to get a ring – then home to bed, her first day in New York.

> *Today, November 27th, is what Americans call 'Thanksgiving'. Shop windows have been laid out as dining rooms with wonderful glassware, cutlery, furniture, table linen, flowers etc…I go for a blow across Central Park – the sun and wind shall be my company this day… The phone goes. 'Are you doing anything tonight? You wouldn't care to have dinner with me, though I'm not as young as I was?' 'Who is it?' Why, it's John Godfrey Saxe! God Almighty – Senator Saxe is inviting me out to Thanksgiving with him!*
>
> *I reflect: this is Thursday. On Tuesday I had walked into this man's office, hugging a cable from Archibald K.C.: 'Go to John Godfrey Saxe 60 Broad St and get him to find you a lawyer.' Saxe is an habitué here, and out*

come the Veuve Cliquot and a magnificent Chateaubriand to follow. He is charming company, but I don't quite like it when he says, 'Fancy Sam Archibald sending me a yellow girl.' Afterwards he has to return to his wife, and so I return early to the Barbizon, very shaky on my legs!

Sam Archibald will prove to be significant in my story, and we'll return to him later in the book…

I am glad, glad that I have brought my son to be born among the Jews of New York. It seems to me that I might marry one… Oh dear, this is a lonely business though. No Serge! … he thinks he's being shadowed by detectives so that Trixie [his wife] can have her divorce – what a farce marriage is!

I am miserable without Serge –'le grand esprit' with whom I have worked for the past three years. I want to talk and talk to him… All I have are chapters of his book on Theories of Art to translate – a very learned work but a little dull for me at this particular time. He is executing several busts of millionaires, politicians and what-nots in Albany or somewhere; when I ring up he is always out. I could cry sometimes I am so alone. My father's letters come regularly every week. He is father, lover, friend in one, for love-letters certainly don't come my way and friends seem to have forgotten me.

While I was down this awful 27th St I saw a maternity clinic, so I walked in and registered. I shan't be able to afford a doctor – that's certain, so here goes. I go once a fortnight… I've made a muddle; I said once that my husband is coming over from Europe, and I'm sure I said once that he's dead – I'm worried. I'll go down to Saxe and ask about things.

He says not to worry – he'll call me. I've been on tenterhooks all week. He rang up and said he was worried

to death about me: 'Darn it, Wendy, there's going to be hell if you stay.'

He takes me to dinner at the Hotel Lafayette. 'Listen here, Wendy. I've had to make myself drunk to tell you. You've got to have courage, so you drink as well.' Oh damn! Lovely food but I can't eat it. Saxe gobbles his and explains that I must return to Europe before the child is born, otherwise I shall be deported! 'I'll book you a passage on the Bremen – Sam Archibald will pay me back'. Of course - he thinks I've been A's mistress. I'm furious. A. shall not pay my passage – there's no reason why he should… oh, silly independence, silly pride!

I determine there and then not to go!

'Well, you needn't go right now but pretty soon. Look, you've got a brilliant future; why spoil it by risking deportation? You can leave the kid in Europe somewhere and then come back and start afresh. They'll nail you as a prostitute, undesirable, if you carry on. Go now while you can.'

* * *

On Christmas Eve, my mother stays in bed and cries, and avoids the Christmas lunch. But she's so hungry by evening that she goes down to the restaurant and has a depressing dinner by herself. She decides to put an advert up in the Barbizon hall, informing all that 'Wendy Dechesne, of the Theatre Femina in Paris, gives lessons in diction and in French.'

My telephone keeps ringing – life smiles. I've fixed up some lessons for $3 an hour…I've made a grave mistake. I should have come to the USA as a divorcee, not a widow. All these women seem to be divorced. There are seven hundred of us in this club and I seem to be the only widow – at least the only one that knows nothing of the joys of alimony.

I look up all that's free in the daily papers. Any lecture that is free I go to, so a free tea tacked on to a lecture at the Temple is a tremendous lure…Irma Kraft is speaking on 'Dialogue in Drama'. I speak to her afterwards, and get invited to lunch! As a result Irma K recommends French lessons to the foolish wives of rich Jews on Park Avenue.

Saxe rings up and delivers the final ultimatum: 'Don't expect me to help you get an extension, then.' He is so rough and utterly decided to wash his hands of me. I'm utterly depressed… I seize the phone and call up my new friend Irma. Prompt and efficient comes the reply: 'Meet me tonight at the Greenwich Village Theatre. I shall have a lawyer friend accompanying me.' They discuss my predicament and he arrives at the one solution – marriage with an American! Irma is convulsed with laughter – already planning the birth chez elle, and the little lawyer as the proud father! He really is half inclined to take the step, his admiration for me, despite the frontal elevation, is profound and quite unconcealed. 'Think of it, Lew, to have a son to help you in your old age!' But he is afraid of his two sisters - more frightening, it seems, than the spectre of old age in these hard times.

My mother evidently felt at home with Jewish friends ('my tribe') who tried to find her a husband. The problem is discussed:

All the men I like are already married, and I cannot bear those who really care for me. Tom would marry me like a shot but I'll have none of him. No, these encounters with future husbands only make me laugh. I can't seriously think of asking one of them to marry me.

* * *

The baby is expected mid-March, three months' time. Having made this courageous or foolhardy decision to stay, my mother has to find a way of earning more money. Evidently the lessons weren't enough. So she managed to write articles for the Evening Standard and Daily Express in London, and contacted Paramount Studios:

> *The phone rings. 'Would Mme Dechesne go along this very morning to Paramount and collect some books for synopsis?' – Life is sweet! I come back with a 3-volume Goncourt Prize novel. My hired Remington is in for some work now and I'm profoundly happy – writing for Paramount at last!'*
>
> *My birthday (20 January) - I spend a melancholy afternoon wandering around trying to decide which hospital shall receive me… I register at a very dirty, gloomy looking one … quite cheap; $42 for 14 days.*

The days go by, with still no solution to the problem. Various wild ideas are floated: give $50 to a down-and-out in Central Park and take him down to City Hall; or marry one of the 22 men waiting to be electrocuted in Sing-Sing before May. Or advertise. But none appeal to my mother; she's too tired to follow through:

> *If I cannot give my son (and she's been convinced all along that it will be a boy) a worthy father I shan't give him one at all, so he must be content with being an American citizen.* Later she writes: *I go around and look at the Junior League's new clubhouse and arrange about Baby. I'm to bring him straight from hospital… while I go around to see what can be done to stay in the USA.*

3

The Baby Arrives

EVERY BIRTH is similar, and yet we cannot help feeling that our own birth was something special. My mother – who later gave me away so easily - recorded my birth in some detail; and I reproduce her words here as a poignant reminder of this most human moment: the hopeful, painful arrival in this world of a soul whose future is still open to every possibility. In this case, the beginning of life seems already fraught with problems…

18 March

My face is very flushed and I tear off my dress which is soaking… I grasp the phone and ask for Mrs Roberts to come up. My hour is near! She says I must get a taxi to hospital at once. If the pains come quicker, an ambulance would be better. Oh no! I throw things into my suit case – I jam things in anywhere. I'm running like 'the brook' now and breathless with excitement….

But oh! The taxi man doesn't know where the Infirmary is, and can't pronounce it to ask anyone! The night is so dark and the rain is in torrents, so there's no one to ask. I hang out the window… there is no hurrying him and we go round blocks and back again. At last a negro puts us on our way (I notice they are the only ones who know about getting around this city).

I run across the shiny pavement, and tell the girl at the desk that I've come to have my baby. Soon a nurse comes along… off come my clothes and I put on a coarse white shirt. Then to business – a wash, brush up, and a

shave! It's all new and strange and I'm so excited I'm not afraid – not till I'm left all alone on a narrow white bed in a bare room, to wait while the pains come, one on top of the other with amazing regularity. I say my little prayer and then settle myself for the fray.

They are coming more steadily and each bout seems stronger and more overpowering. I try to think, to concentrate on something, anything but the pains. When I first came in and was being prepared, I could hear another woman's moans all the time – then her screams. I resolved that I would not be so silly. I wouldn't cry at all. But it is dreadful: cries are torn out of me, they begin high, and then become deep-throated and hoarse. There is no one to call, but I yell 'Nurse, nurse,' long dragging cries; and sometimes a nurse comes and I clutch her hand – I must catch hold of something. She tells me to keep time of my pains. They've dropped from every three minutes to one-and-a-half. Another white-coated doctor comes and feels me and says it's coming along nicely – maybe about 11.30pm.

As soon as she is gone I sink and seem to be borne far away – a lovely 'ended' feeling. No – there is no end; a great pain comes and it seems my body is being forced – like a locked door being forced open with a battering ram. I can't fight any more… I must yield to that sleepy feeling forever. My arms ache, as if I've been swimming very hard. A queer physical struggle with myself. Soon I can bear it no longer – it is long past midnight and then they try and put me on a stretcher for the delivery table.

My teeth are chattering now – my legs are thrust into two linen bags, and they tell me to bear down and push. 'P…u…sh!' I cry. It's a funny long bawl, but without bawling. 'Push'. I cannot bear down, but I push with all my weak strength.

Now I'm aware that someone is giving me ether at intervals. 'Breathe deeply' says someone, but I struggle and cry, 'I don't want any more!' Suddenly a terrible forcing, and the doctor is 'scooping' me – trying to make me bigger inside or something… A rush like a gush from a burst pipe, and something hot… darkness. I am in a very big room, it seems. I can't think where I am but I know I'm going to be sick… There is something heavy on my stomach, and someone comes and looks at me and talks about 'tubes'. I can only whisper. I have lost my voice…

* * *

I see nurses bring babies, and each mother is nursing. I am in a ward. My baby does not come. I think it must be dead, I don't dare ask.

I'm so hungry, and a nice nurse gives me two cups of tea. The babies are brought in again. I am numb with fear – my son is dead… A few hours later – 'Here is your baby, Mrs Dechesne.' I make room for a little flannel bundle. I am just curious… a funny little head with my hair – the same shade, the same silky texture. I am frightened; he looks marked, as though a red birth mark will show on his cheek.

He sleeps, and I can't get him to feed. I don't quite know how to go about it. I am afraid to touch him. I lie there and look at him, and every few minutes I try to get his mouth to my breast. At the end of twenty minutes a jolly fat nurse takes him away, but he's had no food! I worry about that. I ought to have tried harder, and maybe asked the nurse to show me how to teach him to suck.

Some flowers come for me – Sara has sent them, the only ones in the ward, the only splash of colour. It is the barest hospital ward I have ever seen… I feel very alone. The women are talking about tomorrow. It seems the

husbands come on Thursdays and Sundays for an hour, but I shall have no one.

The babies are brought in again. Mine is crying… I try and arrange myself to feed him, but somehow it doesn't work and I get so frightened. He must be starving for his cries are long and loud, but he doesn't seem to want to suck. The nurse tries to hold him to me, but I just fail and she takes him away.

The next time he is asleep and I try to wake him up. Pinch him, quite hard, too… but he seems strangely sleepy… sometimes he yells for a second, then goes to sleep again. I wish he would take my milk, it is hurting so. (I know now why the RSPCA fine farmers who bring their cows to market unmilked.) Milk is running out of each breast and the binder gets so sticky and wet.

Madame Y sends a huge box of fruit, and Claude sends a telegram. That makes me feel happier, and just then the superintendent comes through the ward. I've asked for something to relieve the pain in my breasts and she shouts at the nurse, 'No, nothing, it's her fault that the baby is losing weight and if it gets ill she'll blame us. No, she must feed it. She's just lazy!'

I begin to cry and my sobs are heard by the other women who tell me not to cry as I shall have milk fever, and then that'll be something to cry about. In the morning the other superintendent comes to me and says she has heard bad reports about me. I must feed the baby – a mother who doesn't, goes down in her estimation. In vain I try to tell her that as I have no home here and I must work to keep him, he will have to go into a nursery until I get strong and can get a job. Thus I can't feed him myself. But she doesn't understand.

Soon another nurse passes by, saying, 'Your baby's been crying all morning till he doesn't know what to do

with himself.' I begin to cry too, my breasts are so swollen. When he comes I am ferocious in my desire to get him to rid me of my pain. He feeds for a minute or two, then goes to sleep… Already, like so many men, he is selfish and doesn't care. I am almost mad now with pain and fury. I want him to feed and he won't. What am I to do?

* * *

My bed is wet from a leaky bed-pan, I can't sleep. I'm waiting for the dawn. Tomorrow I shall get an ambulance and leave this awful hospital where I can have no friends to see me, and my baby is taken away just as I get him to feed… Someone else is crying. It is the woman who had a baby born dead.

It is strange, when I have a really bad night, something nice always turns up in the morning. A letter from Saxe and a cheque fell out. Immediately I ask the superintendent to be moved to a semi-private ward where I can have visitors. I am overjoyed and life smiles again.

Each time Baby is brought in I love him a little more. We are getting to be quite pals now, for he is learning to feed… I am moved now into a room with a young Jewish mother who also has a boy – we discuss circumcision. The superintendent says it will cost less to have it done by the doctor, but we agree we'd rather the rabbi did it. So I summon the guests for the event…

A godmother is forgotten – Irma Kraft came y'day and I wanted to ask her, but she seems so busy. So they get a patient, someone quite unknown to me – a woman from Long Island who sells hats…

Claude has come to see me – he was the very first person – a week after Baby was born… He is a funny little man but so theatrical, but I like him very much… Sara is a darling, a most amazingly kind, joyous person who brings me soup from Otto Khan's chef, and the

loveliest flowers…Serge and Griko don't come, but Madame does – a very gracious queenly visitor… The nurse put Andre in her arms, but she was so embarrassed she didn't know what to do – she was afraid of him, she says – and that's funny, so am I!

Tom comes too, and is very sweet. The nurses all think he is handsome, but I don't. I feel irritable when I see him – it is quite wrong of me. He has given so much of his time, so much tenderness, even when I repulsed him when he wanted to caress me. It is maddening, this feeling…

A great gilded basket of flowers arrived today – just JGS scribbled on a bit of paper among the roses. Oh, discreet Senator Saxe, leader of the Wets. Frankly I would rather have had the dollars than the flowers…

The big fat nurse has brought him in – he's lying on my bed waiting. He is not asleep, he isn't crying, he's just lying there helpless waiting to be taken somewhere. Today we leave, the 14 days are up, and now we must go and find somewhere to live. I wish I was going to Madame's house in Plainfield… I am a stupid bungler. However, it's done now, and Tom packs up my things and I pay the bill and walk out of that hospital with my son in my arms. We drive gently up to 71st St, because this is the first time I've held Andre John for so long and I'm quite helpless and afraid. I'm glad he's going to the Junior League. They do understand babies there, and I certainly don't.

It is with relief that I hand him over to Miss Nevins. That's unnatural – I should have broken down and wept all over him, but I felt strangely cold about it all.

* * *

Well, it's clear from the outset that my mother is finding it hard to bond with me, that I even alarm her. . . Perhaps,

given her uncertain circumstances, this is scarcely surprising. She returns to the Barbizon, as she has nowhere else to go. She cannot walk far, and standing is a strain. She feels utterly tired and depressed – she decides to go to a convalescent home. Before she goes she visits the Junior League:

> *He looks so pale and wan, so thin. And he was born so chubby and round and rosy. Surely in April a baby could be put out in the air? He wants fresh air instead of central heating at its highest degree.*

She busies herself with translating Serge's book, and writing articles…

> *Anything to keep my mind off André* (the name she'd decided to give me)*… I have terrifying nightmares. Always the same theme. Sometimes I have left him in a drawer, shut it and forgotten him. Then again I take him out for a picnic and find I have no milk, so I leave him for hours while I try to find some. Always I have forgotten him and he cries for milk…*

She returned to NY determined to find work. But she had not bargained for the exodus.

> *Every year in spring, New York is forsaken for Europe. Wealthy Americans book passages and away they go for the summer. Thus all my pupils depart – even Madame. The Grand Duke is sailing and so Griko and Madame will accompany him, leaving Serge and I alone. I should be quiet at Plainfields feeding André, continuing to give French lessons to people who are not rich… I have a hunch that something really good would have happened had I gone there. Just a simple country life with my son!*
>
> *Madame asks me to come back to Europe with her. There's a first class stateroom with a real bed instead of a bunk! Oh the joy of being in the entourage of his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Alexander! Oh Scotch-Yid – your journey all paid. And you can enjoy none of these*

things, for André is too ill to travel! The doctor said the risk would be too great.

Later she reflects:

For the first time in my life I transgress. I have a child without being married. Oh the lovely calm days of those first two months. The girls (in the Paris theatre, I guess) *said they couldn't understand why I didn't worry, why I hadn't gone grey, why in fact I didn't do something about it.*

I had never been so calm in my life. The half-hearted endeavours 'to get rid of it' by taking Epsom salts, by douching with hot soapy water, were made to comply with a certain worldliness. But with the coming of the child I felt there would be release! My dreadful bruised childhood would culminate in serenity, and the child would bring me peace.

What was my object in coming here? People thought me quite mad. I wanted to leave behind that weakling that was my English self, to learn about the Jews and possibly marry one. But I don't put my ideas into execution… I crave for a husband! Physically I merely 'carry on' instead of being strong and vital. My brain works sluggishly, and sometimes it's difficult to get it to work at all, so terrible is this thrust in my body for sexual intercourse. I have never lived with anyone, never spent even a weekend with anyone, just beastly disappointing hours with some brute now and then.

31 July

Tonight we leave America, my son and I. At midnight the Caronia sails carrying back to Europe a muddle-headed little bungler with a baby. Defeat in any circumstance is galling, but defeat that could so easily have been avoided – that is not to be endured.

I wonder why it is so hard to be 'natural' in England. I don't mean free love and nudist colonies, but just ordinary everyday life. At school I always felt queerly apart from the English girls, detached somehow from the majority… Here in America self-expression is squeezed from a child, willy-nilly. With lamentable results when so often there is so little worthy of expression. But in England a child is bottled up; to be free in thought and movement is considered 'not done'.

I have bought André countless bottles and nappies… if I had fed him myself I shouldn't have to worry about this cumbersome great crate of tinned milk, or fearing the bottles would break, or the teats get lost.

My mother fetches me from the Junior League, and the taxi drives to the port. A steward takes her down to D deck.

Here I am on the list as Mrs Munro and André John Dechesne. Lord, how complicated it all is. How miserable is this voyage. Instead of hot August sun we have the foghorn shrieking away every other minute the whole way over to Ireland. There is always a dense mist that makes visibility impossible, and all the chairs on deck are damp…

London 8 a.m. Rain and cold, grey skies. I am the last to go before the landing officer. He is quite charming and doesn't seem to want to know anything at all about Baby or myself. How unlike Americans!

The steward precedes me down the gangway carrying André… No one has come to meet me… at Liverpool Street station I put André into a taxi and ask the driver to look after him while I go and phone. Everyone seems to be away…

Thus I arrived in England. I can only wonder at how much of my mother's anxiety and ambivalence I was drinking in with the tinned milk…

4

Foster Care

SO THAT'S how I came to be brought up in Britain. Not Ma's idea at all. She was weary and depressed at the failure of her plans. She had hoped to travel to New York with the Grand Duke and his entourage, which included his chamberlain (the sculptor Serge), then have the baby and find a black wet-nurse to feed it and be its nanny - a common occurrence in those days. She told me she realised she wasn't 'maternal' – not surprising, as her mother hadn't been very maternal with her!

When she arrived back in London she sought a recommendation from a leading child-care specialist, Dr Sloane Chesser, for a suitable nursery. So on 21 August 1930 I was taken down to Ewell in Surrey to Mrs P. A fortnight later mother's diary records her first visit, made with a friend:

> *Joyce and I are shown into the old cottage… and Mrs P, all in white, enters with such a brown-skinned and bright-eyed André in her arms – he looks an entirely different baby. He smiles in her arms at us but when he comes to my arms he begins to cry – bitter, long piteous sobs. His eyes look up at me with the saddest expression. I have never seen him like this before. We take him out and he resigns himself to his fate and sleeps, tired out with the exertion of so much crying.*
>
> *He seems better when we come back, and brightens up to see Mrs P again. Then he is not to be taken away again? Can he really stay with this comfy white Nanny? … What a narrow squeak, for surely it was time he was pushed off somewhere else again. When he sees us go he*

smiles and breaks into a triumphant laugh, safe in Nanny's arms. At last he has found a real home, and isn't he glad!

* * *

I smile to think how even a six-month-old baby can sense what's best for its own survival and comfort, and that Mum recognised this. My *bitter, long piteous sobs* speak volumes: of my fear of returning to the probable pain and anguish of the sea journey, and the sense of ambivalence and abandonment emanating from my mother.

Mrs P

Mrs P was an SRN, a state registered nurse, and wonderful with tiny babies. She'd wanted half a dozen of her own, but the man she married only gave her one. It was a very sad marriage; but it meant she had plenty of love to pour out on needy kids like me – until they grew older and were no longer in absolute dependence on her! Then it was a different story…

For now, though, I had found a 'real home' and real love, but it was not to last. I don't know how long I stayed with Mrs P, or exactly what happened in those first five years. I believe that her interest was primarily in tiny babies, and

less when they grew to have little wills of their own! Mum did try to look after me herself, on a farm near Bodiam, I gather. She told me later how I got lost once: she was sitting on the promenade at Brighton with me and dozed off. When she awoke I wasn't there; she looked around wildly, then a police car went by and she spotted me in the back. So off to the police station to reclaim her lost property!

Mother on a visit

I know I went back to Mrs P around three. She had moved to Dorking; she was always flitting, I gather. My first memory is sitting beside the fire opposite Derek, her only son, who was five years older than me. He was reading his comic, and I guess I was trying to talk to him, but he just wanted to read. Suddenly I snatched it out of his hands and flung it on the fire. Not a way to endear myself to him.

My next memory is of being in a Jewish children's home in Folkestone, aged four. Perhaps my mother moved me there because she was friendly with Lili Palmer, the actress, who took an interest in the home. I shared a room with a six-year-old. One day he found two used rail tickets and we ran away together, with our little suitcases, but didn't get far. Other memories are of falling into a pond in the park, and of having cold orange 'soup' for tea.

When I was five, and it was time to go to school, it seems my mother wanted me nearer London to make visiting easier. It must have been difficult for her to find a suitable home for me, with no social workers to help in those days. So she

went back to Mrs P, although she was no longer running a nursery but living in a dingy flat above a wool-shop in North Cheam. I clearly recall arriving at the door, and seeing Derek on the stairs looking very dubiously at me. I don't think Mrs P liked me much, but with the 25 shillings a week my mother paid for my keep, the family were able to rent a bungalow near my new school in Stoneleigh, a mile away.

But it wasn't a wise placement; Mrs P's marriage was a disaster. I don't think my mother had any idea about that, Mr P had been educated at Dulwich College, but had lost a lot of money in the Depression apparently, and now worked at a garage as a mechanic, having previously been a fine precision engineer. He was a loner, who seemed to have no friends or social life. Mrs P told me just before she died that her friends had warned her not to marry him because he was homosexual. 'Oh, don't worry, I'll soon change him,' she'd responded. But of course, she couldn't. She continually disparaged him, at which he retreated to his workshop in a shed in the garden. Mealtimes were a minefield – you never knew when the next eruption would happen. She would nag him about something and he'd finally flounce out, taking his dinner to his shed. I would shudder, feeling the tension rise. Then often I'd be told to take his pudding out to him, which were the only times I saw inside that amazing workshop with its rows of tools and boxes. Thankfully, he got a job as a precision engineer later on, but he was a desperately sad man. Recently I told Derek that I'd only just realised Pa never had a conversation with me. 'Oh, don't worry, John – he never spoke to me either!'

My first memory of my infants' school was when a teacher got exasperated at my constant chatter and sat me down with an atlas and told me to shut up. That's when my love of maps began. I recall finding East London on the coast of South Africa, and annoyed my classmates when I asked them if they knew where East London was! In the play-

ground, I remember, I once bought five chocolate caramels for a halfpenny.

Occasionally my mother would visit on a Saturday afternoon, and we would all be on our best behaviour. Once she brought me a shiny red model car which came from America. On another occasion, Derek had made the tea and was bringing it into the living room. I hid behind the door, and shouted 'Boo!' as he came in – and he dropped the tray in fright. My mother's presence thankfully softened the retribution I would otherwise have received.

I had a small bedroom of my own in the bungalow, with a table and a chair. My spare clothes were kept in a suitcase under my bed. I don't recall much in the way of toys or books – there were no bookshelves in the house at all – and no pictures on my wall. But I did collect cigarette cards from the packets of Craven A that Pa used to smoke, and also the cards inside the packets of Typhoo tea. I thought about collecting stamps, but I'd heard that King George had a fine collection, and decided I couldn't compete!

I think I must have been very bored, as I recall often asking, 'What can I do?' Mrs P often seemed irritated with me, giving me a sense that I couldn't do anything right. I would often be sent to my room after a row, or if I'd 'answered back'. But if I lay on my bed I'd be told, 'Get off with your dirty trousers!' I'd been given a gun that shot rods with a rubber suction pad that stuck to the wall; I had fun shooting at the flies that came in from the back yard. Didn't do much for the pattern on the wallpaper…

Aunty Frances, Mrs P's elder sister, lived near Southend in Essex, and we went there for a holiday. A photo shows that even Pa came too. But I wet the bed, and that was a disgrace; I stood accused and humiliated in front of the rest, totally unable to do anything about it. Not a happy holiday for me, I recall.

I was in the garden one day in 1938 when a young

Derek with baby Monya

woman wheeled a pram around the corner of the bungalow, and left a tiny baby with Mrs P, who later adopted her as her daughter – Monya. I was eight at the time, and I remember two or three other young children coming at different times, but none stayed long. These were probably all private arrangements, before the advent of children's legislation.

* * *

We never went to church, except for one Sunday later that year, in September 1938, when we walked to the nearest one – together with others streaming into the crowded building - to give thanks for 'a piece of paper'. Mr Chamberlain had returned from Munich proclaiming 'Peace in our time!' But not long after, one evening when I'd already gone to bed I was awoken and told to dress. I was quite excited - we all went down to the Town Hall to collect our gas masks!

One sunny September morning the following year, Mrs P decided to have a day on the beach at Littlehampton. So the pram was packed, with one-year-old Monnie securely strapped into it, and we set off to walk to the station. Halfway down the hill, Mrs P ricked her ankle. Oh dear, the trip was off, and we trailed back home. Turning on the wireless, we heard the voice of the prime minister, '…and so we are in a state of war with Germany'.

Straightaway came the blackout regulations. Street lights went out, and all our windows had to be boarded up at night so not a chink of light could be seen by enemy bombers

above. Sticky tape was criss-crossed on windows to prevent flying glass should a bomb land nearby. Anderson shelters were delivered (corrugated iron structures named after Sir John Anderson, Home Secretary at the time) and we had to dig a large hole in the garden to fit these curved corrugated iron 'leaves' together, then cover them with earth and hope grass would grow on top to conceal it from above.

No bombs fell in the first year, but when they did in September 1940 we found our shelter was unusable because of water inside it. So we had a Morrison shelter (named after Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary in Churchill's national government) – a sort of iron table with wire mesh sides - installed in the dining room. But sleeping under that didn't satisfy Mrs P, so finally we dismantled the Anderson and put it up in her bedroom, over her double bed. When the air-raid siren went we'd all come in – except Pa. He always stayed in his own bedroom!

The war affected Mrs P, and she said I 'got on her nerves'. Arguments and rows were frequent. After a confrontation with me she'd complain of palpitations, call for *Sal Volatile* and smelling salts, and ask for a window to be opened – her fluster making me feel very guilty. She'd flop in her chair until she calmed down, and we'd all hover anxiously, trying to restore the peace.

Sometimes when I'd been sent to my room in disgrace for something or other, and would be trying to do my homework, the siren would go. That would give me 'permission' to return to the family, into her presence. It was always tricky after a row to re-integrate, treading on eggshells, wondering how I could get into her good books again.

One way was to clean her shoes. I'd take the kit out onto the back doorstep and carefully polish away, including the instep underneath. When Derek derided me for bothering with that part, I protested, 'What would happen if she had an accident and people saw the underneath of her shoes?'

Other ways to please her included bathing her swollen feet. Being plump and with varicose veins, she found walking quite tiring. The shops were about a mile away, so I began to do the shopping. I was nine when the war started, and I remember getting our ration books – green for baby Monya (under five), blue for Derek and me (under 16) and buff for

adults. We had to 'register' at the shops of our choice, and you could only change shops when you got the next year's ration books. (Recently, when I gave a talk to a local primary school about being a child in the Second World War, I took in a plate of a week's rations and one chubby boy remarked, 'That's what I eat in a day!')

First thing on Saturday mornings was to get down early to the butchers, to get in the queue before they opened. The joints hung from the rail; I would be told to get a nice lean piece of topside of beef, or perhaps a leg of lamb. I'd have my eye on one, anxious lest it go before I get to the counter – then maybe only a scraggy shoulder would be left. This was

the worst part of the shopping; I was trembling with apprehension at her verdict on my choice when I got home. She would sometimes tear the paper wrapping off and say:

'Look at all that fat; they must have seen you coming. Take it back!'

'I can't,' I'd wail, 'There's nothing left.'

Then back down I'd cycle with a list for the first lot of main shopping, usually the heavy veg. If I saw a queue (especially at the greengrocers) I'd hurry to join it, asking the woman in front of me what is was for. Sometimes for onions, or rarely oranges! Never bananas – they didn't return till after the war.

Sainsbury's those days had separate counters for different foodstuffs. So I would queue first at the bacon counter for 2ozs per person, then at the butter counter for our 2 ozs each, plus 4 ozs marg, also lard and usually one egg per ration book, sometimes two, but in the depths of the war, in 1941-42, sometimes none at all. They managed to produce tins of dried egg as a substitute. At the grocery counter I bought the tea (always had to be Typhoo), and jam (Hartley's) and sugar (Tate & Lyle, of course), all on the ration. For other scarce groceries we had 'points' in our ration books, of different values – A, B, C & D – for such foods as dried fruit (sultanas, raisins, currants); golden syrup (16 pts!), tinned fruit, Nestlé's condensed milk, tinned salmon (a great treat), Spam (tinned meat loaf from USA), tinned peas and peaches, etc. A tin of baked beans was more points than pence – 9 points and eightpence. Every month the value of the points might change according to the food supply; we'd listen to the wireless after the 6 o'clock news on the last Sunday of the month to hear what had changed. Looking back, I realise that we had no inflation, so prices remained stable.

'Personal points' were for sweets and chocolate; they varied from 2 ozs a week to 4ozs. Cadbury's milk chocolate was scarce; they made a blended bar, in just a paper wrapper

that was open both ends, and no foil. Bourneville chocolate was always plain.

Bread was never rationed – until *after* the war (when US Marshall Aid was redirected to starving Europe). But I had to be quick; often I had to queue to get some before it sold out. Usually a greyish white, what they called a National Loaf, for fourpence-halfpenny. Brown was scarce, Hovis or perhaps Turog, and more expensive. Milk was restricted to half a pint each a day per person, also fourpence-halfpenny a pint, and always delivered to the door. You couldn't buy it in a shop – very different from today. But sometimes the birds pecked through the top for the cream.

Cereals were scarce, but we could usually get rolled oats for porridge. Also oatmeal, fine, medium or coarse. I'd buy the latter to feed our chickens. Biscuits were a rare treat, but one shop sold broken biscuits cheaply. Soap and soap powders were rationed and scarce. Mrs P rated Persil the best, Rinso next, then Oxydol; if I spotted Persil in someone's shopping basket I'd timorously ask the lady where she'd got it. Then I'd hare along to the shop, but sometimes be met with, 'You have to be registered here, sonny'. So sometimes, when another child or two was being fostered with us, I'd take a couple of ration books and register with another grocer, in the hope of getting more choice. But I was forbidden to go to the Co-op – 'cheap muck', said Mrs P.

One Christmas, probably 1941, I was queuing at the grocery counter and I noticed that the chubby assistant was reaching under the counter and giving each customer an extra, off-points 'treat'. When my turn came she presented me with a box of Welgar Shredded Wheat – and I proudly went home with our Christmas treat!

Totting up what I'd spent was a nightmare. I had to account for every penny. I think that's why I can remember, almost compulsively, the price of so many items. For three ration books I could get a leg of lamb, or for two and half, a

shoulder. But in the depths of the war sometimes the ration would be reduced. There was a horsemeat shop in North Cheam, and we experimented with that, off the ration, but Mrs P didn't much care for it. Sometimes liver or kidneys were available (also unrationed) but Mrs P wouldn't let me buy them ever – she didn't approve of offal. Sausages seemed to be mostly made of bread. Mrs P made delicious stews, with Bovril. She spurned Oxo cubes – but would use Marmite.

Just when I thought I'd done all the shopping, Mrs P would remember something else she needed. So down I went again on my bicycle – except when I had a puncture, or it was out of action – then I'd have to walk. Maybe to the chemist – for smelling salts, or eau de cologne, or Brand's Essence of chicken (a jelly, very scarce, but good for baby when ill). And I might be rewarded with a rare warm smile if I could get her a bottle of Sanatogen tonic wine from the Off-Licence.

* * *

We'd get the *Daily Sketch* delivered each morning, and the *Sunday Graphic.* I went straight to the cartoons – Blondie (a curvaceous young lady) and Dagwood (who made enormous multi-decker sandwiches). The wireless was always on for the news at 6pm, read by John Snagge or Alvar Liddell.

In our living room there were just two armchairs either side of the fireplace, a dining table and six chairs. The wireless would draw us together as a family. There was just the Home Service and the Light Programme; the Third Programme came later. I recall sitting around to listen to *Monday Night at Seven*, and *ITMA* (It's That Man Again) with Tommy Handley and his famous characters - the inebriated Colonel Chinstrap ('I don't mind if I do!'), Fumph (the fifth columnist), the mournful Mrs Mopp ('Can I do you now, sir?') who, when asked how she was, always replied with a long tale of woe, but ended, '…but it's bein' so cheerful wot keeps

me goin'.' If, as we sat there, I happened to pass wind, I'd be told to go out and 'air myself'. Nobody else apparently experienced that problem.

On Saturdays there was Arthur Askey and Stinker Murdoch in *Bandwagon*, and much later in the war, Kenneth Horne and Richard Murdoch teamed up in *Much Binding in the Marsh* – a mythical air force station.

Wireless was our chief entertainment, though Mrs P allowed no one but herself to turn it on. We didn't have a gramophone, but did have a piano, which I was put to when young, at my mother's insistence. But the teacher was so glum I regrettably never made much progress. I also liked reading, but I don't recall a bookcase or books in the house, nor in my bedroom. But I did win a prize book, *The Story of Heather,* about a horse.

The atmosphere in the bungalow was one of more or less continual tension. All depended on what sort of mood Mrs P was in. She found so much to criticise: everything I did seemed wrong. Yet sometimes, in summer, before I got up, I'd hear her filling the watering can and humming as she tended to her plants, and that seemed to bode well. But winning any approval, let alone affection, always seemed an effort. Everything I did had to be calculated, not spontaneous. Laughing and joking just never seemed to happen. In the garden, if I was weeding, or digging, or feeding the chickens, I'd fear a rap on the kitchen window: 'Don't do that!' My whole security seemed to depend on her approval – no wonder I became so anxious to please people in later life. And yet my prayer at night was, 'Please let her live to the old age of 90, happily, healthily and wealthily.'

5

School

IT'S A COLD January morning in 1940. The war is playing havoc with our schools. My junior school has not yet built air-raid shelters, so it is closed and classes are held by turn in different pupils' homes.

I'm nine, and today it's my turn to have the class, but as the crocodile approaches our road, I am feeling prickly with anxiety. Mrs P looks out of the front window, and turns to me:

'I've changed my mind. Go and tell the teacher she can't come here after all.'

Why? For no particular reason, as far as I can tell.

I feel dreadful and humiliated as I go out of the door and stop them all by our front gate, quickly fabricating an excuse: 'I'm very sorry, but my mother says she's not well enough to have you in today.' The teacher is quite non-plussed, and uncertain what to do. Suddenly Peter James, who lives further down the hill, pipes up, 'Please Miss, we can go down to my house.' I marvel that he can be so confident, springing such a surprise on his mother. But I am enormously relieved and grateful.

* * *

When I was ten, Mrs P took me to sit the scholarship exam. As we walked to the bus a bird dropping fell on my shoulder. 'That's good luck,' she exclaimed. And so it turned out to be. I started at Epsom County School in September 1940, just as the Battle of Britain began. I was pleased to go, except I'd heard that we had to shower after PT, and I

dreaded the thought of being naked in front of the others. Of course, when it came to the point, the fear vanished as we all splashed about. Mr Weale, our form master, was also the French teacher, and to my surprise he made me Form Monitor. Perhaps it was because my name then was André John Dechesne, and maybe he thought I could speak French… or because I was one of four boys who'd made the short-list for a single place at King's College, Wimbledon. At the interview they asked me about my grandparents – and that threw me, as I knew practically nothing about my mother's parents, nor of course, of my father's. I didn't get the place.

I'd take the 93 bus the three miles to school; the fare was a penny. When I was eleven I got a bike, a second-hand Elswick with Sturmey Archer three-speed gears, a great present from Ma, which cost her £3. So that saved me tuppence a day.

Many of the masters had been called up, and later a female teacher took us for French. But because she could not keep discipline, we learnt very little! I enjoyed English, with Mr Massing, but never shined at maths; I just never got the hang of algebra, or trigonometry. Chemistry was limited because of shortage of chemicals to blow ourselves up with! I dreaded Latin, taken by the formidable deputy head. He would tell us to open our *Caesar's Gallic Wars* at page so-and-so and start translating. One by one we'd stutter our way through, and he'd say in his sepulchral tones, 'Next… next… next.'

The art teacher was a joke, who could never control the class. We had no paint, so just drew in pencil, when we weren't mucking about. I enjoyed the class: perspective came easily to me, and I usually came top. The woodwork teacher had been called up, and there was no metalwork, and no chance to use our hands, and no after-school clubs – just detention!

Homework was a headache. Usually two subjects a night,

and three at weekends, including an English essay, which seemed to dominate my Sundays, because I wrote far too many pages. Sunday evenings were a nightmare, trying to finish the homework, iron my shirt for the following week, and wash my socks in my weekly bath – the ring of scum around it took a lot of rubbing to remove!

* * *

One day in school, I'm walking along a corridor by myself when suddenly, without warning, a heavy bowling frame falls – who knows why - on my foot and I'm in agony. Looking down I'm alarmed to see blood oozing from my shoe. And now I hear footsteps, thank goodness - it's Mr Richards, the maths master.

'Sir,' I cry, 'I've hurt my foot!' Sizing up the situation, he sweeps me up in his arms, as if I were a baby. Oh, the wonderful sensation of being picked up and held so strongly. Strange, but welcome. I can't recall ever being picked up before, and I feel somehow honoured, worthy, even privileged and secure as he carries me towards the first aid room. The pain in my foot is secondary to the wonder of this!

Looking back I realise, with a sort of aching longing, how much I missed being held, cuddled and caressed. Later, after I had to leave school, I recall having several dreams of going back. But one stands out. We were at a swimming gala, and somehow I was due to do a special sort of dive. I was being supported horizontally by six of my classmates, as if they were going to run and propel me into the water. But that feeling of being held was most powerful and satisfying. It stays with me still.

* * *

But strangely I don't recall missing either my real mother or the father I'd never heard of. It was just something I didn't think about – and that never got talked about. I accepted it without complaint. Yet I certainly would have needed the

encouragement and camaraderie of a father who *believed* in me, and who could have done things with me – fishing, football, the cinema, all those ordinary things that dads do.

As for sporting prowess, this was torpedoed when Mrs P announced that I was not to do sports because I had a weak heart. Where she got this information from I don't know. She said I had been a TB suspect as a child; it was not until I was 31 and applying for life insurance that the doctor told me my heart was fine. Yes, it was congenitally enlarged but I could 'go and climb every mountain'. I felt I'd been cheated of a normal boy's activity; stigmatised as a feeble wimp.

I sold the new football boots my mother had bought me to the boy at the next desk. I had to be a linesman (with no knowledge of the game) and stand there in the cold, miserably bored. In the cricket season I was allowed to play, as it was a gentler game… but I was no use. There were tennis courts, but only for the seniors.

One result of this ban was that on Sports Day I was told to write up the results on a big blackboard, because I was good at lettering. It so happened that the PT master who ran the sports day also taught us history. Now in my fourth year, a new cycle shed for a hundred bikes was built, and he decided that in his history lessons I was to be given a pot of paint and told to paint the numbers 1-100 on them. My knowledge of history is abysmal. Somehow, I get the sense, people knew I could be mistreated and marginalised, because I was expecting it.

* * *

My mother was then living in London. Every Saturday morning I would be given fourpence to go to the phone box and call her (and afterwards Mrs P always wanted to know what she'd said, and what I'd said – a humiliating exercise, in which I dissembled uneasily, carefully picking my words). About once a month I would travel up on the bus and Underground to visit her for the weekend. One day in 1940, stay-

ing with a friend of hers near Baker Street, we were out walking when a fine figure of a man on horseback, in a yellow waistcoat and cravat with a gold pin, drew up at the traffic lights. I waved to him cheekily: 'Hallo!' and he smiled at me and then doffed his bowler hat to my mother. I didn't realise that I'd just introduced my mother to her future husband – and the man who could have been a caring stepfather to me. Ah, so many 'could-have-beens'…

He owned an advertising agency in Bedford Square, and used to ride in Hyde Park every morning. Ma had worked at Crawfords advertising agency before the war; some of his staff had been called up, so later he asked her to work for

him. She moved in, became his housekeeper (his wife was sadly in a long-term mental hospital, and they had no children), and I would travel up occasional weekends to stay.

His name was Laurence Holman; he came from Lancashire: a lot older than my mother but an avuncular and generous man. He signed his personal letters with a sketch of the back of his head. His horse, Mariana, was his pride and joy, stabled in a mews off Gower Street. To my delight he taught me to ride in Rotten Row, in Hyde Park – a great adventure for a small boy. In the large common garden he taught me to shoot. So I greatly enjoyed his attention; I also enjoyed tapping away on one of his office typewriters. I made a list of 'my imaginary government'; ministers had to be boys from my class. I was King John, and Jimmy Eaton was Prime Minister (he was the most popular boy in the class). McClelland had glasses so I made him Minister of Health. I can't think why I was obsessed with government; the war of course brought mention of ministers every day on the wireless and in the papers. We had a national coalition led by Winston Churchill and I knew the name of every member of the Cabinet.

By this time I was going up to stay at the rather grand Georgian house in Bedford Square about once a month, and sometimes for holidays. The thought of bombs never seemed to worry me. We slept in the front part of the second floor, but the kitchen and dining room were in the basement, with offices in the rest of the house. At night Mum would take a tray of tea things for the morning up in the narrow little service lift. One evening just after Christmas all three of squeezed into this lift: up it went – then suddenly stopped halfway, between floors. Oh calamity! Nothing would make it move. There we stayed for ten long hours, until the boilerman came in at 7am next morning, and managed to release us. I don't remember any raid, but poor Ma and Laurie had to take turns to squat on the floor, whilst I was able to sit on

the shelf alongside the tea tray. A night to remember!

* * *

Back home with Mrs P things were getting tight. Her husband gave her £5 a week for housekeeping. She got a part-time job in a tiny Finlays tobacconist's kiosk in nearby Stoneleigh, job-sharing with her younger step-sister Ella. Cigarettes were scarce, but you could get tobacco and make roll-ups.

Monya, aged 11

The nation was exhorted to 'Dig for Victory' so we planted cabbages, sprouts, carrots and runner beans. Weeding was a constant chore, as was picking the caterpillars off the undersides of the cabbage leaves, and feeding them to the chickens we started to keep. They supplied us with much-needed eggs, and as time went on we got more hens and were able to supply both neighbours each side. I'd take the eggs to them and borrow their ration books to go, with ours, to the corn merchant in North Cheam to mark the egg page for 'balancer meal'. We'd boil up our vegetable peelings and scraps in a bucket , then I'd drain and mash them and add the meal – the hens loved it. At weekends it was my job to clean out the hen-house; once I didn't secure the gate and all the chickens got out and had a merry feed off the vegetable garden. Of course, I got it in the neck!

I cycled ten miles to Reigate to buy day-old chicks and tied the cardboard box with its air holes to the back of my bike. What a bumpy ride the poor creatures had! Mrs P put them in a container with a light bulb to keep them warm; we usually managed to rear about two-thirds of them. We had a mixture of Rhode Island Reds and Light Sussex; there was

nothing nicer than going to the nest boxes to find warm, brown eggs.

When they got past laying it was my job – of course - to kill them for the table, by breaking their necks. Once Derek tried, but only succeeded in pulling the head right off, and the headless creature ran all round the garden – an awful sight! Later Mrs P bought a 'humane killer' she'd seen advertised in *Poultry World* for nine shillings and sixpence, which I screwed on the fence. I'd nestle the poor unsuspecting hen's neck into the groove and then pull the lever down and click, her neck would be broken – instant death, followed by much flapping of wings whilst I held onto the legs till it subsided. Then came the plucking, whilst still warm – a tedious job; so easy to tear the skin. We also kept rabbits, as they were a good source of food too. But they did smell, and needed to be cleaned out more often than the chickens. Monya helped, as she made them her pets.

* * *

My mother had wanted me to join the Scouts, apparently. I must have procrastinated, not knowing any friend who might introduce me. One evening Mrs P got exasperated.

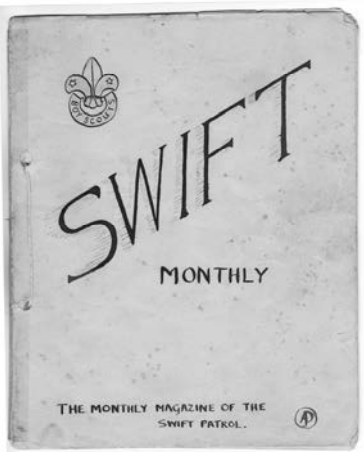
'Get out and don't come back until you've joined.' I was eleven; I cycled down to the Scout hall in Ewell, gingerly opened the door and peeked in. I was warmly welcomed. The following week I'd passed my Tenderfoot and was enrolled, having learnt the Scout Law: 'Trusty, loyal, helpful, brotherly, courteous, kind; obedient, cheerful, thrifty, pure in body and mind' was the jingle we learnt to recall its ten laws.

I never looked back. I reckon it

met my needs – for friends and things to do. Each Thursday I'd put on my uniform, with scarf and toggle and floppy-brimmed hat, for an evening of British Bulldogs (hopping on one leg with arms folded to knock over your opponents – great fun – now banned, I believe, on health & safety grounds!), Kim's game (remembering 20 objects on a tray) path-finding through the woods, wide games (getting lost in the woods) and much more, plus swotting up for proficiency badges. Oh, so many to choose from.

A big treat was going with my mother one day to Scout HQ in Buckingham Palace Road in London to buy the big green 'bible' that had all the info you needed to work for a badge. And she bought me a sheath knife to put on my belt – that was tops (again, banned today!). Going to camp was a great adventure. But having to winkle the food rations out of Mrs P (butter, marg, lard, cheese, bacon, egg, stewing steak, sugar, jam and tea) which she seemed so reluctant to dispense, was a regular anxiety-provoking nightmare. One Saturday I nearly missed the bus, but Derek's intervention saved the day – he simply took over from his mother. I was so grateful to him.

It was fun putting up the tents, hammering in the pegs, and hoping the rain wouldn't drip through, then making a 'hip hole' before laying our groundsheets, and putting down newspaper beneath our blankets. Baden-Powell, the founder, said, 'Always have more insulation under you than on top.' We were in patrols of eight or so; Lions, Panthers, Badgers and I was in the Swifts. We rose in seniority, and



when I was Third Scout I launched the *Swift Monthly* – a single-copy, 14-page, hand-written magazine that was circulated to each lad in turn. It was illustrated with cartoons, inspired by Jack Blunt of the weekly *Scout* magazine. But the title was over-optimistic – I only produced two issues.

I became Second to the Patrol Leader, having attained my second class badge and twelve proficiency badges. My great sadness was never getting my first class and red and gold cords - because I couldn't swim in those days, and you had to have the swimmers badge. Then, when my Patrol Leader had to study for his School Certificate exams I became PL.

One weekend I took the patrol to camp. I can only recall digging latrines and trying to cook a spotted dick - which wouldn't cook! When it came to cooking, I wasn't much good. I'd never done any at home: I wasn't allowed to go to the pantry or touch food 'in case my germs infected it'. I was somehow 'unclean'. Nor was I allowed to dry up, as I'd contaminate the tea cloth. I had to clean my teeth in the lavatory to avoid my spit fouling the bathroom sink (so my teeth weren't as well kept as they should have been!). Sometimes, in exasperation, Mrs P would call me a dirty little Jew-boy, or a cunning Isaacs. I realise now why I've always been ashamed of my Jewish heritage, and kept it secret all my life until recently. Shame became a way of life…a sense of being unworthy and unlovable.

6

War and Strife

TREADING on eggshells became a way of life at home. Adjusting to Mrs P's moods was necessary to keep the peace; she never slept well, and she worried a lot. I had to pick my words carefully in case they caused offence. Conversation at mealtimes never seemed to flow naturally. I was always trying to get her approval, so when she asked me to bathe her feet, or pluck black hairs from her chin with tweezers, or pull grey hairs from her head, it was a way of getting back into her good books.

She got particularly anxious and worried after Derek was called up in 1943. She must have felt so alone without his presence. He went into the RAF as a photographer, because on leaving school he'd gone to Epsom to work at a photographer's shop where he learnt his trade. Then he went to Carlton Studios in Holborn, London, doing still-lifes for commercial clients.

He got posted to the Cotswolds, and took some beautiful shots of nearby Bibury, which later appeared in *Picture Post.* When he came home on leave the whole atmosphere would lighten; Mrs P adored him, and leaned heavily on him for the support she spurned from her husband. After demob he set up a studio in St James, London, and specialised in portraits of musical personalities. I remember often seeing his photos of Adrian Boult and Malcolm Sargent in the *Radio Times.*

The strain of war must have borne heavily on Mrs P, especially with Derek away. A bomb demolished a house in our road; she had the worry of her elderly mother who'd moved to a bungalow just up the road, but also the occasional sup-

port of Ella, her younger half-sister who lived with her. I was often sent 'to see how Grandma was', and take a couple of eggs.

Later, the Germans launched their new secret weapon, the V1, or doodlebugs as we called them, from sites along the French coast. They were basically pilotless planes with a one-ton warhead powered by a jet engine. They flew at 4000 ft, at a speed of 350 mph. Towards the end of their journey they slowed down and flew at 1000 ft. making a characteristic droning and throbbing noise; then the engine cut out and twenty seconds later there was a loud explosion as they hit the ground. (A few would unaccountably glide on for a mile or two before falling.) They did tremendous damage to property and caused many casualties. Altogether more than nine thousand flying bombs were launched on southern England, over four thousand of which were destroyed before they reached their target.

One morning I was out on my paper round when I heard a doodlebug coming towards me. The engine cut out, and I hid under a garden wall, fearing the worst. But it glided on for a minute or so – and I was spared, but I wondered who wasn't as it exploded a few miles away. Our schoolwork was mightily disrupted by the V1s, which grew in numbers, and sent us scurrying in to the shelters. Later came the V2s, rockets much larger than the V1s, which descended so suddenly without warning, creating huge damage. But I think after the D-Day landings in Normandy their launching sites were found and destroyed.

* * *

Hostilities at home kept pace with the war. I was always in trouble. If I ever answered back I was sent to my room; it was the smallest of the three bedrooms, and looked out on the backyard and the bungalow next door. It just had a bed, table, chair and a cupboard, and a central light, but it was a bolt-hole I could escape to, and where I did my homework.

I never seemed able to say what I felt to Mrs P without it causing an over-reaction. Reasoned discussion never seemed to happen.

One evening after a really serious row, when I felt I could take no more, she yelled at me, 'Pack your bags and clear out!'

Oh, ghastly moment - what have I done? – I've gone too far. I crept back to my bedroom and knelt down and tearfully dragged out my old leather suitcase from under my bed and slowly began to put clothes in...

But where can I go? I had no idea; I just felt desperate, rejected, useless. I didn't matter to anyone. I knelt beside my case crying; it's so unfair, so unjust. I wanted to explain – but I couldn't. She wouldn't let me, just tells me to shut up and get out. There was nobody I could appeal to – Derek was away, and Pa's no good, in his shed most of the time anyway, and Monya was too young – and she'd take her mother's side anyway. It wouldn't be safe not to. I felt so alone, and still on my knees, bitterly slumped over my bed in the cold. I dreaded her footsteps, but they didn't yet come. How long before she would haul me up and kick me out? I just didn't know what to do, and blubbed uncontrollably.

I finally risked getting undressed and climbed into bed, hoping she'd forget me, and cried myself to sleep.

* * *

But after several such screaming sessions, which usually end with me tentatively crawling back into circulation feeling like a worm, hoping I won't get trodden on again too soon, I begin to realise it is more bluster on her part than real intent to get rid of me. Those anguished moments of rejection were some of the worst times of my life. I would sometimes gladly have disappeared from the face of the earth – there seemed no point in living.

When Mrs P went out she was careful to lock up very

securely - even locking all the inside doors as well - why I don't know; to deter burglars I suppose. I was never trusted with a key, and the back gate was locked, so if no one was in on returning from school, I'd have to cycle around till Mrs P returned. Or climb over the gate and do some gardening, or sweep the back yard. But sometimes I'd find my bedroom top window had not been closed, so I could reach in and open the big window, then climb in, out of the cold, but I was confined to my room. One day she came home and had forgotten her key; I was called upon to climb into my bedroom, then push a sheet of newspaper under the door and with one of her hairpins wiggle the key till it dropped on to the paper and I could slide it back, then open the door and let her in through the front door. So I had some uses…

I can't think why, as far as I remember, I never complained to my mother about Mrs P. Perhaps it was because Mrs P, however moody, was the only stable person I had in my life. If you're floating on a broken raft, you don't find fault with it: it's all you've got to hold onto.

I vaguely recall some tussle between Mrs P and my mother on the phone and in letters which involved me having to see a Probation Officer in Sutton, and telling him who I wanted to live with. I was terrified; I couldn't tell the truth, somehow, that I wanted to leave. Wouldn't that be disloyal or ungrateful? I felt very awkward, and conflicted. So I stayed on. (Strangely my mother never came down to talk to me about all this, and only recently did I discover letters that showed that Mr Holman was wanting to adopt me, but Mrs P wouldn't sign the agreement paper. How she could stop it I don't know.)

Finally, when I was about 13, Mrs P asked my mother to remove me. My mother advertised in the local paper and found a couple in Banstead, about the same distance from my school in the other direction. I recall the man being especially kind and interested in me, and I looked forward to my

new life there. They were nice people, and I settled in readily and felt quite happy there. I did get quite a pang of homesickness, however, down at the shopping parade, where there was a Woolworths, just like at North Cheam. Then to my surprise I got a letter from Mrs P.

Hallo 'Ond'

How are you? Derek says you have got much thinner and look white. How's that!!! You must try and keep your rosy cheeks, you know.

Well, André, I understand you are going to live at Banstead and that you are looking forward to going there. Here's wishing you every happiness and success there, but there is just one thing I want you to always think of and remember fondly, and that is you were <u>always</u> my little baby boy, because as you know I have had you nearly all your life and loved you and nursed you dearly and tenderly. Always remember that, when you are not feeling too good or when things seem to be going wrong, and then you will be cheered knowing that you have at least one friend…

Well, 'Ond' dear, Cheerio, and <u>always, always</u>, wishing you the best of everything. Fond thoughts to my 'second son', Missy

That letter shook me. Especially the words 'Fond thoughts to my "second son"', which made me weep. So I did mean something to her after all, I thought, although I could hardly credit it. Each time I took that letter out of the envelope and re-read it, I cried.

Then Derek, aged 18, came to visit me:

'Mother says to tell you that you can come back home if you want to, you know,' he informed me.

Oh, what a surprise. Why the change of mind?

'You have only to get the bus back after school tomorrow on the other side of the road,' he continued.

I felt awkward, and didn't know what to say. I didn't want to leave my new home in Banstead. Yet I felt duty-bound, under an obligation to be grateful. I was in a difficult dilemma; I havered and wriggled. But in the end I said, 'Alright.'

Next day I took the bus back to Worcester Park. (Looking back, I can't think why I didn't talk to my mother about all this – but there was no communication as far as I recall. I was scared of the phone, and I now think that she was quite scared of Mrs P, who was a formidable figure.) Once I arrived back I was declared 'ill' and sent to bed – I can't remember why. But I wasn't in my old bedroom; that was now Pa's. He used to share with his son; now I took his place – and I didn't feel Derek was best pleased with the new arrangement. But since he was away in the RAF most of the time it didn't matter so much.

After that, there were angry phone calls between London and Worcester Park. The phone was a recent installation, and I dreaded it ringing. A 'tug of love' with talk of possible adoption ensued, with court proceedings threatened. This continued for months, without me understanding what was really going on. Gradually the situation deteriorated, with me in the dog-house most of the time. My schoolwork went downhill.

* * *

I was in the kitchen one August morning in 1944. I was fourteen, and it's the school holidays, and we'd just finished breakfast. Mrs P had a letter in her hand - from my mother in London. Oh, I said to myself, why for her and not me?

'Your mother has booked you into a boarding school, Dartington Hall, in Devon, starting in September.' Strangely, she and Uncle Laurie (as he's become to me) have never discussed it with me, so it came as a huge surprise and a bit of a shock.

She's was holding the letter, but hadn't let me read it, and I didn't like to ask. I felt scared, but somehow elated at the prospect.

'Do you want to go?' she asked me.

Inside I felt exhilaration – yes I did, but also a little fearful. Most of the books I'd read from the school library were stories set in boarding schools – so yes, I'd be glad to go, though I didn't realise I had a choice. Did I?

Mrs P was implying I had. But evidently she was dead against it.

'If you want to go there, with your mother's foreign friends, after all I've sacrificed for you – well, don't think you can come back here afterwards!'

I was in turmoil. If I said yes, it looked like rank ingratitude. I wanted to go, but this threat of excommunication made it hard to contemplate. Eventually I mumbled that I would stay here. Oh miserable me…

She 'encouraged' me to write to my mother to tell her my 'decision' and also say that I never wanted to see her again. Why that, I don't know. Feebly I assented, feeling I had little choice in the matter.

* * *

Thus I broke off all 'diplomatic relations'. It meant not going up to London to see her, or Laurie, in the big house in Bedford Square, or phoning or writing to them. Extraordinary – I can't think why I complied. I was quite cut off. But perhaps why I didn't realise the enormity of my action was because I wasn't all that attached to my mother – she was more like an aunt. My attachment was to Mrs P, whether I liked it or not. That was where my security lay, though I couldn't have put it into words then. And fear of insecurity has always played such a large part in my life.

As a result I lost the four most important aspects of my future: 1) my mother, and consequently the rest of her

family; 2) the rest of my education, which she intended to include university; 3) a step-father, which I would have dearly liked; and 4) my inheritance – because Laurie wanted to adopt me, and leave his business to me. (All Ma got when he died was an annuity of £6 a week: Laurie didn't anticipate the dreadful inflation that came much later.)

The enormity of that loss never dawned on me at the time. My mother stopped her weekly 25-shilling payments - which covered the rent exactly. Every Saturday morning when the registered envelope had arrived from her bank, I would take the contents with the rent book to our landlord, two doors up. One evening of that first term of my fifth year, my Scoutmaster came to see me. He'd been asked by Mrs P to explain how difficult it was for her to keep me without any money, and now that I was 14 I really ought to start work. Evidently she didn't want to have to tell me herself. After all, she pointed out, Derek had gone out to work at 14 (legally, from the Elementary School) so why shouldn't I (even though I'd got a scholarship, and was legally obliged to stay at school till 18)? Maybe she was also jealous of my success.

That Christmas I did a postal round, cycling down to the sorting office at crack of dawn. At 14 that just wouldn't happen today. I enjoyed the camaraderie as we sorted the huge pile of cards, letters and packages, but the long walks were wearisome. In those days we did a final delivery on Christmas Day, and twice that morning I was asked in for a drink and a mince pie!

As a result I was able to give Mrs P a princely five pounds, which covered a month's keep. I know I was sad to be leaving school; in particular I was doing well in English, and when it came to returning the schoolbooks I'd brought home to study over the Christmas holidays I guiltily kept back Oliphant's *Matriculation English Course*, hoping they wouldn't notice it was missing.

After New Year I went down nervously to the Labour Exchange in Sutton and said I wanted to be a commercial artist.

'What training do you have?'

Well, none; we didn't even have paint in the art class, only pencils. 'But I'd like to work in an advertising agency.' (I knew the lingo from Uncle Laurie.) The man drew out a folder from a filing cabinet and rang a number. In the course of his enquiry he used the initials 'VGT' to describe me. I like to think that meant 'Very good type' but maybe that's just wishful thinking. But I secured an interview, put on my best jacket and trousers, and got the job as a 'routing boy'. I started on 11 January 1945 (whilst we were still at war) at J Walter Thompson, in Berkeley Square, London, established 1896 in New York - the best ad agency in the world at that time.

7

The World of Work

A 'ROUTING BOY' had to take the proofs, layouts and artwork around the various departments for their correction and approval. The rubber stamp of the signature box read: *proof reader, typographer, copywriter, art director, group head, legal dept., account executive* – and return to *production controller.* There were three of us boys, but I got a reputation for being the fastest. We served about eight production controllers, who all had urgent layouts and proofs at times. Being young and cheeky, instead of just putting the proofs in their inbox I would say how sorry I was to interrupt them, etc, and cajole their co-operation to look at them while I waited.

But the job gave me a wonderful overview of how the agency worked. I was especially intrigued by the typographers (who nicknamed me 'Blitz'), headed by T. Wilson Philip, president of the British Typographical Guild. He marked up the type specifications in beautiful handwriting (and I can still copy his signature). The copywriters were not always so easy to wheedle.

I would dawdle in the art directors' room, watching how they worked. I knew that's what I wanted to be. They were the ones who, after the creative meetings, would draft out the ideas in pencil layouts for clients to consider. In those days ads were in black and white. Colour only came in later, with *Woman* and *Woman's Own* magazines printed by gravure. Paper was rationed; the largest circulation *Daily Express,* at four million, was just one sheet of paper folded to

four pages. The maximum space the media department could usually buy was a 3½-inch double column, into which had to be fitted the headline, copy, illustration and logo. A work of art, where every single word counted. The largest circulation magazine in those days was the *Radio Times,* at eight million, and the biggest space we could get was a 5-inch single column.

Just four months after I started work came VE-Day – 8th May 1945. I squeezed my way to Piccadilly Circus to celebrate; the crowds roared their delight, and the flashing neon lights lit up the scene for the first time for five long years. I was just 15, and on my way home in the crowded, chattering Tube a young man got talking to me in the excitement of the event. I was flattered by his attention, and when he asked if I'd like to meet him the following evening I thought OK, and asked what we would do. He said, 'Oh, go to the cinema or something.' When I mentioned this at home, Mrs P's lip curled up in distaste and somehow I sensed it was wrong. I had no idea why; I wanted to go, as he seemed such a nice chap, and friendship was in short supply. But I didn't show up. It wasn't till years later that I understood.

I decided to study for the diploma of the Advertising Association. But as I had missed my School Certificate/ Matriculation exams at school, I first needed to gain the Preliminary Examination of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries as a substitute. Oh, it was such a drag, going four nights a week to the Regent Street Polytechnic to study English, maths, French and history. There wasn't much to eat between work and classes; I remember falling for a watery chocolate ice cream at ninepence from a barrow in Oxford Street. Keeping awake in class was a problem; they were long days, getting home about 10 pm for my supper simmering on the stove.

I passed, but later I chose to concentrate on classes in lettering and typographic design at the London School of

Printing and Graphic Arts, at Bolt Court in Fleet Street. I became fascinated with type and layout; I would wallow in the type specimen books that type-foundries like Monotype produced, comparing the hundreds of different fonts that were available even in those days. I seemed to have a good visual memory, and got great satisfaction at identifying typefaces in newspaper adverts and magazines. A new book was advertised – rare in those days: *Printing, Design & Layout,* by Vincent Steer, at thirty-two shillings, which I bought on hire purchase, sending off monthly postal orders of 2/6d.

London offered a rich choice of classes: I also did life drawing at Chelsea, and calligraphy at the Central School of Arts & Crafts, where Edward Johnston had first taught calligraphy in 1899. Eric Gill had been one of his first pupils.

I got £2 a week to start with; 25 shillings went to pay for my keep, and two shillings and sixpence (2/6d) for National Insurance. Fares were 3d on the bus and 8d each way on the Underground - almost ten shillings a week, and 6d for my Saturday evening youth club – my entire social life at the time. That left 2/6d to buy five lunches… Well, that would pay for just two, so I turned to crime! I devised several ways to cheat London Transport. I would tuck an old bus ticket in my book and sit up at the front of the bus on an inside seat and hope the conductor would assume I'd paid; if he didn't, I'd feign surprise and pay up. At Morden tube station, being small and rather skinny, I pretended I was under 14 and bought half fares for a year or so. I won't go into the other methods I used, but it did mean I could sometimes afford to go to the British Restaurant – a Government idea to feed workers in the war - for a tenpenny main meal and fourpenny pudding. For variety I'd go to the Lyons teashop in Albemarle Street for a vegetable hotpot for ninepence and a steamed sponge and custard for fourpence-halfpenny. Later, when my wages increased, I'd occasionally treat myself to a salad at the Lyons Corner House at Marble Arch – a veritable

feast for 2/6d, where you could help yourself to as much as you could pile on the rather small plate.

In 1946 bread was rationed for the first time. But many people didn't use all their 'bread units', and I went round the office asking for any spares. With them I went over to the baker in Mount Street in the lunch hour and bought 24 penny buns, nipped across to the classy grocer and bought a ninepenny carton of Fry's chocolate spread (very scarce), came back and cut a slice in each bun and inserted some chocolate, then took a tray around the secretaries and sold them for tuppence each. That way I made enough to buy lunch next day.

One day I decided to cycle up to London. That saved nearly two shillings; it was 16 miles, and on the first morning I arrived at the office elated by my achievement, and full of fresh air, in contrast to the stuffy Tube (there was little traffic in those days). My main worry was to avoid my wheels getting trapped in the tramlines. It took an hour going, but an extra quarter of an hour returning, tired from the day.

I got promoted to the Art Files department, where all the artwork was stored, to be readily available when it was needed again. It was fun looking back at old pre-war campaigns: Horlicks ads with strip cartoons ending with the doctor saying, 'You've got night starvation – I recommend Horlicks.' And for a chocolate ad, a part of a letter ending, '...and then he produced a box of Black Magic!' Then there were the photographs of the film stars who used Lux Toilet Soap, and beautiful, titled women who testified to Pond's face creams and powders. These prints, often by Shaw Wildman, cost a fortune - especially later when they were hand-coloured before the advent of colour photography.

When I was 17 I was delighted to be chosen as an assistant controller, working under Mike Ambler, handling over a dozen accounts, including Rediffusion, Bradford Dyers Asso-

ciation, and Carter's Little Liver Pills. Our job was to turn the copy, layouts and artwork into printed proofs – dealing with typesetters, blockmakers and engravers. Then, when the ads were finally approved, adaptations had to be made for all the differing column widths of the magazines, and national and local papers we used. Ordering the stereos and electros to be posted in time to meet their closing dates was a constant pressure, and URGENT was written everywhere.

* * *

During this period, at least, I had thrown myself into work with some enthusiasm and felt liberated by it. But I often wonder where my adolescence went. There was so little spare time, and even less spare cash to do anything much – except cycle. I had a map of the district, and everywhere I got to I'd colour in red, and that was my 'empire'; if I'd had a companion with me it would be striped to represent only 'mandated territory'. After I left the Scouts I kept up a friendship with one of them, Brian, and I'd call on him in Ewell to see if he'd come out. One fine day we cycled south, on and on, till to our amazement we finally reached Brighton and collapsed on the beach with exhaustion. We were hungry, but had no money. It was the first time we'd seen the sea, just after the war, and the barbed wire (to deter invading Germans) had been removed. Getting back home was a painful drag; we had to rest frequently by the roadside. When I announced where I'd been I expected a gasp of unbelief, but no – not much interest at all.

Another time, on a Bank Holiday, we were returning up Handcross Hill towards Crawley, cycling two abreast, when a small overcrowded Standard saloon car clipped my handlebars and I went crashing into Brian and we fell in a heap. I stood up and shook my fist at the receding vehicle, yelling 'You bloody fool!' Fortunately a coach following saw what happened, speeded up and somehow forced the car to stop. Right opposite, a group of Rover Scouts had also seen what

happened, and one came over and took down details from both parties; he was training as a solicitor, apparently. Brian's bike was buckled, and we had to walk to a B&B overnight. Thanks to this fine Scout, and Brian's father, and the coach driver, compensation was paid.

Rows at home continued as a regular occurrence. What they were about eludes my memory. It seemed like everything I did was wrong. Sometimes I'd wish I'd never been born – it seemed so hopeless. I now had no mother to talk to, though that hardly made much difference. We hardly ever had anyone come to visit; Mrs P didn't seem to have any friends – nobody ever dropped in. Derek went out to his friends. I could never bring a friend home..

After several threats that I should 'clear out' I searched for digs in London, and found a dingy room in Islington (long before it became fashionable). It was fourteen shillings a week, but just before I moved in Mrs P relented and said I could stay. This threat repeated itself; insecurity became a habit. I spent less and less time at home, and more at evening classes. Weekends were the problem; after doing the Saturday shopping I'd go down to the youth club in the evening, play table tennis, and later joined the drama group. Our producer had a friend, Herbert Lom, the actor, and they persuaded us to stage Bernard Shaw's *St Joan,* a very ambitious project for ones so young. I was typecast as the Dauphin, a whingeing wimp; at the Old Vic in London the play was on with Celia Johnson as Joan, John Clements as Dunois, and Alec Guinness as the Dauphin. I paid my sixpence to stand in the Gallery three times, and shamelessly mimicked Guinness for my part!

There was competition for girlfriends, but I had little interest in the hunt. One bespectacled girl, towards the bottom of the 'league', seemed to attach herself to me, and we went out on half-hearted jaunts. I certainly lacked confidence – and couldn't believe a girl would really be interested in me.

At the youth club we decided to have a magazine, and I was appointed editor. Now I had a role, a status. We held a competition for the title, and Mrs P won – with *Chinwag,* and got 2/6d prize money! In my lunch-hours at work I would sit and type onto wax-covered stencils, in two columns, sometimes three, and draw in headlines and illustrations using a silk-covered plate and a stencil pen. But my numerous typing errors required extensive application of the red correcting fluid, making my stencils look as if they had measles! Then I conned the lovely lady who operated the office Gestetner duplicating machine into running off my stencils, paying for the paper but not her time. The greatest joy was finally collating and stapling the copies to take down to the club.

I was keen to sell advertising space to help pay for the production, and approached a local grocer, a furniture shop, and a photographer. They all agreed to take a half page for half a guinea each, and I had great fun de-

signing their ads. The first issue sold for 4d, but we were able to reduce the price to 3d subsequently as circulation and ad revenue increased. It was the beginning of my love of publishing.

I had now reached 18, and awaited my calling-up papers to do my National Service. Mrs P had told me I could avoid the call-up by claiming US citizenship, but I was determined to go. It was a good way to leave home at last. Besides, I wanted to emulate Derek, who'd now become a sergeant in the RAF. I was on holiday on a farm at Chipping Norton, 'lending a hand on the land' when the telegram arrived telling me to report to RAF Warrington, in Cheshire. Stepping out of the train there, the familiar smell of Persil assailed my nostrils. That's where this precious powder was manufactured!

8

The RAF and Spiritual Stirrings

FROM Warrington I was posted on to RAF Wilmslow, not far away, to do my basic training. Joining the RAF was liberating. Meeting up with so many chaps of my own age – well, it was like a substitute university for me. Except that in place of lectures we had square-bashing - learning to march and handle our rifles: eight weeks of exposure to the harsh and sometimes sadistic attentions of our drill instructors.

As I stand rigidly to attention on the parade ground, the corporal inspecting us stops in front of me, his face very close to mine.

'You 'orrible shower – what are you?'

'Horrible shower, corporal.' (It didn't do much for my already low self-esteem)

'Am I hurtin' you?'

'No, corporal.'

'Well, I should be – I'm standin' on your ruddy hair. Get it cut!'

Wilmslow had a cinema called the Rex, run by a woman – unusual in those days, and it was the most comfortable I've ever been in, plus you could book seats in advance. We got 14 shillings a week, which was princely for me; I didn't smoke or drink, so for the first time could afford to go to the pictures regularly.

Just before our passing-out parade we had to choose a trade that we *might* be given; there were two grades, A and C – and A was better paid. But to my great surprise, I was

offered the chance to be an Education sergeant – teaching recruits basic English and maths, I believe. I never found out what was really involved as I turned it down. They didn't seem to realise the fragility of my educational qualification, taken after evening classes as a substitute for School Certificate (O levels), and I thought I'd feel a fraud; nor could I see myself surviving in the boisterous atmosphere of the Sergeants' Mess, much as I would have loved three stripes on my arm, and the money to go with it!

So I chose A-grade cartographic draughtsman, and twelve of us went to Medmenham, in Berkshire, for trade-testing. Whilst we waited, news came that the trade had been civilianised, and we were down-graded to C-grade. Six were then posted to the Canal Zone in Egypt, but I wasn't one of them, to my disappointment. When one of them heard the news, he burst into tears. 'I don't want to leave my Mum,' he cried.

I ripped down to the Orderly Room and asked the corporal on duty if I could take his place. Not so much for his sake but for my desire to get abroad, and away from having to spend my leaves at home.

'No, mate, it can't be altered.'

'But he's very upset.'

'Can't help that.'

'But his mother's very ill,' I lied.

'Oh…well, hold on.'

And so I got to the land of the sun! On the SS Devonshire there was a library, and after the gut-wrenching sickness of the Bay of Biscay in February, I was able to read in the calm waters of the Med – a delicious leisure I'd never experienced before. (Incidentally, some fifteen years later I took a National Trust cruise around the Isles of Scotland on the SS Devonia, and on going down to our cabins I recognised the smell immediately – it was the same boat - refitted!)

Jerome K Jerome's *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*

prompted me to follow Robert Louis Stevenson's advice to always carry two books with you: one to read from, and one to write in. Thus began my habit of keeping a journal.

Howard Spring wrote: *I rely very much on what Mr Somerset Maugham has called 'the amiable and useful little imp that dwells in your fountain pen and does for you all your best writing'.* I really enjoyed expressing my thoughts on paper, and there were so many new experiences to record.

On stepping out onto Egyptian soil at Port Said, with our kitbags heavy on our shoulders, we were met by a welcoming host of women and children waving fronds and offering sweets. But when I sat down to write, my fountain pen, with or without its imp, had disappeared from my breast pocket. And even watches had similarly vanished from others' wrists. I felt very annoyed.

At our billet we found a bullet hole in the door. 'That happened last week, mate,' we rookies were warned. The regulars (chaps who'd signed on voluntarily) liked to scare us. 'Get yer knees brown,' we were constantly taunted, as newcomers to the sun. They were definitely superior to us

With 'best mates' Carl Pearson & Alan Howling

national servicemen, and were in the majority, but seemed greyer, less resilient, and more cynical. We six who'd been posted together were scattered in different billets, but we met at meals. But there were three who I didn't get on with. One in particular – even the way he held his knife and fork, his hair, his walk – all got on my nerves. But one day I was reading an old *Daily Express* and at the bottom of the editorial was a thought for the day: *Allow a person three faults, and then start from there.* That was a revelation: that one should tolerate imperfection, and actually enjoy people, instead of focusing on their faults.

It was a jammy life. In summer we worked from 6am to 1pm; the rest of the day was our own, to sunbathe and swim in the Great Bitter Lake or play tennis, or just lounge on the beds in our billet and burrow in books I managed to accumulate on the tiny shelf in my bedspace. It was sheer joy to have time to read, and I made copious notes in my journal as my mind began to expand in that land of sand – the awakening of an intellect that had been suppressed, an opportunity to think for myself. The Education section – a magnet for me - had an Information Room with magazines and books. *John Bull, Reader's Digest* and the daily papers were all grist for my rapacious mill.

Buried in the sand

I used to say I'd swum from Africa to Asia - swimming across the Suez Canal, avoiding the steamers. We soon got sunburnt, then brown. And at the Malcolm Club by the shore I heard my first classical music, Dvořák's *New World Sym-*

phony, explained to me by a knowledgeable comrade – the slow movement has been my favourite ever since.

We enjoyed our periods of leave immensely; first a week at a 'holiday camp' in Port Said (where I taught three chaps to swim in one afternoon!). Later a group of us went to Cairo and toured the Pyramids, and admired the tomb of Tutankhamen. A corporal, agile and adventurous, chose to climb the outside of a pyramid. Back in camp, he fell ill with polio, and a week later he was dead. We heard that there was curse upon anyone climbing the outside . . .

Another leave took me and a friend to Malta for a fortnight. One abiding memory was how even the bottled fruit drinks tasted salt; in 1949 water was still scarce there.

Three of us were able to take a leave all the way down to Luxor, on the Nile, where the great temples and tombs offered huge vistas of ancient history. The thirteen hour train journey from Cairo led us to the Savoy Hotel, and unaccustomed luxury—arranged by the YMCA. My little camera was in constant use, recording this once-in-a-lifetime experience, but my head just couldn't take in the vast amount of history before us.

Our hotel in Luxor

At the end of the week we were broke, and greatly embarrassed as we exited the hotel through a double line of waiters and staff all expecting baksheesh. On the train back we survived on a pomegranate each . . .

My notebook reveals how busy I was at 19 forming my

life views and opinions. On marriage I asked myself what I would look for in myself and my partner:

At Luxor, gazing in awe

> *Easier to say what we'd want in the other person than ourselves. Deep, sincere love; sincere Christian convictions and beliefs. A clean bill of health... common or overlapping interests, and upbringing more or less the same. In a woman – attractiveness, good cook, able housekeeper and know how to handle money. Husband's means and prospects very important. Agree to differ if necessary on political views. Finally trust each other implicitly.*

J B Priestley in *Home is Tomorrow* summed up my secret rosy ambition:

> *To acquire a few exquisite choice things – to retire with these things into some green and sunny place, far away from the squalor of industry and the sordid cares of business – then occasionally to show these beautiful things to a few well-chosen friends – well, that seems to me as much happiness as a man can expect in this world.*

Interestingly, no mention of relationships as a source of happiness…

We were part of JAPIC (ME) – Joint Air Photographic Intelligence Corps - and our squadron of Mosquitos took aerial photos of the whole of the Middle East. Our job was to lay these photos out in overlapping pairs on our long cork

tables, pin them down and plot them on maps provided. The officers would then examine some of the pairs of photos with stereoscopic glasses to determine the height of buildings, the depth of docks or the capacity of oil tanks, etc; then we filed them for future reference.

I sat opposite Carl Pearson, a commercial artist from Leicester. But because I was good at lettering, somehow I got asked to produce posters for the NAAFI dances and the camp cinema each week. It was wonderful, splashing about with colour, creating designs. One Friday the Education Officer asked for six posters by Saturday morning for a big dance that night – but that seemed an impossible request. Then John Jones, the person whom I greatly disliked, wandered over to my desk.

'Can I help?' he asked. I was amazed, but felt I couldn't refuse. He organised Carl and four others into an assembly line, and we delivered on time! John wasn't such a bad fellow after all…

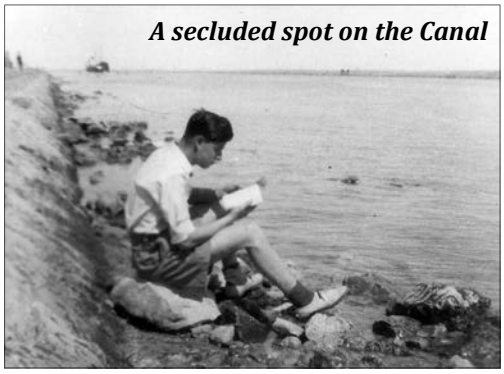
John was C. of E. and introduced me to his padre, Wing Commander Cecil King. I learned of his commitment to Moral Rearmament – something entirely new to my ears - and its emphasis on four absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and seeking the guidance of God in one's daily life. But I didn't do a lot about it at the time, except for reading some of the magazines he gave me.

But clearly things were stirring in my soul. I actually wrote about my Christian convictions to Mrs P (who I addressed as Mother in those days):

> *There is one person who first to put trust in, and that's our Lord. Knowing him brings me the greatest gladness – it makes me sweet-tempered, a better friend and social acquaintance, and thoughtful about others… I derive my energy from him; I get a zeal to better myself. And to have people say 'God must be wonderful'*

when they observe how I live… But how far from that ideal I am, and we all are. But that's where the Church comes in. I can go and get a reviver there, and a fresh resolve to try harder and be more selfless.

I'm surprised now at my fervour then, fed by Sunday evening visits to church services at RAF Fayid, seven miles south of our camp.



A secluded spot on the Canal

I began to get anxious as to what job to get on demob. Idealism was clashing with reality, pie-in-the-sky with down-to-earth. Getting so near to demob I was in a quandary. I decided to write to Derek for advice:

I was panicking to think of a decent job, with three weeks left in the RAF – and with all kinds of aspirations far above my abilities or qualifications. Well, I went and had a talk with the Education Sergeant, and briefly he told me to come down out of the clouds and get an adult mind. In his opinion, the best thing I could do was to stay in advertising and slog away… it would be a serious step to change careers at 20. Use what experience I've gained, and carry on from there, continuing with my correspondence course. Swot to get the Diploma of the Advertising Association in lieu of any college training. In any case, he said, there are no grants I could have: business executive grants for regulars only, teachers' grants only if I held the School Certificate (my Prelim wouldn't count) and there's a long waiting list for

agricultural colleges. 'Get out of that adolescent idealism,' he said, 'and face hard facts.'

I can't find any record of Derek's reply; maybe he never received the letter.

It was February 1950, with about a month before my demob, and I was contemplating signing on for another six months – it was so good in Egypt, and I could delay having to decide about my career. But then a telegram came from RAF UK: *'Mother dangerously ill. Please return.'* That was Mrs P, of course, not my real mother, but the authorities didn't know. I couldn't think what was wrong – perhaps a heart attack. I was quite worried, but not panicking. They say 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' and it may have been true for both of us, because her occasional letters were warm, and I wrote back quite voluminously and frequently about what I was doing and thinking.

I consulted Padre King, and he prayed for me and Mrs P as I awaited permission to fly home. Finally I was granted early demobilisation rather than compassionate leave. Suddenly I was uprooted from the comfy life I was leading. I had to pack up my books and belongings and leave my beloved bedspace, saying a hurried farewell to my friends. I was told to take the train to Cairo and travel in civvies, as we weren't allowed to wear uniforms outside our camps. That last night I toured the shops searching for presents, using up my remaining few piastres. Next morning I boarded a BOAC Stratocruiser bound for Britain, anxious as to what I would find on arrival at home.

Perhaps I should have known that, as so often before, Mrs P had sabotaged my bid for independence.

9

Demob, Despondence and MRA

I LANDED in horrible February rain and cold, and got home to find that Mrs P had merely hurt her knee and was in bed. Whilst I'd been in Egypt she had moved from the bungalow and set up home in Sutton in a three storey semi-detached house, taking in three elderly ladies to look after. They all shared one room on the ground floor, and because there was no bedroom for me, I slept that first night in the hallway.

She and Derek had had a blazing row and he was *persona non grata,* and had moved out, so she only had Monya to help run the new rest home. She had conned the SSAFA lady (Soldiers, Sailors & Air Force Association) into asking for my return.

The honeymoon didn't last long; within five days I was having to eat my meals in the garage. It was so difficult to please her, and God knows I tried hard, with my new resolution and fragile faith. And I was mortified to find out that my letters hadn't made much impression. 'Oh,' she said, 'I usually read the first bit to make sure you were all right, then I put them in a drawer.'

A fortnight after my return I wrote in my diary:

> *I'm fed up, despondent and angry… Since the first bang, crash, or whatever it was last Saturday I think, though damned if I can recollect what it was caused by) I have been trying very hard to behave thoroughly decently here at home. I couldn't possibly have done it*

without God's help. It's been an uphill job that has included, though, many gratifying, happy moments when I felt I was really succeeding in my New Way.

But tonight, after another day (the second) 'out of the house' I feel I've come to a temporary end of my tether. It's about time I showed a bit of bloody spirit! Mother's had her own way with me entirely since I got back. She's been ill, and I'm afraid she still is, and I've tried to cooperate with her, but I seem to have made an unfavourable impression – and I'm treated with contempt and intolerance again. I'm fed up because I've failed to bring the fresh happiness to Mother that I'd planned; I'm despondent because I can't see any improvement likely in the near future, and I'm angry because I don't think Mother is being fair to me.

I don't recall ever really saying what I felt to her, or successfully challenging her. I needed to learn that appeasement only breeds dictatorship. It was a crushing disappointment, and I wished I'd stayed on in the RAF. I felt alone, unwanted, useless and rudderless.

But there was still the necessity of finding a job. I had pondered long and hard whilst in Egypt on what career to follow, whether to stay in advertising or break away. I'd read Shakespeare's advice in *The Taming of the Shrew: 'No profit grows where is no pleasure taken; In brief, sir, study what you most affect.'* I took that to mean do something you actually enjoy – not easy. My main concern was to follow a career likely to pay well enough to give me what I most desired – a handsome home.

But in the end I decided to follow J B Priestley's advice: 'Stick to your last' (*last: a shoemaker's model for making or repairing a shoe or boot*) and remain in advertising. But I just didn't fancy returning to the production department of JWT again, even though they were legally obliged to give me my job back; I was keen to see if I could be a layout artist/

typographer. One of the controllers, Bill Phillips, had left JWT to join Grant Advertising as their Production Manager. He'd wanted a photographer, and I had earlier been able to put him in touch with Derek, who then returned the compliment by getting Bill to arrange an interview for me with the art director at Grant's.

> *Tuesday 9th May 1950: Today is Victory Day, for I've got a job at Grant's! And I know it's going to be difficult to hold it down – I only hope I've taken the right step in going into this type of work again. However, now I won't have a guilty feeling every time I go out for a show, etc…*

A week later I recorded:

> *Grants seems a pleasant enough firm to work for, and indeed I'm lucky in getting the opportunity… for my talents are strictly limited. I wonder about the future. I've not yet settled on a definite ambition; it should be as art director but deep down I honestly don't think I've got it in me.*

Oh dear. 'Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.' (Shakespeare again – *Julius Caesar*)

Nevertheless, I was soon making adaptations of press ads in differing sizes , using a *camera lucida*, which projected the image of the artwork onto a ground glass screen so I could trace its outline, thus giving the blockmakers the actual size needed. I started at £350 a year, quite a leap up from the £104 I'd started on in 1945. My fellow layout artist was Rikki, a laid-back, rather cynical young man who'd fought in Spain against Franco; we had many discussions as we pondered over our layout pads. I'd taken up smoking, having been given a shiny leather cigarette case by Derek. As I puffed reflectively, I hoped it impressed the girls as they typed, but to no avail…

* * *

I'd been home from the RAF about six months when I received a buff envelope from the Ministry of Labour & National Service saying, 'The enclosed letter has been received in this Ministry with a request that it be forwarded on to you.' It was from my mother! Written on Holman-Advertising notepaper, it read:

My dear André,

As I have had no reply to the letters sent to Mrs P, nor received any acknowledgment of the last gift of £5 sent to you, and Messrs J Walter Thompson are unable to give your address, I have been forced to act without consulting you.

As you know, the ownership of the Laurence Holman Advertising Service passed into my hands on the death of my husband. It was my wish that it be passed to you in order that you might derive some benefit therefrom. All my communications to you have been ignored and therefore in these circumstances I have sold the business.

I should like to see you in regard to other matters concerning finance as you will be twenty-one next year. Should you at any time be passing through London, would you telephone me?

I hope you have had an interesting time in the Forces and I wish you all the luck that you deserve.

Gwendoline Holman

I have no memory of this letter arriving. Nor, strangely, of any of the earlier 'communications' that my mother referred to. Did Mrs P hide them from me? I don't know. But in fact I have only just discovered this letter, and two others, in a box marked 'Archives' which I must have hauled with me over the years, and which only now at 80 have I properly opened and explored, specifically for this book. It contains old pho-

tos, Scout camp log books, youth club magazines, posters and programmes I'd designed, essays from college, and numerous letters from RAF friends and others after my demob, etc. I also found two letters from a solicitor, dated three months after my mother's above, asking if I would contact them:

> *We act for your Mother… there is a small sum of money due to you on your 21st birthday… and your mother is desirous of making certain arrangements in regard to her affairs… we shall be glad if you will kindly get in touch…*

I replied twice that I did not wish to claim the money (yet I could certainly have done with it!), 'and also hereby state that I have no desire to participate in any way in the financial or personal affairs of my mother, Mrs G K Holman.'

I am astonished and mortified to see how hard-hearted I was. Apparently I never responded to my mother's letter at all. She'd obviously tried every way to locate me; how she must have ached at not being able to reach me. She was now alone, without Laurie; I had read about his death in *Advertiser's Weekly,* but with no sense of compassion for her. Very odd, that I could have wiped her so completely from my life. And I don't think I talked about it to Mrs P or anyone else…

* * *

With my new-found interest in religion from my time in Egypt I tried visiting local churches – six in all, but none seemed interested in me; no welcome or conversation that I can recall. Then one day a letter came with an invitation to a Moral Re-Armament meeting in Cheam Village Hall, near Sutton. I went along, and at the end of the meeting the chap next to me said his name was John Bevis, and asked what was mine. After a chat he introduced me to the chairman, a wing-commander in the RAF. I felt awed - conversing man-to-man with an officer on the state of the world!

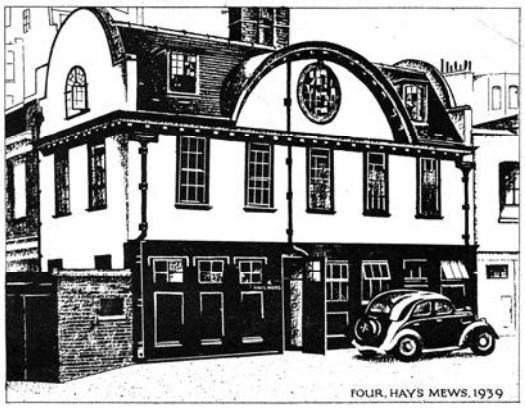
Andrew Combe

It turned out he lived in the very next road to mine, and he invited me later to his home to meet the family. His name was Andrew Combe. He was a friend of Cecil King's, and worked at the Air Ministry in London. He told me a lot more about the ideas behind MRA, which quite appealed to me. My stint in Egypt had broadened my horizons, and I recall that my first impression on arriving back was thinking that the headlines in my favourite *Daily Express* seemed so parochial – they didn't reflect the world view I was now beginning to form. I remember visiting the parents of my friend Trevor, who was then serving at RAF Changi in Malaya. I looked at their suburban lifestyle and thought, 'Is that all they live for?' I couldn't bear the thought of becoming like them, with just a garden and an annual holiday to occupy them.

So I was ripe for finding a purpose in life – and that's what MRA offered. I 'would argue the hind leg off a donkey' (as Mrs P used to chide me) with Andrew, as I wrestled with my doubts and reservations about the philosophy he was propounding. But the books he lent me were persuasive; especially one called *Escape to Live,* by a friend of his in the Air Force, Edward Howell. This was his story of being shot down over Crete, of being injured and taken prisoner, then miraculously escaping from the prison hospital and finally getting back to Britain. His reliance on 'guidance' from God seemed so real, I thought I must try it myself. Andrew said, 'If God gave us two ears and one mouth, why don't we listen twice as much as we talk? Take time each morning to pray – and listen - and then jot down any thoughts in a notebook…'

Later, as I got into the practice of having an early morning time of quiet, I would then go round to Andrew's home to share my thoughts and have breakfast, before taking the train to London. A joyous start to the day in such a warm family atmosphere, and often with guests staying with them in their large house. I got invited to parties, and made several new friends.

I discovered that the MRA headquarters were at 45 Berkeley Square, Clive House, just yards from where I had previously worked at JWT. Now, in Grosvenor Street, I was just two streets away. I recall being introduced to a small gathering, and pulling out my leather cigarette case and offering it around – but no takers. Only later did I discover that people working with MRA didn't waste money on tobacco or drink. Behind Clive House was no. 4 Hays Mews,



where books and publications were stored, sold and despatched. I was soon enlisted to help pack books, and to go to meetings in town halls and sell books, to pass the message of 'change' on. They had a chorus that sang inspiring songs, and I was invited to join them - a great new group of friends of both sexes. Later I met some interesting people at Clive House, amongst whom were MPs and Arthur Baker, chairman of the parliamentary press gallery. Going into work afterwards I was full of revolutionary thoughts, which sometimes made it hard to concentrate on just trying to sell cigarettes, Calor Gas or Rediffusion.

Whilst in the RAF I'd kept up a desultory correspondence with the girl from my youth club, Mary. Back home, we met up a few times, and one evening I took her home on the last bus to Tooting and struggled back to Sutton at midnight. I *still* wasn't trusted with a key, and I dreaded knocking Mrs P up out of bed. Sure enough, when she finally opened the door, she exclaimed, 'What time do you call this? You're not making a convenience of this place!' and shut the door in my face.

I wandered around the streets of Sutton looking for a hotel, and luckily found one with a light still on; they gave me a caravan in the garden. Next morning I went round to the Combes and told them I was off to London to find digs. 'Oh, why don't you stay here while you search?' I had twelve most comfortable days there. One evening I was gazing into the fire, pondering on the break with Mrs P. Andrew had said that in a dispute it's easier for the one who's perhaps even only 10% in the wrong to apologise than for the other one to say sorry. It was as if I saw a Cross in that fire: I had to cross out my self-will, and put things right with her. Next day I plucked up courage and went round to see her; she let me in and I told her I was sorry for taking her for granted. She responded well, and even offered to have me back, but this time I stood my ground and told her I'd found digs with a friend in London, who was our chorus master. He lived in Maida Vale with his mother. So began my London life. I discovered that Derek was also living nearby; we met up one day - as refugees from Mrs P's household.

Derek gave me this portrait for my 21st birthday

I'd been at Grant Advertising for 18 months when one day John Bevis took me out to lunch. 'There's going to be a six-month tour of the MRA play *The Forgotten Factor* around the industrial cities of Britain – and the Chorus is travelling with it. Would you like to join it?' The play was a drama about the conflict between management and labour, centring on the families of both the boss and the trade union leader. At that time, 1952, Britain was in the grip of much industrial strife.

'Let me think about it,' I replied. I had just over a fortnight before they departed. This was an extraordinary opportunity, perhaps, to learn more and actually do something practical that might benefit the country. Perhaps I didn't really want to spend the rest of my life trying to think of more ways of selling Gold Flake cigarettes and Palmolive Shampoo…

I handed in my notice next day!

I had just £5 of savings, and that went on a navy-blue suit at the Army & Navy stores in Victoria. After that, it was living on faith and prayer, because no one working with MRA was paid a salary. When Cecil King heard of my decision, he covenanted £5 a month to me; that kept me in toiletries and travel costs, whilst a group of women in Kent clubbed together to pay for the board and lodging of the whole chorus.

It was an amazing experience travelling with the cast and backstage crew. Our first stop was in Southsea, near Portsmouth; the theatre was on the pier, and I recall seeing the sea between the planks backstage! Next was South Wales, among the miners. Then up to Liverpool, where I stayed with a docker and his wife in their little 2-up, 2-down in Toxteth. Every morning the team would meet to plan the day; trade union leaders and local businessmen and councillors would join us, and big issues were raised, both locally and nationally. In 1952 the Korean War was still raging, and rationing didn't end till the following year. Our docks and mines

seemed under constant threat of strikes, and there was much unrest. The message of the play – that it's not *who's* right, but *what* is right - was badly needed, and much appreciated. Long after the performance ended each evening we would still be talking to members of the audience who wanted to know more. Then when we got back to digs found for us by the team who went ahead to do so, our hosts would often want to continue talking. Sleep was frequently short!

To travel with this amazing group of people was for me a bit like the university education I'd been denied. I lapped it up, though I did find the philosophy of trying to follow absolute moral standards difficult – or rather, of course, impossible - to attain. But I was told, 'If you don't aim at the bull's-eye, you probably won't even hit the target.' But I struggled with the total commitment that was expected; I still wanted to run parts of my life – perhaps not surprisingly reluctant to surrender total control, given how little had been in my control in my early years. It wasn't until we were in Glasgow, one night in a cold bedroom, that I finally gave in to what I believed to be right. I knelt down and surrendered all that I knew of myself to all that I knew of God. Then he seemed to say, 'You will have a life of iron discipline, yet deep contentment.' That promise I've held onto ever since, and it's true – when I'm disciplined, I am content; when I'm not, I'm discontented. It's a simple lesson that I still believe might apply to everyone, and make the difference between fulfilment or dissatisfaction in our lives.

10

Rediscovering my Mother

BACK IN London after the tour of *The Forgotten Factor* I was invited to work on publications. I was delighted to use my new-found skills in typography to design leaflets and booklets, and also to operate a small litho printing press. My mentor in this new enterprise was Ken Belden, who had worked with Frank Buchman, the initiator of MRA. He invited me to stay in the large home he ran with his wife Stella, just around the corner from Clive House.

The chorus continued to be in demand at meetings around the Home Counties, and rehearsals took up much time – new songs were composed for each town we'd visit. And in the home where I lived we had a constant flow of guests, and special meals arranged which I helped with. There was always so much to do, and late nights and early mornings began to tell.

When I got over-tired my Achilles' heel seemed to be getting laryngitis. After one particularly bad attack I was sent off to convalesce with a family in Hertfordshire. One morning, in my leisurely quiet time *after* breakfast, I was praying the Lord's Prayer, and got to the words '… as we forgive those who trespass against us'. Suddenly, out of the blue, I thought of my mother; it was nearly ten years since I'd broken with her. It dawned on me that I had never really forgiven her for having given me birth and then given me away; and for failing to provide me with a father – and for all the problems I'd had to put up with as a result. In fact, I realised I had a great load of resentment towards her which had built up unawares. So, what was I going to do about it?

I knew it was wrong to hold a grudge against someone. It not only hurt that person and soured the relationship, but it also damaged me. What was I to do?

I would have to find my mother, after all this time – to try and put things right. The prospect filled me with fear, yet a tinge of elation. I ran into the kitchen to tell the lady who'd kindly given me hospitality during my convalescence about this revelation.

'I've just had this thought, about my real mother.'

'Oh yes, what's that?'

'Well…' and I explained how I'd had to cut off from her ten years earlier.

'So what do you think you ought to do?' she asked.

'I'll have to try and find her, I suppose, and apologise.'

She was reassuring, and felt it was indeed a message from the good Lord. Up till then, no one knew about my mother; they assumed she was Mrs P, as had the RAF. On my return to London I told Ken about this thought. He advised me to try and find her address and write her a letter. I was as nervous as a kitten. So I rang up Holman Advertising, where she had been ten years previously. The woman on the switchboard said, 'Oh, she's away in Majorca. Would you like her address?'

It took me a month and seven drafts of that letter before Ken and I felt it was right; then he said I'd better ring up and see if she was still away. 'No,' said the receptionist, 'she's here – would you like to speak to her?'

'Er…no, that's alright, thank you,' I spluttered, and put the phone down. Oh dear, now I would have to go and actually see her. Why had I procrastinated all that while? I felt sick to the stomach. I needed all the courage I could muster as I set out to walk unwillingly to Bedford Square. I knocked on the big door; it was opened by the receptionist, and behind her I saw the figure of my mother on the spiral staircase. She

swooped down and flung her arms around me. I was so surprised; I'd expected her to be surly and suspicious, saying, 'What have you come round for?' But no; I felt like the Prodigal Son returning - not to his father but his mother.

11 Bedford Square, painted by Stuart Munro

I can't remember what I said, or anything of the rest of the day – but that turned out to be the most creative act of my life. It led me back to my family and my roots. Gradually I got to know my mother again; but I was very stilted and uneasy. I suppose, looking back, I felt I couldn't really trust her yet. On her part she was most accepting, and anxious to make up for 'the years that the locust had eaten'. Laurence Holman had married her on the death of his first wife, but now she was alone.

She invited me to lunch at Bedford Square several times, and I remember meeting my younger cousin Stuart, the son of Douglas, my mother's younger brother, for the first time. As he walked in I saw with a jolt his resemblance to myself. He was the first of my relatives whom I met. On another occasion she introduced me to a Frenchman, André Savanier, who was a compositor. I wondered if he was my father, but somehow I couldn't bring myself to ask. I was far too diffident and fearful. Was it from him I inherited my love of typography?

This reunion with my mother took place shortly after the Queen's Coronation in June 1953. In September she invited me for a week's holiday on the Isle of Wight. Should I go? I was apprehensive about how we'd get on. But it went OK,

and I slowly grew more at ease in her presence. The hotel food was very good – too rich, and too much, but I ate it because I couldn't waste it, the result of a wartime upbringing. (Even today it feels like a sin to leave food on my plate.) I bitterly disappointed her by not joining her for a pre-breakfast dip in the sea; I just felt so heavy and slightly bilious. Later, when we were playing table tennis, a little girl watching us asked me, 'Is she your wife?' Ma dined out on that for a month!

In some notes she made during that holiday, that I've only just found, headed 'Quiet Time', she wrote:

> *André* (that's what she always called me) *always seems to have a deep sense of guilt – why?... Uppermost in my mind is what line shall I take when I get back? In a way I should have liked to have taken the flat to take care of André – that would have been a delightful job – belated indeed – nevertheless just as important for me. I wonder if it is as important to André ... There is no reason at all for André to be nervous with me... I do love having him with me... I can't understand how I stuck such years of being alone... I wish I hadn't taken nearly half a century to grow up.*

Next day:

> *I wish he didn't get so tired...he looked exhausted after ping-pong y'day... I simply don't know what to ask God for today – it comes to the same thing every day. I'd like to settle by the sea and have a little home with someone I love in it and maybe give some folk who are not well a lift up with good food and plenty of cheer. That's not a bad thing to do in life...*

None of this was I aware of; she didn't tell me her thoughts as far as I can remember (but I can't be sure). It was difficult to really talk to her, and say what I was feeling. I'm sure I seemed very closed up to her. The following day she wrote:

André and I haven't really disagreed or quarrelled – is it because we're so alike? Perhaps we ought to have a healthy quarrel… It would be nice to get married again and have André live with my husband and myself until he too gets married. Perhaps he won't marry at all – deep down he fears the tie of marriage like I did.

Last day:

We must devise some plan to stabilise André so that he isn't all drive and no confidence, but well balanced… the week has been free from petty irritations, certainly no great obstacles have barred us from each other. Has this week then been too smooth? I've certainly not sought to hide or evade any issue. It's just been a simple week of happiness…

Looking back I realise I wasn't up for confrontation; I couldn't risk saying what I really felt. A quarrel – a row – was anathema, it could lead to annihilation. That was my experience throughout childhood, living with Mrs P. So I was evidently mealy-mouthed, and dishonest, really. So much I could have asked her, but didn't dare, I suppose. And I just didn't recognise how much she cared for me. At the time I did feel somewhat overpowered by her, smothered almost. She had the initiative, and later I was always tacking away, avoiding or delaying further meetings with her. She got exasperated by my indecision, because I always felt I had to consult my friends before committing myself to an appointment.

Two days later, she was still trying quiet times, and wrote: *I need to see André every day almost – how to achieve this? – go to work in Berkeley Sq kitchen. Ask him tonight.*

And that's how she came to meet Ken's wife Stella, who made her welcome in her kitchen, and tried to answer the many questions my mother had, being rather mystified by my attachment to MRA, and wanting to know more. But she didn't stay long.

* * *

One day I had the thought 'to go back into business'. I shared it with Ken, somewhat reluctantly, as I realised I would be stepping out of a fellowship that had been so supportive. But he encouraged me, and with his help a couple of weeks later I got the offer of a job with the publisher Blandford Press, in High Holborn. It seemed tailor-made - mornings with the book department, designing their publicity, and afternoons with the magazines, serving the advertising managers of the six trade journals they published for hotel and catering, children's clothing, the travel trade and window display. In effect I was a one-man advertising agency, designing ads for clients too small to hire an agency themselves. I loved it, and enjoyed the autonomy.

The book department consisted simply of Terence Goldsmith and his secretary. Terry was editor and production manager all in one, working under the chairman, Richard Harman, who'd met Frank Buchman and was determined to make his company available to publish books that would further MRA's aims and beliefs, in addition to a small general list of non-fiction. I got to design the leaflets, catalogues and press ads, and help with the book jackets. A great opportunity, which I absolutely relished.

'Letraset' had just been invented, and I would use it for headlines, rubbing down the individual letters from the silk screen, transferring them on to paper. I could combine them with my own script lettering, and litho printing gave me great freedom in design, instead of having to make blocks for letterpress.

Blandford published a variety of non-fiction books, on the countryside, gardening, biographies, and a crafts series, starting with Adrian Hill's *What shall we draw?* Terry took me on a visit to Adrian Hill in Laundry Cottage, near Midhurst, and he contributed half a dozen books to our list. The last was *The Beginner's Book of Oil Painting* which was in a

great muddle when we went to collect his MSS and all the pieces of artwork he'd done for it. It so happened that a mumps scare caused me to have to stay at home for a week's quarantine, so Terry gave me all the material and *carte blanche* to edit it for publication. I was able to lay it all out on the living room floor and really sort it out day after day, concentrating in a way that was impossible in the office. No interruptions; the result was a book that reprinted ten times, of which I was very proud.

But Terry sometimes got frustrated at my slow delivery. Mrs P used to say that 'procrastination was my middle name'. I wanted to get everything perfect. So work piled up in my in-tray. Terry used to travel up from Woking by train, and he'd arrive in the office with half a dozen letters handwritten for his secretary to type. A favourite ploy of his was to show me a letter to a printer saying, 'We enclose copy and layouts for the prelims of such-and-such book…' which meant I had to get them done by the 5 o'clock post that day. Nothing like a deadline to concentrate the mind!

'Perfectionitis' is a problem that has pursued me all my life. I would take so long preparing to get ready to start. I had to get things *right* – to avoid criticism, which I found crushing. Failure was to be dreaded; I felt I'd 'been wrong' for so much of my childhood that at all costs that possibility must be avoided.

I wanted to be the perfect father, to make up for the fathering I'd never had. So I had to find the perfect wife, and make the perfect marriage. It never happened – unsurprisingly! But also because I just didn't find myself attracted to girls in the normal way. My friendship with Mary ended when I faced the fact that I was only stringing her along, with no serious intent.

When I was 26 I spent my fortnight's annual holiday at Caux in Switzerland, MRA's world conference centre, high in the mountains above Montreux. This was established right

after the war as a meeting place to help bring healing and unity to the damaged nations of Europe. The theme of one session was 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy Cross I cling' – a line from a hymn - to help us surrender totally to the will of God, with no hold-back or cherished reservations.

Walking in the wonderful forest nearby with a friend I finally confessed that my cherished aim was to get married at 26 - which I considered the perfect age. Not that I had a particular girl in mind, but there were several lovelies in the chorus I could choose from! However, I felt strongly that I should sacrifice that aim and leave it at the foot of the Cross, and announced this decision at the early morning meeting next day. In retrospect, I don't think this helped. Later, I had a vivid dream: I was at a large reception in Clive House to celebrate my engagement. Standing amongst a group, about to introduce my fiancé to these friends, I looked around at the girls but couldn't for the life of me remember which one she was. I was in a panic – and woke up in a sweat! I was clearly in love with the *idea* of marriage, but not with any particular girl.

At the time I didn't realise that somehow I couldn't love – it just didn't happen, no matter how hard I tried. Not until fifty years later did I come to understand that a child brought up without love is likely to fail to love itself or others.

* * *

At Blandford Press the chief accountant was Elis Philips, who was also committed to MRA. He would often join Terry and me for lunch. Early on, as we chatted, I mentioned I was now looking for somewhere to live. He invited me stay with his family for a fortnight whilst I searched. I went - and stayed six years!

He and his wife Dorothy were Welsh, and had four children. They lived in a semi-detached house in Pinner, on the Bakerloo Line. What really made me happy to stay was find-

ing out that I was really *wanted* there – especially by Dorothy. I felt a warmth and trust in that family which I lapped up. Sunday lunchtimes were especially good; we'd sit around and talk, together with their grandfather, and often with another guest invited. The children were encouraged to contribute – they were respected as persons; it was a real eye-opener for me to see how they were treated, especially when there were disputes amongst them, as in any family, and how they were dealt with.

The parents had adopted Frank Buchman's idea of a 'quiet time' each morning before breakfast, and the two older children followed suit sometimes. Usually we got together before breakfast briefly to share thoughts, and this was a challenge to be absolutely honest yet loving at the same time. Difficult, but a healthy way of keeping the channels of communication open in a busy family, especially when hurts or unadmitted anger were involved.

They were active in the community, and also in the Methodist church. I would attend occasionally, and finally at 29 I became a member. I liked the simplicity of the service, and Wesley's hymns.

I was experiencing family life in a way I never had before, and it was good - to feel I mattered, to be listened to, to talk and laugh and joke together – with no tears before bedtime! And when they decided to move to a bigger house in Pinner, I went with them, and enjoyed helping settle in and get it straight. I had a room of my own, and to my delight I was able to redecorate it in the colours of my choice - cantaloupe orange and olive green. As I applied the emulsion paint I played the *New World Symphony* on my new record player over and over again. My own new world, I felt, had begun to dawn.

11

On the Move

I HAD SIX splendid years with Terence Goldsmith at Blandford Press. He taught me a tremendous amount. After a couple of years I was able to go full-time with the book department at Blandford Press, as the business had grown and the magazine side took on a designer full-time. We used several printers, and Terry occasionally would visit them and take me with him. It was an invaluable way of learning what machinery they used, and the whole process of book production – from type-setting, block-making, making colour litho plates, machining, binding and despatch. The more one knew what each printer was capable of, the better one could judge who to place books with.

I'd been at Blandford about six years when one day Angus, a printer's rep, a knowledgeable and cheerful chap, mentioned to me that OUP (Oxford University Press) was looking for a production manager for their Overseas Education Department – was I interested? The glamour of working for such a prestigious company appealed to me, and I was flattered to be approached. But somehow I didn't feel I could tell Terry about it… I felt guilty that I was even contemplating leaving.

To my shame I never consulted him until it was a *fait accompli*. I recall the look on his face; he was aggrieved that I could have gone behind his back. He'd always wanted the best for me, and was a steadfast friend, yet I hadn't felt able to confide in him. Why? I felt a bit of a rat at leaving –

disloyal to the work of MRA that underpinned our efforts at Blandford. Yet I'm quite sure he would have backed me if I felt it was the right choice, regardless of the loss he would have felt.

After so long it was quite a wrench to leave, but suddenly I found myself in charge of producing a quarter of a million books a year for schools in Africa and Asia. When I arrived at OUP's office in the Old Bailey I found my department was dealing with 33 printers. This was somewhat overwhelming, and when Christmas approached I was embarrassed by the number of 'presents' that I was offered by visiting reps. I did not wish to be influenced in my choice of printer by other than strictly professional judgment as to who was most appropriate for the type of book in hand, so I had to gracefully say thanks but no thanks to many proffered bottles and boxes. I soon whittled the number of printers down to a more manageable group, thus saving time and interruptions.

But there was one book we could hardly keep in print since demand for it was so high. *The Adult Learner's Dictionary of Current English* was a huge volume, printed on Bible paper, and because the thin paper was so slow to print and even more difficult to fold, three different binderies were employed to keep up deliveries. Dictionaries were big business for OUP, and the revenue derived enabled them to publish other works that would never make a profit.

I found myself serving sixteen editors; I had one assistant who was chiefly responsible for reprints, and a secretary. It was exciting working on new series for East and West Africa, and then for Asian countries. I felt I was making a contribution towards helping the Third World (as it was then called) in raising educational standards, and I enjoyed the challenge of cutting costs to the bone wherever possible to keep prices down. But the volume of work was increasing, and I had difficulty in keeping up.

My social life had changed, too. I'd moved out of Pinner to

a small bed-sitter in St John's Wood, so I missed the fellowship of both the Phillips family and my comrades at work. However, I did attend the church across the road and found a slip of paper in the pew asking for volunteers to help redecorate old people's flats. Ah, I thought, this is something I can do – and that's how I met David Welch and his merry crew. He lived in the High Street, and on Sundays after early morning communion he'd invite me and the two curates to breakfast, and lively confab over the eggs and bacon and Sunday papers. The Revd John Drury went on to become Dean of King's College, Cambridge, and the Revd Michael Till became Dean of Canterbury.

David introduced me to the church's drama group, the St John's Wood Players, and one Easter we took the Mystery Plays out on the streets of Maida Vale. And in church we produced Dorothy Sayers's *Man Born to be King.* In week one I played Jesus; in week two, Judas! A most satisfying contrast, in which I enjoyed venting my grief and remorse. Later I acted in Rattigan's *Separate Tables* – I've been a fan of his ever since.

Another outlet for my dramatic tendencies was OUP's own drama group. I played the Revd Hale in *The Crucible,* by Arthur Miller, a searing experience relevant to the McCarthy trials going on the US at the time. We also put on a Pinter play, *The Lunch Hour,* in which my secretary Doreen had a part. But in the dark of the backstage of the Cripplegate Theatre I somehow managed to mishear my cue and missed out an entire scene. Afterwards Doreen's parents were puzzled; they'd come up especially from Margate but hadn't seen her…that was the only scene she was in!

* * *

I did less and less with MRA, and I often worked late to try to keep up with the number of new books that poured out from the editorial department. Finally after 18 months the management decided to merge my unit with the main

production department – a sensible move to rationalise contacts with the numerous printers and binderies involved. So I became redundant – a totally new experience, which shook me to the core.

What was I going to do? Maybe this was a chance to escape from the pressures of London. Samuel Johnson said, 'If you're tired of London, you're tired of life.' Well, I had to admit that I felt a bit dried up and burnt out; I'd been working in the big smoke for 15 years, but I hadn't taken much advantage of all the delights and opportunities the metropolis offered.

I surveyed the book scene, and decided that 'of the making of books there was no end' (Ecclesiastes 12:12). It was *selling* them that was the challenge. So why not go and work in a bookshop. Where? I looked at a map of Britain, wondered about Liverpool or Sheffield, and then settled on Edinburgh because that was where my grandfather came from; I had a root of sorts there. I wrote off to a couple of booksellers, and James Thin replied: If I called in, they would 'maybe' interview me.

But when it came to actually packing up to make the move I was in a great dither of indecision. Had I made the right choice? Doubts began to assail me. Shouldn't I stay put in London and get another job in advertising design? I gathered my erstwhile friends in MRA to discuss my plans, and it seemed I *should* go ahead up to Scotland, but Ken Belden's advice for me was 'to keep on an even keel'. And that was proving very difficult!

* * *

I dither day after day, and by the time I'm due to go to King's Cross to board the night train I'm quite convinced I've made a big mistake, but I can't back down now. I've given up my bed in the flat I shared in Chiswick, and all my possessions are in the two big suitcases I'm carrying. I have nowhere to stay in Edinburgh, nor any assurance of a job.

Nobody knows I'm coming, no one cares. I'm convinced it's wrong, but helpless to do anything about it.

I pay off the taxi and find the platform. Miserably I step into the sleeper – to find to my huge surprise an MRA acquaintance in the other bunk! Duncan Corcoran, a former shipyard worker from the Clyde. 'What are you doing here?' he asks.

I tell him my tale of woe. It's amazing to have a sympathetic and wise ear. I can hardly believe my luck. What an astonishing coincidence. He takes it all in, but says little – just suggests we turn in and have a good night's rest.

But I toss and turn all night. In a great sweat, despite it being a cold November night, I keep wishing I could pull the communication cord to stop the train and get off and go back. By dawn I feel a total wreck.

We are due in at 7am; Duncan wakes at 6 and after his quiet time he says to me: 'You need to do four things on arrival: first, get some breakfast; then go to Thins and see if you can secure the job. Thirdly come to the MRA meeting at 10.30 at such-and-such place, and afterwards see if you can borrow a car from someone there to find accommodation.'

These practical points save my sanity and get me back on an even keel! I stow my luggage at the station, get some breakfast, call in at James Thin's shop and meet Jimmy Thin, who decides to give me a trial. Then I walk to the meeting, and afterwards a good soul lends me her Morris Minor and I tour the town till I finally find a vacancy – I didn't realise how full the city would be of university students.

* * *

I regard that episode as an amazing example of the work of a guardian angel – it was so improbable, yet so essential. Otherwise I think I would have turned tail and taken a train back – to what? Indecision, homelessness, unemployment and – possibly even a nervous breakdown.

12

Decisions and Indecisions

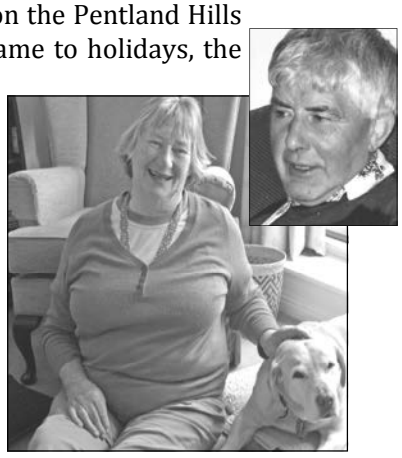
SO BEGAN two rewarding years in Edinburgh, a city of only a quarter of a million, yet the capital of Scotland. At Thins I was placed with Elizabeth Grainger, reckoned the best children's bookseller in Scotland. I loved it, being introduced to books that I'd never got hold of in my youth. I remember reading *The Wind in the Willows* over my lunch – a wonderful revelation. Many of the customers would ask for help in choosing a book for their child or grandchild, and to listen to Elizabeth as she offered advice was a great lesson. Later I worked in Thins' direct mail department, designing flyers and ads for their many technical books.

At lunchtime I would often walk into Queen's Park to eat my sandwiches. At the entrance I passed by Thomas Nelson's, the educational publisher. I looked through a window and saw layouts for books, and I felt drawn to see if there was a job for me. What a lovely setting to work in, right by the park, I thought. I'd been at Thins for six months; maybe this was the next step. I enquired, and was interviewed by the manager of the primary education department, who offered me a job producing their publicity – not quite what I was hoping for – but I accepted.

I'm ashamed to say that I changed my mind *seven times* over that offer. I can hardly believe the awful feelings I awoke with in the night having first accepted, then being overwhelmed with the conviction that I'd made the wrong decision, and cancelling. Then a day later, believing my motives had not been pure, I rang up and asked if I could retract

and accept the post, then repeating the saga… The fact that the poor man put up with my prevarication was either a tribute to his patience or evidence of his need. I was certainly over-qualified, but finally ready to take the job, still feeling fragile after my 'escape' from London.

Through a friend in the local MRA team I was offered lodgings with the assistant curator of the Portrait Gallery, who had a lovely home on the edge of Dean Bridge, with the sound of the rushing river below my window - and within walking distance of work. I found that I could do much more on my weekends than in London; for example, on Saturday morning I could visit the National Gallery, and then join friends for a glorious walk on the Pentland Hills in the afternoon. When it came to holidays, the choice was wide. I ventured on a pony-trekking holiday in Aviemore, but by day three I was so saddle-sore I couldn't mount my pony. The bonus for me was meeting up with a couple who lived in Edinburgh, Tom and Pat Peters, who became life-long friends, and later asked me to be godfather to their first child, Susan.



Tom & Pat

Then, to my surprise my mother proposed coming up to Edinburgh to stay with me! Golly – this was a shaker. We'd never lived together before; could I cope? Would I feel smothered again, overwhelmed? Her optimism prevailed, and we found a flat in the same road as my new friends, who became Ma's friends too. It worked; I had a nice bedroom, with a lovely large desk to do my calligraphy on, and she made a comfy bed-sitter out of the living room. I got tasty

meals, and we entertained friends, so my social life definitely improved. Yes, we had the occasional spat, but somehow we coped. Ma made some good friends with the local Steiner community, especially with a couple of teachers from the school there.

I began to wonder about the next step in my career. Too often I worried whether I was in the right job, and kept casting around, looking at other possibilities. Prospects of promotion at Nelson's seemed slim, and we were not exactly market leaders in educational publishing – still rather staid and a little old-fashioned. The minister at my Methodist church suggested I go up to Crieff for a weekend to discover whether I had a calling to the ministry. There I found that I'd have to learn Greek, and that put me right off! Then I answered an ad to go to Nigeria with the CMS (Christian Missionary Society) as assistant literature secretary. But I felt I would need a wife as a helpmate, and I didn't have one…

Then came news of a course at Newbattle Abbey College, just outside the city, that offered those who'd missed out on further education a 'second chance'. And to my surprise, Edinburgh Education authority was willing to give me a full grant for the year. The course was in 'Liberal Education', designed to prepare one for university. I accepted with gratitude. A chance at last to catch up, and I devoured the pre-course reading list. I was due to start on 15 September.

But one morning, as I was eating breakfast and listening to the news, I heard that Lord Thomson had bought up Nelson's. My manager told me the print unit would be sold, but the editorial and production departments would move down to London in September. I had already handed in my notice, to go to Newbattle, and this seemed like an amazing confirmation of my plan. Yet hideously I began to have doubts about going to college; would I have to share a dorm with a lot of younger chaps? At my age I wanted privacy; I didn't realise that my basic security was threatened, and foolishly I

hadn't bothered to visit to check out the facilities - a major error on my part. My manager tried hard to persuade me to go to London with him, as neither of his two editors were willing move down south. When he offered me promotion to become an editor, with a fifty-percent pay-rise, I finally succumbed.

* * *

Oh, the pain of that decision. My mother was distraught, but she couldn't dissuade me. It turned out to be the second-worst decision of my life. Going back to London was never on my agenda. I had no accommodation to go to, so my mother gave notice to her tenant in the tiny 'pied-a-terre' she kept in a block of flats in Park Road, just below St John's Church, and I moved in to the ten-foot-square cubbyhole with a sloping roof. Alone again. And unwilling to reconnect with my MRA friends in case I got drawn into all their activities. What an ass I was. Where was my guardian angel then? I'd lost touch, I suppose – got seduced by Mammon, and the need to be needed, and the prestige of being an editor. But the work was uninspiring; our firm was not in the forefront of educational publishing, and try as he might, my manager seemed to find only second-rate authors. Attempting to turn their manuscripts into first-rate books proved well-nigh impossible.

I became increasingly tense and dissatisfied. I was withering around in my mind, endlessly censoring myself and trying to analyse my failings, notably my inability to make decisions that stick. In an old exercise book I re-started an occasional journal – a repository of anguished feelings, a sort of stand-in for a confidante/psychotherapist. But I didn't seem to get many answers. On a hot August night in 1965 I wrote:

> *An inventory of every problem and failure, with conditions and causes that brought them about.*
>
> *Indecisiveness – brought about by a domineering*

Mrs P, who disparaged my efforts and constantly nagged and criticised.

Timidity – probably a pre-natal inheritance, plus insecurity from a tiny baby upwards.

Effeminacy – partly inherited, perhaps, from a masculine mother and an unknown father, and partly from an 'enclosed' upbringing. Probably a fear of women and the power they can wield to hurt and humiliate.

Inferiority – again, the disparagement of Mrs P, and a lack of strong physique.

Cowardice – fear of getting hurt.

So, how can I pull the threads together and decide what I really want to do now; what I am good at, and what I am meant by God to do? It may be He wants me to do something I don't believe I can do, until I am forced to start... But in the absence of a small voice, let me analyse again what I can do:

Design adverts – of 1945 vintage!

Understand typography…

Calligraphy

Acting ability, ability to sell (as evidenced at Thins)

Magazine editing, layout and design – and promotion, able to polish and improve.

Teach?

However, nothing concrete emerged from these considerations. A fortnight later I was haranguing myself again:

Why is it that I am so unwilling to commit myself? To a career, a wife, a district, a job – and right down to details like taking a part in a play, standing for election on a committee, doing some decorating… One reason maybe is that at home I felt I could not commit to any arrangements without first asking 'Is it alright to…?' So I got into the habit of postponing decisions. If I made an

arrangement to meet someone or go somewhere Mrs P could come down on it and say no. So I got discouraged and did nothing, my spirit got broken. Even now I don't feel free to decide something for myself – I look around for someone to consult, or give permission.

I am so jealous of my 'freedom' now, not wanting anybody to rob me of my time to myself…determined to fend off all demands on my time and even my affections, I suppose…So now I must face this voice, find it and root it out, which 'tells me off' – criticises, disparages, derides and frightens me.

I felt wracked by doubts and frustration, searching for a sense of personal worth, and a worthwhile job, wishing to make a home, earn a good living doing something useful and lucrative. To cease forever waiting in the wings, to get into *action.* I wrote: 'I need the stimulus of a group life. Without it, here at Grove Gardens, I'm half dead. So go to where there's life, purpose and vigour. And work in a team – hard and happily!'

My mother sensed the turmoil I was in from my letters. She came down from Edinburgh to see me, retaining the flat there meanwhile. At lunchtime she would bring me sandwiches to eat in Hyde Park and talk over my problems, trying hard to help me. But I just felt I was getting worse, and I think she feared I'd have a nervous breakdown.

I had begun to feel fed up with just dealing with paper; perhaps I should go and teach the kids I'd been making books for. The idea grew, but I found that I'd have to wait a year before I could start to train – that's if I could get a grant. But I couldn't wait; I had to do *something.* Meanwhile, my mother had to return to Scotland.

I found a leaflet that she had left lying around about Emerson College in Sussex that offered teacher-training for Steiner schools. It was already mid-August, but I was burning to make a move – I was in such a turmoil. One Sunday I

borrowed a car and headed south out of London in a great state of indecision: either to find a former girlfriend, Christine (whose address I wasn't sure of, because she was a district nurse and had moved to a village I didn't know and I had no map) with the intention of re-proposing marriage, and then try for that Nigerian job again - OR to find this college, which was unknown to me, and enrol: whichever came first on the road! That indicated the level of doubt and confusion I was in, leaving such a life-changing decision to chance.

As I drove along the A22, in the leafy countryside, up came a painted board bearing the words 'Emerson College' and an arrow pointing left. Oh, was this a sign from above, from the Almighty? It was quite extraordinary to find that sign along an unknown road – but I followed it with gratitude, and found my way to a low wooden hut. The door was open, and inside a chef was making bread. Although it was holiday time, a few students and others were staying on, so meals were needed. I hesitantly enquired if the Principal was around.

'No, but can I help? I'm Anthony, the cook here,' he replied.

'Well, I'd like to know if I could become a student.' And so began a conversation that was to change my life. He described the ethos of the college and its founder, Rudolf Steiner, and gave me such a picture of the daily life of students there, as he steadily kneaded the dough, that I felt I had found my next step. Which was to make an appointment to meet the Principal the following week.

13

New departures

FRANCIS Edmunds, the Principal of Emerson College, received me in his study. His easy manner encouraged me to explain my situation, but also to reveal my almost total ignorance of the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, and anthroposophy - the work that had developed from it (from anthros + Sophia = wisdom of the human being).

'Oh,' I thought, 'that's it – I've cooked my goose, I shan't get in.'

But I was wrong. Yes, he would be glad to accept me. He felt I was good teacher material; mature, with life experience, and teachable. But the fees were a problem for me, having very few savings.

'But I think I can offer a partial solution there,' he said. 'There is a vacancy for a part-time assistant warden in the neighbouring hostel for boarders at Michael Hall Steiner School next door. This would pay for your tuition, provided you passed the interview with the warden and his wife.' He picked up the phone, and yes, they could see me straight away that day.

George and Joan Usher ran the hostel, housed in Kidbrooke Park, a fine Victorian pile that had once been a stately home, and now was home to sixty adolescents aged between 13 and 19, of both sexes.

'Quite a challenge,' said George. 'They're a very lively bunch, coming from all types of home, and some from abroad.' They explained what my duties would be: to look

after the top landing where about fifteen of the younger lads were living – to get them up in the morning, down to breakfast, and off to school, just in time for me to get up the cow path to my lectures at 9am. Then I must be back by 5.30 to ensure they got into supper at 6, to eat with them, and take turns in supervising their homework hour-and-a-half. After this I should be around until they were due to go to bed, and see that lights were out by 10pm.

Not a lot of time for my own private study or recreation – but I was ready for the challenge – and to my surprise, they were ready to take me on. So began an entirely new phase of my life.

* * *

So what of poor Christine? That's a sad saga, of which I am deeply ashamed. She was the sister of a close friend. I had proposed to her earlier, when thinking of taking the job in Nigeria, and she had accepted. But that very same evening I had crawled back to her digs and retracted. I had been seized with my usual, paralysing indecision, and the awful feeling that I'd made a mistaken lifetime commitment. Her parents were there when I arrived, congratulating Christine. But when I stumblingly blurted out the reason for my arrival, after much distress and discussion they finally considered I needed psychotherapy, and recommended a doctor they knew. I gladly assented to the idea, feeling very guilty, and wobbly up top!

But the sessions didn't really reach the parts they should have. The damage that had been done in my first six months of life was never acknowledged or understood – how the lack of love and bonding had resulted in an inability to make a deep and trusting relationship later in life. My basic mistrust of women was never recognised, nor was the fear of being in their power, of being humiliated, which hearkened back to the years of domination by my foster mother, fully explored or addressed.

A month later, I arrived at Kidbrooke Park just as term was starting. I had a room on the third floor landing where the 13-16-year-old boys slept; After I had got them off to school on time I'd walk up the hill to Emerson College by 9am for the first lecture of the day – on Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* – a key text. But within twenty minutes a sort of mental blanket came down in my mind and I just couldn't keep awake. (It was just like what happened after lunch at Nelson's; I'd get back by 2pm, and inevitably, about twenty minutes later the same irresistible urge to sleep enveloped me.) In both cases it may have been a mixture of boredom and post-prandial torpor, but I could never properly get my head around Steiner's concepts, which seemed so abstract to me. I needed more tangible, concrete images to grasp hold of.

However, the rest of the curriculum at Emerson was balm to my soul. I was introduced to things I'd never attempted before, such as wood carving, clay modelling, weaving and making things out of copper. The intellectual side of my brain was being given a rest, and I discovered a chance to be creative with my hands – something that was denied at school because of the war, when we never saw the inside of the woodwork room.

One day we were asked to take a large lump of clay, close our eyes, and just let our hands fashion whatever they will – from our sub-conscious, I suppose. To my surprise I came up with a family group of mother and father cradling their baby. That spoke volumes to me, of my inner yearning and loss.

Outside we were each given a small plot of garden to grow

vegetables, and make a compost heap. We planted according to Steiner's biodynamic ideas, and I was impressed at how well things grew. Back in the kitchen we all had to make bread, kneading the dough in a rhythmic, meaningful contemplation of the bread of life!

Then there was eurhythmy – moving to music. It was an important part of the curriculum but I never really got the hang of it. Nevertheless, I found the whole year a wonderful antidote to my cerebral career so far, although I had to admit that I couldn't really get a grip on anthroposophy, a spiritual philosophy that maintains that anyone who 'conscientiously cultivates sense-free thinking' can have insights into the spiritual world.

I was confiding my doubts one day to a fellow student, Jonathan Stedall, and he suggested that over the Easter holiday I pay an 'observation visit' to Sunfield at Clent, Worcestershire, a Steiner home for nearly a hundred children with learning difficulties. I was impressed; Steiner believed, very humanely, that no child was uneducable – even those who seemed beyond reach to others. I saw how music was used to stimulate them, with rhythm and percussion. I also met teenagers with autism who were engaged and active. The staff all believed in what they were doing; they shared the anthroposophical approach to a greater or lesser degree, and they worked for a basic wage of £4 a week, whatever position they held. (Those with families could get more from the Bursar according to need.) I was invited to spend the summer holiday working there if I wished.

Back at the hostel I had to be back from college by 6pm to help supervise supper, then generally mix with the youngsters and sometimes oversee their homework period. I found this unusually stressful, trying hard to maintain discipline, but in a friendly way. It didn't come naturally, and as we all know, kids can spot a weakness straight away. I realised I just didn't have the ego-strength to hold things

together without considerable effort. If I was going to have to screw myself up for every lesson I gave, I'd be worn out in a week. I wrote in my journal:

> *My idea of being called to work with children seems dead – merely an emotional conviction. You feel awkward and inferior with children; they don't come naturally to you… recognise your limitations and work within them.*

One evening I was tucking up the two lads in the room next to mine, and they were engaging me in conversation – anything to delay lights out. James, 16, the older of the two, was quite frank; they'd asked me what I planned to do at the end of my year at Emerson.

'Sir,' said he, 'I don't think you'd make a good teacher – you're too soft.' Out of the mouths of babes and suckling… that really helped to make my mind up!

So reluctantly I realised that teaching was not for me. I plunged into another orgy of frustration and indecision, writing reams in my journal of all the possible jobs I might apply for, all the avenues I could go down, trying desperately to sort myself out.

> *With every decision you make you are tempted to doubt. Don't give in to temptation, but TRUST instead… My folly, stupidity, sin – to disparage and revile myself after every decision. That is a habit to break. Don't give in to it.*

Easier said than done. I lectured myself to death:

> *The reason I don't make decisions is that I know I will regret them. So I put off the day; surely I know now that the best thing I can do* is *to make decisions in advance, then stick to them, and resist the temptation to change the bet… At this late stage* (two days before the end of term) *I am full of regrets and self reproach – and hindsight and fear, bordering on panic.*

I finished the year at Emerson ragged and half a stone lighter, unclear what to do next. I had an offer from the Steiner School in Edinburgh to go and be a class teacher, and I havered and dithered about it. Finally I accepted Clent's invitation (there was no clear alternative) and spent an instructive three months helping to look after a ward of twenty children. One weekend I travelled up to London and visited a day centre for children with mental handicaps in St John's Wood, just around the corner from where I had lived, and near where my mother was now back in her 'pied-a-terre' in Grove Gardens. It was on that visit that I was told of a vacancy at a brand new hostel in Paddington for adults with mental handicap (as it used to be called), run by Westminster City Council. The post was for an assistant warden; I applied, and my experience at Kidbrooke got me the job.

That was an amazing bolt from the blue, all arising from my time at Clent – where I wouldn't have gone but for the concern of my friend Jonathan (a true guardian angel). To be honest I was more enamoured by the accommodation on offer in the hostel than the job itself; my own bed-sit with brand new, gracious furnishings – and a television set – a new experience for me! But I reflected how, step-by-step, I had been led, despite my overpowering fears, anguish and regrets, by seeming 'coincidences' from my publishing career into a new one – not teaching, but helping people in difficulties.

14

Children and Guardian Angels

LOOKING BACK after my fateful return to London, getting embroiled in a job I really didn't want, and living in a city I had been glad to have escaped from earlier, I pondered on my efforts to find guidance from the Holy Spirit. I had persevered with morning quiet times, spasmodically, but I wasn't in fellowship with others on the same path. But I can see now how, while some doors closed, others seemed to open for me. Whether that was the result of divine influence - the guiding hand of a guardian angel - I can't be sure, but looking back it seems likely.

I know that when I sincerely want to do God's will in preference to my own (often a costly but eventually wise choice) he does seem to make his will known to me in some way. Numerous small examples illustrate this: spotting the sign to Emerson on the drive south from London into Sussex; being offered the unexpected post of assistant warden at Kidbrooke; visiting Clent and my subsequent summer there; visiting the day centre in St John's Wood, leading to the job at Paddington… all things I could not possibly have planned.

Belief in a guardian angel has grown in me over the years. I sometimes imagine that if we arrive in heaven (should we be so fortunate) we might be allocated to care for a soul on earth – after a suitable period of training, no doubt! I find it hard to reconcile myself to a belief that God himself can attend to some seven billion individuals so intimately and expertly at any one time, so maybe he delegates – as all good managers do!

At a performance of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* I noted that Henry Newman gave the following words to Gerontius' Angel, just after he had died and been carried across the great divide:

My work is done, my task is o'er…
My Father gave in charge to me
This child of earth e'en from its birth
To serve and save,
Alleluia, and saved is he.
This child of clay to me was given,
To rear and train by sorrow and pain
In the narrow way, Alleluia,
From earth to heaven.

* * *

St Jude's, the brand new hostel in Paddington, could accommodate thirty residents, but only half a dozen had arrived when I started. So it was a cushy number in comparison with Kidbrooke/Emerson combined. There were five young lads aged between 16 and 18, who went out daily to a work centre, plus a man of 45 who'd been hit by a car when he was six. He was a delightful chap, with a calm personality that contrasted with the lads. The warden had been a warrant officer in the army, and ran the place like a barracks. I tried to soften his approach, and get to know and understand my charges, but I was green. I was also wallowing in regrets again:

September '67

Well, I've got the job, and now I'm in the doldrums, 'cos I feel I ought to have done better for myself… It seems my motives are all wrong, and I'm not looking forward to doing the work at all. […] Anyway, despite my depression, I know I can put my back into the job and give these kids some warmth, humour and love.

I had several run-ins with the warden and his shrewish wife over their unsympathetic handling of the residents. But as the place filled up, I realised that I needed proper training, and made enquiries. The supervisor from City Hall said, 'You have fire in your belly to help deprived kids, so you should try for a course to get qualified.'

And that's how I discovered Ruskin College, among the 'dreaming spires' of Oxford. I was 38, and taking a course in the Residential Care of Adolescents. along with twenty others, as well as another 250 or so in the college, mostly from trade unions - workers who had never gained any qualifications at school but were now in responsible positions and needed training for the union tasks they were engaged in. Ruskin was a 'second chance' college, and entry was by essay, not exams. I heard afterwards that there were 19 people competing for every place, and I was thrilled to be there.

I had a study bedroom in a Victorian 2-up, 2-down cottage in Worcester Road just opposite the main hall, which I shared with three other mature students - and a year to explore and enjoy all that Oxford might offer. It felt like heaven, after 24 years at work, to be able to read, explore, discuss – even just think.

I bought a third-hand car, a black Morris Minor, stuffed in all my belongings and drove to my pre-course placement – a junior Approved School near Bath. The headmaster was a dedicated man, as was his small staff. On my very first day I learnt my first lesson: I'd left some small change on my bedside locker when I went down to breakfast - it had gone on my return. My naivety was being challenged; I learned a lot. One 12-year-old was given to terrible tantrums; I observed how in a class the experienced teacher in charge just clasped the lad in his arms till he calmed down. It was difficult work dealing with damaged children who'd already broken the law, and whose trust in adults had often been entirely shaken or even destroyed.

My very first essay at Ruskin was on 'Maternal Deprivation'. As I read the required books, light dawned. John Bowlby's *Child Care and the Growth of Love*; Erik Erikson's *Childhood and Society*, and Clegg & Megson's *Children in Distress* all opened my eyes. In 1951, under the auspices of the World Health Organisation, Bowlby had written a report on Maternal Care and Mental Health, which collated expert world opinion on the subject and the issues arising from it, and formed the basis for the above book. Bowlby wrote:

> *Just how we develop as personalities and how this development depends on our being in constant touch with some one person who cares for us during the critical time in our early years… is a very interesting question… What is believed to be essential… is that an infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother (or one person who steadily 'mothers' him) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.*
>
> *Partial deprivation brings in its train anxiety, excessive need for love, powerful feelings of revenge, and… guilt and depression… Complete deprivation has even more far-reaching effects on character development and* ***may entirely cripple the capacity to make relationships with other people.***

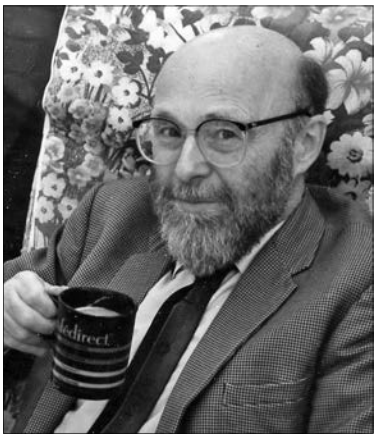
Bowlby gives an example of a typical separated infant – listless, quiet, unhappy, and unresponsive to a smile or a coo:

> *A baby boy who at four months of age, the latter two in hospital, weighed less than at birth and whose condition was critical. His appearance was that of a pale, wrinkled old man. His breathing was so weak that it seemed he might stop at any moment. When seen 24 hours after he had been at home he was cooing and smiling. Though no change had been made in his diet he started to gain weight promptly…*

This was my story – this was maybe why I was disoriented, conflicted, indecisive and unsure of myself. And why I had found it so difficult to really attach to anyone. I got five stars for my essay!

* * *

The room next to mine was occupied by a German compositor who had worked at Oxford University Press, so we had a lot in common. Hermann became a life-long friend. With his bald head and long beard he reminded me of Marx. Life at Ruskin was lively; it was 1968, and revolution was in the air! The students tended to be militant about everything – they even went on strike in protest against the food. I thought it was OK, but then I was a wartime kid, and used to austerity… Later we marched to London in protest at the imprisonment of David Kitson in South Africa, a former Ruskin student, for anti-apartheid activities. That was the time when my lettering got onto the front page of *The Times*. I had painted some of the banners that were held up in the Trafalgar Square demo.



Hermann—a coffee addict!

That Christmas I had a placement in a children's home in Wheatley, not far from Oxford. Snow fell, to the delight of the kids, and I joined them in snowball fights. Such fun to be a kid again, but I almost had a heart attack – the exercise was so vigorous, and I overdid it.

Another placement was in the county's Observation & Assessment Unit at Yarnton, where to my delighted surprise I was asked to paint a mural in their new large playroom.

But my abiding memory was when, one morning, I went upstairs to a 12-year-old boy's room to see why he hadn't come down for breakfast. He was cheeky, and I lost my cool, shaking him in anger and accidentally banging his head against the wall. Naturally that resulted in him staying in his room, darkly fuming. Downstairs I admitted to the head of the home what had happened.

'So what are you going to do about it?' he asked.

'I'll have to go and apologise, I suppose,' I replied.

And I did. The lad was, I think, quite shocked – maybe the first time an adult had said sorry to him. Anyway, after that he became my most loyal helper!

I got through the course OK, but a bonus I didn't expect was to be invited to stay on, if I wished, to sit for the Special Diploma in Social Studies, a two-year course. But as we had covered some of the subjects already – such as criminology and sociology, we could do it one year. I gladly took the chance. But it meant writing *two* essays a week, with two tutorials – twice the usual rate. I'm a slow reader, and sometimes there were four or five books to absorb per essay. I didn't have much energy left over for socialising or enjoying the delights of Oxford and the university. But I did join the Union and listened to the debates. Especially the final debate of Union President Giles Brandreth: he had arranged for a trio of buglers to play a fanfare to introduce each speaker, and at the end of the evening he did a handstand on the arms of his huge presidential chair, waving his legs in farewell!

As we approached the end of the course, job-hunting took precedence. There was always a dearth of qualified childcare personnel in residential homes for children, so there was quite a choice. I felt drawn to work with 'maladjusted' children (as they were labelled then), so went for an interview in a well-respected school in Hertfordshire. I arrived on a sunny day and saw children bathing naked in the pool. It was evidently a free-thinking establishment.

About eight of us candidates spent almost a day there, and looking around at the others I didn't rate my chances highly at all. Most were younger than me, and much more vigorous. To my surprise I was called in first, and offered the job. I think they were impressed by my brief life story, especially the psychiatrist on the panel. But term was due to start three days before I was due back from a holiday that I'd already booked in America; I asked if I could come then.

'Oh no,' they replied – not unreasonably. 'You must be here before term starts!' At the back of my mind I worried that I wouldn't be able to cope with the freedom and lack of formal structure in the school, so I stuck by my holiday plans and lost the job. I was relieved; perhaps my guardian angel had saved me from a difficult situation - though it is also possible I had missed an important learning opportunity. Sometimes the choice your angel is asking you to make is the one that seems to ask most of you.

15

The Land of My Birth

SO, IT WAS off to USA to see my twin godchildren who were now five. I'd met their mother Maggi in Edinburgh, where we'd had a warm friendship. One evening in the bar of the Traverse Theatre she'd asked if her being taller than me bothered me. 'Oh no,' I lied. But it definitely did. She wanted to marry me, but I would have felt smothered. So she married Kenneth, a tall American teacher instead, who took her off to Massachusetts.

Nevertheless, when they had twins she asked me to be godfather. It was a huge delight to be back in America forty years after leaving as a babe in arms. Ken met me in New York and drove me all around the city showing me the sights, then drove me the two hours to his home in Fairhaven, near the former whaling port of New Bedford.

Maggi, with Cora-Dot and Henry (Hank) on the steps of their home

When I'd gone to the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square to line up for a visa, the woman had shaken her head.

'Sorry, we can't give you a visa.'

I was distraught – 'Why?'

'But we can give you a passport!'

I was astounded. Apparently, in the interim, the Supreme Court had repealed the law stating that US citizens serving in the armed forces of a foreign nation lost their citizenship, and had accepted that Britain was an ally and an exception. So that very afternoon I stood before the Consul and swore the oath of allegiance before the Stars & Stripes. I now had dual nationality – a far cry from the stateless alien I once was.

During my three weeks holiday I visited a contact in Boston who told me of an unusual vacancy for a social worker, because someone had dropped out at the last moment. The deal was a year's fellowship in Community Mental Health at Massachusetts General Hospital, one of four leading hospitals in the US. It would give me 3½ days a week at the Bunker Hill Health Centre in Charlestown, and 1½ days' tuition in advanced casework at the hospital, a wonderful arrangement. This was an offer I couldn't refuse. It overlooked the fact that I'd never actually done any casework, and I concealed my ignorance from them; my Oxford diploma opened doors!

I wrote to my tutor at Ruskin, seeking permission to take the course, as I was really duty-bound to return to Britain to take up work, having been trained at government expense. He gave it, and I joined two other 'fellows' for what turned out to be possibly the best year of my life. Then, miraculously, I got a call from my contact, Philip, saying they were leaving their flat – would I like to rent it? It belonged to a doctor who was working in Switzerland; it was furnished and was on Louisburg Square, in the fashionable heart of Beacon Hill, where the Cabots and Lodges – the renowned

I had the ground floor flat

families of Boston - used to live. That was another offer I couldn't refuse.

Money was tight, so going to the supermarket meant writing a list and sticking to it, wearing metaphorical blinkers to the obscenity of goodies on display. What an ignoble contrast to the lifestyle of a third of the rest of the world. And I was fortunate to have air conditioning, which helped me sleep in the unfamiliar heat and humidity of the Boston summer. The shelves of books were a delight – I felt really comfortable and at home, especially when I could listen to the BBC World Service.

Charlestown was an urban community of about 15,000, and the health centre had 60 staff covering all aspects from maternity to old age. There were eight social workers – one per 2,000 of the population, which was unbelievably generous. Clients came for hourly appointments; home visits were rare. It felt more like a psychiatric unit, giving us a chance to work in depth with people's problems and negotiate treatment plans. The lack of pressure and the high quality of the supervision was something I never experienced again in my career. Every Monday morning for two hours Mary Kearney,

our supervisor, would give me her total attention, having told her secretary 'no interruptions or phone calls'. It was the same for the other two 'fellows' and it meant that if we had problems during the week we knew we could air them during supervision, which certainly helped me to contain any anxieties. Of course, we could take an urgent matter to her at any time.

It was during one such session that I found tears welling up as I discussed a case.

'Ah,' said Mary, 'tell me more. What prompted that pain?' And so it was that I realised I needed help, as my clients did.

'But surely that isn't right?' I protested: 'I'm the one who is supposed to be giving help.'

'Oh yes it is! If you haven't been in therapy yourself, you shouldn't be in practice as a social worker.'

'You mean it's alright for me to have therapy?'

'Of course. You'll never get a job here if you haven't.'

Well, now I had permission to get help. It was a great relief to address my problems, and I booked in with a local psychotherapist. But he was a disappointment: he didn't seem to probe enough, and even dozed off as I talked. I didn't feel I got anywhere.

In one session with Mary I mentioned that I still felt very angry about my two unsatisfactory mothers and non-existent father, and that maybe I'd been depressed this last ten to fifteen years? To my surprise she readily agreed, and said it was definitely the case. 'You'd got so used to that level of functioning that you didn't know anything better'.

Another time she said, 'People aren't out to hurt you.'

'Oh, but they do!' I shot back with such feeling that made me realise how afraid and angry I was at being hurt before—especially when I felt belittled. *The fight is on,* I wrote, *whether I really break through and into a new phase or not.*

* * *

Meanwhile my mother had asked if she might come over for a holiday. So she spent six weeks with me – a good time, by and large. But I recall one outburst of mine: we'd finished our meal and were discussing plans. Ma made disparaging remarks about some of my friends. Immediately I bristled: disparaging them meant belittling me. That I couldn't tolerate. I reacted with an angry outburst, like a bomb going off. She argued back, I shouted in protest; we stood up and I was so furious I actually pummelled her on the chest. She sank back, horrified. I grabbed my coat and walked right out, simmering with rage yet appalled at my violence and loss of control.

I walked for over an hour, thrashing around in my mind. Do I really want to be saddled with this woman – shouldn't I cut off from her for good, and be done with her hurtful criticism? Why be landed with another woman who could deride and humiliate me, just as I'd experienced all through my childhood?

I wrestled with this, but finally came to the conclusion that she *was* my mother. I didn't really have the option to just drop her, and that for better or for worse I should stick by her. I finally came back and apologised for my temper, and told her of my decision – that I would never ever break off from her again, that I was committed to her forever. I think that reassured her, and our relationship definitely improved.

* * *

Our tuition at Massachusetts General Hospital included attendance at the weekly 'Grand Rounds' held in the Ether Dome (where the use of ether was first demonstrated). Notable speakers included B F Skinner, the behavioural psychologist, and Mary Mead, the anthropologist. We had tutorials on advanced casework, and I had to keep a low profile as I'd hardly done any 'normal' casework. Pretence was a com-

mon problem in my life, and often caused me to perspire with anxiety in case I was exposed as a fraud!

We fellows were privileged to fly down with Mary to Washington to the American Psychiatric Association annual conference, a great treat. We got to see the White House and the Lincoln Memorial, but also the slums of Georgetown. Strange to find such inequality right at the heart of government. Here, in the capital city of the 'greatest country in the world' people of colour were being treated as second-class citizens right under the nose of the President. What hypocrisy; I was sickened by what I saw, and amazed that people put up with such a situation. But my knowledge of the history of the United States was lamentably poor, and the subject was hardly mentioned – it just seemed to be skated over with a shrug of white shoulders.

I greatly enjoyed the space and freedom of America – it seemed one could do so much more with one's weekends than in Britain. We three fellows joined up with the other social workers in a log cabin in Maine, and tucked into a lobster each straight off the beach for $1. Another weekend I went skiing in Vermont with the Bartholomew family – but never got beyond the faltering nursery slopes. To learn at 41 was a bit late, and to watch their three children swing effortlessly down the slopes humiliating! But it was heaven when they invited me to their holiday home on Martha's Vineyard, a beautiful island off Cape Cod - I could swim like the best of them!

* * *

All too soon our year's fellowship came to an end, and I had to consider my next step. The temptation was to stay in America: as a citizen I could work anywhere. I explored the job market, and went for an interview at Concord, Lexington, a delightful town where the first shot in the battle of 1786 was fired. But I was duty-bound to return to England and fulfil my obligation to the state. I heard of a job with the

Medical Research Council (MRC) in Chichester, not all that far from Brighton, where my mother had moved after London.

Back in Blighty I camped with my mother in the flat she'd rented from friends. The job on offer at MRC was for a suicide survey, but I was turned down - thankfully, because I really needed to go into general practice. One afternoon Ma and I went for a drive in the countryside, and I found myself near the home of the former warden of Kidbrooke. Knocking on the door, a window above opened; his wife Joan was at home with a migraine. Nevertheless, she revived and gave us tea and told me of a vacancy at the Social Services office at Crawley, in the north of Sussex. There and then I rang the office, and got an interview next day. I got the job as a generic social worker under the new Seebohm system, combining the former four departments of children, mental health, mental and physical handicap, and the elderly - all under one roof, so people had only one door to knock at.

Crawley was a New Town, created by the government to take overspill from the east London boroughs that had suffered in the Blitz. It was already oversized by the seventies, and case-load pressure was high. At the weekly allocation meetings, when the area director presented each new case for us to opt for, eyes would be averted. As the silence bore down, someone would crack and offer to take it; sometimes (too often) that was me.

My team leader was an angel, but overloaded. She also carried cases of her own, so supervision was hard to arrange, irregular and interrupted. I pined for my Bunker Hill days, but my caseload grew and grew. We had all types of case, from cradle to grave, so although no specialism was allowed I did develop a preference for mental health cases, feeling an affinity with the sufferers, I suppose. But there was never enough time to spend with clients to do a proper job, and home visits were often too infrequent to really help

people deal properly with their problems.

Most of our work involved home visits, in contrast to my experience in Boston. Many cases involved young mums with two or even three children under five, at home all day whilst their husbands worked and often didn't get back till late, doing overtime to earn extra money. There was little nursery day care in those days, and the stress of being alone and far way from helping mums, grans, aunts and uncles - that had been the norm back in London - often took its toll in exasperation, and could lead to smacking and aggression towards babes and toddlers.

Before leaving Boston I'd asked Mary Kearney if she thought I should get therapy back home. Definitely, she said. So I found a Jewish psychotherapist in Brighton, going once and sometimes twice a week to see her after work, which I kept a secret, even from my mother. I was ashamed of having to need help; the stigma of mental and emotional instability was strong. But despite keeping up visits for nearly three years, the good lady really didn't get to the bottom of my problems. I think she was too nice, and didn't probe deeply enough.

But at least in this job I was reasonably settled for a while, and not constantly doubting my decision or wondering if I should be looking for another career. Yet still, in my journal, I asked myself 'What are my lifetime goals?'

Meanwhile my relationship with my mother was consolidating. I usually went on to visit her after my covert sessions with my therapist, and have a meal. At weekends I would help get her flat organised and do odd jobs – or take her out and enjoy the sea. In turn she used to come to stay with me for a week or so periodically, providing delicious dinners when I got home from work.

I used my journals as a cheap substitute for a psychoanalyst. I often awoke in the night or early in the morning hoping for insights, and busily wrote reams in my journal, trying

to work out what was wrong and what I should do to make it right.

I really must have been quite a difficult person to work with:

> *I'm always putting people in the wrong these days. Why? A basic criticism of them, instead of appreciation. Allow a person three faults, then start from there. Allow J. 3 faults; you're disappointed he's not come up to your expectations. And B., now R. All will be a cause for disappointment, but we have to make the best we can with who we've got in the time available!*

And elsewhere, the same old troubles about relationships:

> *6am, after almighty row with Ma the night before – what good came out of it? Rage unbottled – at last I realise how unwise it was to have been placed back with Mrs P at 5 – and how powerless I was during the disputes over my custody to act without being disloyal. I couldn't follow my inclination – actually I did obey when told by Mrs P at 12 or 13 that I had to leave. I told Ma and she made arrangements for new foster parents in Banstead. I would have been OK there so long as Derek hadn't come and told me his mother wanted me back. Then I felt a guilty tug of disloyalty, esp. after that '2nd son' letter – and I ran away, back into the 'frying pan'... I had to pretend to Mrs P that I liked it better with her than with Ma or Banstead.*

New Year's resolution for 1974:

> *Be positive, not whining. Constructive, not complaining... Keep more detached, less emotionally involved. Yet I've taken an anxiety-laden job, knowing that I'm an anxiety-prone person – with infantile/childhood anxiety patterns firmly implanted. In design and layout I was better off – yet in publishing there are deadlines and*

pressures – less than in advertising or journalism, thank goodness.

Not all my writings in my journals were anxiety-ridden: two pages described the case of a teenager at court, concluding:

My first appearance at a Juvenile court – and I was quite pleased with the result…The parents expressed their gratitude, and W. (the teenager) *shook my hand – a most unusual gesture on his part! That's the first court report I've really consulted the client about, and had them read beforehand (pity I didn't do it with S.G.). So now I feel the barrier is broken, and I fear court reports no more!*

It's a relief to record something cheerful: I used to sing to myself – *Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative…* Sometimes it actually worked. I also used Norman Vincent Peale's mantra:

'A man who is self-reliant, positive and optimistic, and who approaches his work with the assurance of success, magnetises his condition and draws unto himself the creative powers of the universe.'

Nevertheless, my Ma and I came to a tacit agreement that to stay for more than a week or ten days was not advisable, as fuses could possibly blow if a visit was prolonged. Inevitably they did blow occasionally; she said I was as prickly as a hedgehog. In retrospect I can see she was absolutely right, but at the time I was indignant, and would over-react. It was usually somewhat of a relief when she waved goodbye, and I could get back to 'normal'.

16

Getting to Grips with Anger

SO AT LAST I felt relatively settled in my job as a social worker in Crawley. The needs of the population were many, and there always seemed to be too few of us to meet them. Caseloads grew, and it was always a struggle to get the visits written up and the reports completed. But at least my diaries at the time aren't so full of the usual doubts and fears:

> *This job gives me opportunities to develop self-confidence, take risks, improvise, initiate – do all the things I'm not good at, e.g. taking responsibility, making quick decisions. I've been complaining that I'm not cut out for this – thinking that perhaps God has 'made a mistake' putting me here – but now I feel it's a challenge, a means of self-development and growth. Thank you!*

However, after 18 months I was again, somewhat anxiously, listing my 'life goals':

> *To be needed, wanted, loved.*
>
> *To leave the world (my bit of it) a little better than I found it.*
>
> *Sexual fulfilment.*
>
> *A house (with a home inside it), a family, garden etc.*
>
> *To be a respected member of the community, to matter to someone.*
>
> *To be able to look forward to a secure old age.*
>
> *To make a perfect marriage!?*

To have children and bring them up perfectly!?

To be creative – frame pictures & prints.

To paint pictures, make collages etc, decorate my home. Even have an exhibition.

To be fit and enjoy being fit – taking walks in the countryside - a cottage in the country.

To read some of the great books, enjoy some of the great music, see some of the great art.

Visit some of the great countries – Russia, China, Africa, S. America.

To have time to be myself.

To be up-to-date – and not constantly with a back-log, so that I can spontaneously take up and enjoy what life offers.

Pondering these aims, I asked myself about the logical next steps towards them…

- Sexual fulfilment: means with a woman I can trust. But investing in one person means risking being hurt or rejected by that person…

- I have a flat (a council flat) *which I want to share with people I love. Which means risking* being *loved, which comes back to this fantastic fear of rejection…*

- Frustration and guilt – my two enemies. Frustration is my mother's problem, she says. I feel it too, coupled with a lassitude and lack of energy which is frightening… There are times when I feel capable of something great – yet others when I look at myself and realise that I've accomplished far less than the average chap, i.e. no wife, or kids, low salary and status, no clubs, possessions, or real hobbies. So if I want hobbies I must make time for them, and spend money, too. Until now I've not felt worth spending money on – a sign of great immaturity - just to own a camera, a cassette player/tape recorder—I feel I've always got to ask

permission first. Grow out of this childish attitude. I distrust my own judgment; place too much trust in others.

- Why do I make myself miserable by always having more to do than I have time for? It's a self-inflicted programme; even at work I needn't take on as much as I do. Perhaps I do so because I'm guilty about how slow I am, and how distractible…

July '73

Stella's wedding. (Stella was the one girl I proposed to who said no!) *If this day has taught me anything, it is that I should stick to a decision, once made. As I sat in the chapel at Bishop Otter College watching Stella get wed, I kept thinking it might have been me who was making the vows and promises and taking Stella to be my wedded wife…*

…My single state is my chief single problem! Then comes job. Fortunately home is not a problem at the moment – tho' I should think about buying somewhere some day… For forty years I've tended other people's gardens and painted other people's rooms – isn't it only natural I'd want my own?

March '74

You crave appreciation, as if your life depended on it – recognition, a pat on the back – without it I cannot survive. This neurotic need for reassurance …I was brought up to regard myself as bad: ***'You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear'*** *Mrs P used to say of me.*

That's why I do social work – to be doing good to other people. To relieve the guilt I feel about just doing good to myself (which I hardly ever permit myself to indulge in – don't read many novels or go to films – if I do they usually have to be 'improving'). My shelves are littered with half-finished books – dipped into, sampled, and put by for 'when I have time'. When's that?

You got out of residential work because the anxiety level was too high; now you want to leave social work for the same reason. And you pine for publishing again. Have you the courage to quit?

I wonder now why I wrote so much – that never got read again, until now, in writing this book. In August '74 I noted:

Writing is for me a form of giving birth, divesting part of myself. I resist it for a while, yet afterwards I'm both pleased and exhausted - as if I value my integrity, selfhood, wholeness too much to risk losing any of it – yet when I see that what has come out is good, I am re-assured, and even proud at times.

* * *

One of my few relaxations was singing. Crawley boasted a fine choir, the Concordia, which I joined aged 42. We gave concerts at the Fairfield Hall in Croydon (Britten's *War Requiem* under Louis Frémaux) and London's Festival Hall with the band of the Royal Military School of Music.

But I had a course to go on. It was decreed that my three qualifications were not sufficient and that I needed to take a further year's course to gain my CQSW – the new Certificate of Qualification in Social Work. I embarked on this in Croydon, under Mr Wolf Blomfield, who proved to be a tough but thorough teacher. Although reluctant at first, I soon realised that I really did need this course. It was said that if Wolf did not get you to break down at some point he felt he'd failed you! I learnt a lot about myself, as well as about the clients I would be working with. Placements were probably the most important part, and each of us was carefully placed with a supervisor who had been on one his courses, and done well, so that he knew he could trust them.

It was back in college, one morning at coffee break, that a fellow student made that life-changing remark to me, 'You've got a lot of anger in you, haven't you, John.' That shocked me.

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us, to see oursels as others see us! as Robbie Burns declared. But I was not pleased with what had been revealed. My self-image was badly dented.

Astonishingly, that was the moment of dawning recognition of how hurt I was about the absence of a father in my life, along with the pain of rejection by my foster-mother. When, in a group, others didn't seem to agree with a view I expressed it really upset me; I felt they were all against me, and the familiar feeling of rejection would overwhelm me.

I didn't understand that they could disagree with what I had to say but that didn't mean they rejected *me*. As indicated in chapter one, I found some solace in Melanie Klein's, *Love, Hate & Reparation* (1937):

> *This feeling arises from the unconscious fear of being incapable of loving others sufficiently or truly, and particularly of not being able to master the aggressive impulses towards others: the dread of being a danger to the loved one.*

That really summed up my situation. I didn't want another episode such as when I pummelled my mother in Boston, but I did fear that I might lose control again if under attack from critical people, especially a woman.

October '74

> *I wish I belonged to a tribe. That's what seems missing in society. Men are often rootless, having moved about so much; don't seem to belong anywhere particular… a lack of attachment… That's why it felt so good to be in MRA in my twenties. I clearly recall the confidence and solidarity I felt… I belonged to a close-knit and supportive group who were really interested, kind and loving – and challenging!*
>
> *When I left at 30 there was a cold wind. I looked around for girlfriends, and had numerous rather superficial relationships…*

Love the bad bits as well as the good in a person; i.e. accept all *of a person, the unappealing parts as well as the attractive side. Instead of looking for perfection, and being constantly disappointed and 'let down', learn to accept all of a person. Practise on your Mum, who now presents her good side in great measure.*

December '74

The day of the Wolf – my assessment at Oxted CGC. I didn't feel so flattened as I'd expected – but now I'm feeling low and unloved, wishing I had someone to hold me and hug me and listen to me – like a lovely wife.

January '75

…Today a good day. In tutorial with Wolf I broached the matter of my anger brewing up in M.C.'s seminar these last 2-3 weeks – and getting so self-pitiful and resentful against the group for no apparent reason. We've been talking about childhood, and M has been asking what we can remember of ours, in relation to play, school, separation, death, etc… I found I was in touch with feelings I thought I'd dealt with over 20 years ago – of anger, bitterness and rage… And Wolf suggested that the group might have taken on the mantle of 'Mother'. That made sense to me, and I was able to feel so much freer when we met again.

On my 45th birthday I wrote:

The greatest gift I would ask is to be free of the craving for sensual satisfaction – or, more positively, to channel that energy into constructive channels. To be free of conflict, to take the brakes off, to go all out for what I believe – to be a whole person, to be sure of myself, to be loved - to be a lover.

Theodore Lidz, in his book *The Person,* wrote:

Dignity, perhaps shaded by resignation, protects an individual from despair. When he is not caught up in

efforts to undo or redo, or to search after what has been missed in earlier years, or in wallowing in self-pity, he can find the benefits that come with dignity.'

And C S Lewis said on Radio 4:

Don't look for comfort, look for truth. If you look for truth, you may find comfort. If you look for comfort, you won't find either truth or comfort!

At the end of my course I had to face re-entry into the Crawley scene. But I didn't want to just go back to routine social work. I had heard that the local hospital had finally decided to employ a psychiatric social worker, and I had applied for the job. I knew how much such a post was needed, and I felt I could make a worthwhile contribution in a neglected field. But on arriving back in the office, I discovered that the post was cancelled, due to lack of funding – and I was crestfallen. I was put into the duty team, dealing with new cases as they came up that day, then passing them on to the respective area teams. So I couldn't get my teeth into long-term casework, and I felt frustrated. But an envelope turned up on my desk that was to change everything.

17

Frustrated Proposals

THE ENVELOPE was from the deputy director. Would I be willing to start a staff magazine? He had heard from George Usher (who had joined the department as a peripatetic relief manager of residential care homes for the elderly) that I had experience in publishing. West Sussex Social Services Department had 2,500 staff scattered in 125 locations, and they needed a house journal to knit them together – to inform, involve and give them a sense of identity. They would give me one day a week off my caseload (which predictably never happened!). I jumped at the chance, and produced the first issue for Christmas 1975. Called *The Whistler*, they liked it, and asked me if I would move to the Chichester office to facilitate production each month. I gladly assented – I'd had enough of Crawley.

I looked for a house in Chichester, but too expensive. So I searched for somewhere between there and my mother in Brighton, and hit on Arundel. I finally found a wee cottage that had been an alehouse from the late 1700s, which was just within my price range. But a fortnight before I was due to move, I recorded:

> *I have an underlying feeling of guilt that I shouldn't be leaving this flat, that I've grabbed at the Chichester transfer – that in some way I am going to suffer for my 'selfishness'. A feeling of being in the wrong, which I associate with packing up and leaving London* (for Edinburgh) *which was so traumatic, but right in the end.*

My cottage in Arundel

At the age of 46 it was the first home I'd ever owned. But when I told my girlfriend Gilly on the phone, she was rather miffed that I'd agreed to buy without her having seen it. Yet on New Year's Day 1977 I purred:

I feel 1976 was a good year for me, and 1977 may be even better! In '76 I achieved four major advances:

- a new job, in Chichester, made possible by the Whistler.

- a home of my own

- the first real relationship with the opposite sex

- therapy

Yet I was beset by continual bad dreams. I faithfully woke and recorded them in the hope that they would yield valuable insights into my condition, as to what was driving me, what was at the bottom of my unrest. But no satisfactory interpretations came:

> *Dreams of frustration – trying to get somewhere but failing. Being abroad, or trying to make arrangements to travel, always having forgotten something, feeling bad, stupid – my fault. Always alone.*

I was always waking up with an anxious stomach. I tried to face this anxiety and find the cause – what I fear to do, or what might happen. Or was it just 'free-floating' anxiety, a permanent condition? A lot of my energy was going into the ups and downs of my relationship with Gilly. 'The unneces-

sary exhaustion of uncertainty' as Peter Ustinov said in his autobiography, *Dear Me.*

Gilly suggested a holiday that June in America, to join her brother and his wife at their daughter's wedding. It went well, but in my diary a fortnight afterwards I wrote:

> *Am I procrastinating or should I take the plunge and propose? Or do I want to look around for another girl? Partly she kills initiative in me because she is so efficient; I fear I can't keep up with her. Feel I'd have to get her approval for everything I planned – but that's not true, she's not Mrs P.*

In July her parents came down to Arundel for a weekend; I felt pressure to decide. I pictured her father asking, 'What are your intentions, young man?' A week later I woke early with this thought:

> *You are pretending to a depth of feeling that you haven't got. Yet act as if you had love, could love, and did love… Could you quite easily do without G? I feel I've tagged along and followed her initiative and been glad to – and done a lot of things I wouldn't otherwise have bothered with. My w/ends would have been more desolate without her, and I would lack a sense of direction & purpose which I now have – a feeling of growing towards an ultimate goal.*

A fortnight later I dreamt that Gilly was offered a job in America, and that this decided me – I would definitely propose and go with her. I felt such relief that I cried and cried. Yet this certainty did not reach into daily reality:

> *I lack the courage to take initiative. It's this that probably affronts and worries G. Has she got to be the continual pusher – whose own performance is thus impaired?*
>
> *You've got to take risks, do what you believe in, not wait for permission – from Ma, Gilly, boss or anyone*

Gilly was a director of the British Standards Institute

else. I still delay doing anything until I've sat down and meditated upon it, thereby killing spontaneity, and my sense of judgment.

There follow four pages about Gilly, struggling to sort out my real feelings and fears.

I'm scared of what G. might have done as a result of my damp squib of a letter… am I repaired enough to risk making a go of this relationship? Could I propose…? Much as I try I don't seem to love G. Can I risk being married to someone I don't love?

Then I dreamt I was pregnant, and going to have a baby! But come the due date, nothing appeared. But my girlfriend, or at least *a* girlfriend, was also pregnant…

Later, when Gilly told me hesitantly at breakfast one morning that she may possibly be pregnant, my immediate

reaction was to blurt out, 'Then I'll marry you!' (But she later found she wasn't).

> *Gilly has made me a* man. *For that I'm eternally grateful. What is the future for us? I'm saying one thing with my mouth, feeling another inside. I don't want to leave here* (Arundel) *and I don't want children. G does… I feel I have to wean from G – to separate, to establish my own identity… But I'm in an orgy of self-concern…*

Evidently I wrote to Gilly breaking off our relationship. In January 1978 I recorded:

At Glyndebourne

> *What a lovely generous letter from G. Makes me feel so much better – so relieved that she's not blazing with anger and bitterness – that there's genuine love there, the love that can let me go – without blaming me. I'm amazed at how it's possible to be so nice to each other when we've just decided to part – to reject each other. It's the nicest rejection I've ever had – and perhaps can demonstrate that rejection can be creative, and right and proper – i.e. to say 'no' is not necessarily negative, that it doesn't mean that I don't like you but that it's not right at this time.*

In March my therapist said I should congratulate myself on how prudent and wise I was not to marry, rather than

flagellate myself for being a coward. To raise my self-esteem was vital. In view of my history and background I may have done the right thing not to marry, but I should find out what I *do* want – what feels right for me – not just society's expectations.

A month later I was writing:

Awoke early, feeling flat and dejected, even tho I've got a day (Saturday) *to myself, and no great pressure. But I feel on edge, as if electricity was pulsing through me… Still feel extremely lonely and at a loose end without Gilly.*

April '78

Gilly does *matter to me – that's the feeling I must communicate to her – that I haven't just dropped her from my life. But I'm so hot and cold, so inconsistent; she's got nothing to rely on,*

So I sent her a card for her 40th birthday,:

This brings all my heartfelt good wishes for an anniversary that is not without its misgivings for you, I know – but I've resisted the impulse to send you a bottle of Phyllosan (which 'fortified the over-Forties'). *Oh, how often I think of you, and long to know how you are…* But what followed, to my deepest shame, were actually *three* proposals over a period of two years - and three acceptances - and three withdrawals on my part. I can hardly bear to write about the trauma… not least for Gilly.

Despite my therapist's best efforts, she never uncovered the real reason for my waking up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat after each proposal, feeling a choking stranglehold around my throat. It was the fear of being overwhelmed, smothered and humiliated in a row if I ever let myself get into the hands of a woman through the commitment of marriage…

18

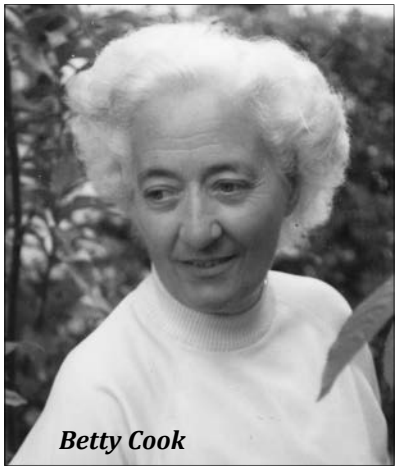
Publishing Success

LIVING IN medieval Arundel and working in the Roman city of Chichester was possibly a combination unbeatable anywhere. Eleven miles to drive in along tree-lined roads, with the sun behind me, and the same time to unwind on my return, again with no evening sun in my eyes. I was so lucky. But more was in store. Because the *Whistler* was so successful, George Usher came to me one day asking if I would make a brochure for the care home he was running at the time. Social workers had been asking him for something they could give their elderly clients and relatives to show what sort of home was available when the need to find residential care arose, even though vacancies were so rare. But they were entitled to know, he said, especially when their doctors were urging them to make the move – something many of them dreaded; the old fear of the workhouse still lingered.

At that time we had 36 homes for the elderly, plus other centres - for children, and adults with mental and physical disabilities. It became abundantly clear that they all needed brochures, and I asked to go half-time to cope with the work. My request was eventually granted, so I'd work in the Resources team in the local office in

the mornings and walk the half mile to County Hall in the afternoons.

Meanwhile *The Whistler* grew in popularity and size. I enlisted a group of 'WAR correspondents' – Whistler Area Reporters – who met with me each month to plot and plan the next edition. At one meeting I appealed for help, as the actual layout and paste-up for the printer was eating right into my weekends. A hospital social worker who was due to retire responded, and as her father had been 'in the print' she understood much of the jargon and was familiar with layouts and pasting up. Moreover, she had a flat halfway between County Hall and the local office, and after she retired was able to type up much of the copy that came in handwritten (long before computers) so I could call in and collect her efforts and take them straight to the typesetters in the printing department.



Betty Cook

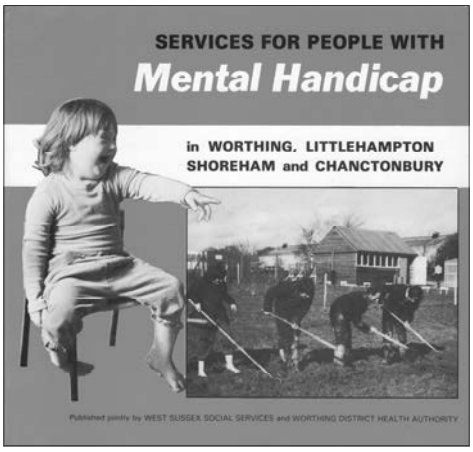
Her name was Betty Cook, and she became a valued friend. She had contracted polio in France at the age of 16, in August 1939. She was taken to Marseilles isolation fever hospital, and while there a group of nuns visited her. They asked if they could pray for her. Betty shrugged, and said OK, not having much faith herself at that point. In September, war was declared. In November, her parents managed somehow to reach her, flying out in an ambulance plane, low to avoid enemy fire.

Betty told me afterwards that though she was not healed of the disease, she *was* healed of the bitterness that could

have emanated from it. She said it had never bugged her, and I could tell that from her calm and positive demeanour.

She helped with proof-reading, cutting up the galleys of typeset copy and assisting with the paste-up, and finding illustrations and photos. It was not long before I was able to stay overnight on a camp bed on a Saturday and start at 7 am next morning on the final paste-up, getting it finished by 10 or 11 pm that night. On the Monday morning I would use her lounge floor to lay out the pages of the magazine, and ask the deputy director to pop over and cast his eye over everything before it went to press, which he was happy to do. It was always a race against time to meet the deadlines!

More and more requests for publications came my way. A senior social worker presented me with a pilot copy of a manual he had prepared for parents of children born with a mental disability, which he had compiled knowing how shocked and helpless they often felt, and how little information and aid was available to them. I was delighted to help, feeling that this was publishing that was really needed, as opposed to the overloading of the educational market that I'd sweated blood on before. My revised version of his manual got good reviews in the social-work press, and was used by some other local authorities as a basis for their own guides.



The same occurred with a guidebook for people with poor sight. It won a commendation from the Clear English

said, alas, of all the papers which reach my desk."

In 1979 the BAIE (British Association of Industrial Editors) evaluated *The Whistler* for its annual awards. "To produce such a wealth of information in an attractive and readable format on what is obviously a small-size shoestring is more than commendable . . . Information, participation — they're all here, plus warmth and humour. The impression is of enormous activity, much interest and an overwhelming sense of what is going on in the field."

A social worker told me how he took his copy on holiday to read in bed before he went to sleep that night (a devotion his wife may *not* have appreciated).

John Brown, in a review of house journals in *Community Care*, complimented us on generating comment in "a particularly lively and, at times, controversial letters column. *The Whistler* includes, edition-by-edition, more named staff contributions that most. Part of its success may be due to the back-up editorial or reporting team, where each district has a named representative to feed in news and generate articles".

Later that year *The Whistler* won *Community Care's* competition for the best house journal in social services. In a press release, our director stated: "*The Whistler* has been tremendously useful y giving such a large department a regular link with the people working in it, giving them an opportunity to air their views, even critical ones, which helps stimulate ideas".

Those were the highpoints but what about the low points? Censorship can be a problem. obviously an editor needs to check his "copy" with the director or the person he has designated

deputy — editors in commercial organisations usually have what they call a vetting director. With the best will in the world, the editor can boob — I was about to print an article on a home but was asked to hold it back. Shortly afterwards the announcement was made of its intended closure.

But with mutual trust the balance can be struck. Only on two occasions have critical letters been stopped, only to appear in the following issue after fruitful discussion with the authors. Then there was the time when the printers were too busy to set the type, and we had to typewrite the whole issue. On another occasion I was off sick and the deputy director was up to his eyes in galley proofs and "Cow Gum", piecing the issue together with our volunteer.

Space does not permit a full discourse on all aspects of producing a hourse journal. If readers would like to know more perhaps a study day could be arranged, such as *Community Care* ran a few years ago with the York Group before its sad demise. I would be happy to collect names of people interested in such a venture.

May I end with one more accolade — from the present chairman of our committee in our 10th anniversary issue? "In human as well as geographical terms the social services committee covers perhaps the widest field of all the county council committees. In spite of all our modern skills, our computers, telephones, direct lines and the vast ebb and flow of paper in an out of county hall, the problem of keeping so many diverse elements in touch remains.

"In this respect we owe a debt of gratitude to those who regularly produce the lively, readable and informative pages of *The Whistler* in helping to keep those vital links of communication alive. I hope we shall continue to enjoy many more issues in the years ahead."□

John Munro is a social worker, West Sussex, and editor of The Whistler

A page from 'Community Care' describing the benefits of a house journal where staff are scattered far and wide

Campaign, and when Kent took it up it actually earned royalties for W. Sussex! I was particularly pleased to publish a handbook for foster parents that had been so sensitively written by a social worker specialising in that field. Another book that was a great success with our own staff was the atlas of maps and photos of all the 125 different establishments, showing clearly how to locate them by road. Staff often found great difficulty in getting to these places, consequently arriving late for meetings.

Eventually I became overwhelmed with work. I just couldn't keep up. The needs of clients to know what services were available grew; previously, because resources were so slim the department had not always been willing to publicise what they were entitled to know - rationing by ignorance. Then I read in the papers about Community Programmes, a government scheme to get long-term unemployed people back to work. With the unexpected but greatly appreciated agreement of the deputy director I applied, and was asked by the scheme if I could take ten people! Oh no, I had only one desk. But there was one proviso – I would have to be full-time, to supervise properly. After intense discussion with my boss, I was finally allowed to become their full-time Publications Officer.

Eventually I negotiated to take three people – two artists and a part-time secretary (all paid for by the government). I found a drawing board for Patsy, one of the artists, and fitted four small desks together in the middle of our open-plan office for the others to sit around, with me. It was not always easy to concentrate, with all the noise and phone conversations going on around us, and later we moved to separate accommodation as a Publications Unit.

We became busier and busier. We were a merry bunch; the programme was designed to help people who'd been unemployed for over a year to get back to work, but they could only stay for a maximum of twelve months. This was

to be a stepping stone to a 'proper' job. I ran it for 3½ years, and in that time I was able to take ten people off the dole queue. It was quite a task training them up to the work, but that brought out the teacher in me! One man was a refugee from Laos, a fine artist who had illustrated National Trust books with his exquisite line drawings of stately homes. He gave me a print of his drawing of his escape across the Mekong River by moonlight with his young wife and baby – a haunting reminder of the suffering and bravery of thousands in that war. Another man, a couple of years older than me, was a journalist who had worked for *The Times.* Patsy turned out to be 'mother' of our unit, and proved so useful I was able to get an extension for her after her year was up; she produced posters to help find foster parents (whom I regarded as the saintliest people in the profession) and could come up with illustrations in great variety.

Meanwhile *The Whistler* won an award from *Community Care* magazine as the best house journal in the country, and that emboldened me to run a workshop at County Hall on producing house journals, which attracted staff from countrywide local authorities. This led on to the formation of SSIN, the Social Services Information Network, which offered professional help to inexperienced staff in County Halls in producing literature for the public, and for their own workers. I was in my element, feeling that this was really needed, and that I was in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time.

This conviction was reinforced when, in 1986, *Social Work Today*, the journal of the British Association of Social Workers, awarded our Publications Unit second prize 'for the most positive contribution to the development of the Social Work Profession in the category of Management'. I was invited to their annual conference that year in Cardiff to set up my stall of publications, and receive the prize.

* * *

The Chairman of BASW made the award to our Publications Unit

A new director was appointed, and the deputy left for a director's post elsewhere. So I lost my mentor's support, and the trust he had in my running of the unit. I now had to submit the final proof of *The Whistler* each time to the new director for his approval. He would sometimes alter or veto articles, and thus delay distribution. I was always working against the clock; any magazine needs to be topical.

Tension built up between us. My unit was moved to premises away from the main building, rather isolated. By then the Community Programme had ended, so I lost my staff but I was able to retain one member as a salaried assistant - Peter Cooke, a 26-year-old graphic designer from Manchester who had shown remarkable talent. Our efforts to obtain a computer were fruitless, despite the fact that several had been installed in the admin and finance departments. But Peter became proficient in pasting-up, with a high degree of professionalism. But he didn't have a particular flair for writing copy and compiling brochures; his major skill was in design and layout. So we made a great team. Frank Buchman once said that the art of leadership is to train ten men to do your job better than you could do it yourself. Well, at least I'd trained one, and when I finally retired he raised the standard of *The Whistler* to even greater heights!

19

Prevarication and Self-Reflection

THERE'S NO doubt that living alone can make one introspective and self-concerned. I definitely lacked a buddy I could talk things over with, and get a better perspective. I did talk with my mother, but to a limited extent; affairs of the heart were difficult to divulge. So my diary/journal became my 'confidante'.

August '78

Being scared of being alone goes back to feeling abandoned as a baby, and may account for why I feel so much better when I've got someone with me - anyone. Yet I don't welcome their restrictive influence; I feel I've got to dance attendance on them, try to please them – like being with Mrs P. I couldn't be myself - I had to please/placate her. It's now difficult to find out what I want to be or do, for fear of being criticised.

September '78

After praying for healing of my hate for women, almost at once I dreamt I was near a group of beautiful girls and I wanted to embrace them – as if sexual attraction returned, as my hate was healed... This sense of unease and depression comes most strongly when I think I've missed something that I ought to have had – disobeyed the plan of God, or missed a chance.

November '78

A night of anxiety in anticipation of a day with G. What a travesty of what should be!

Next day, having *not* proposed to Gilly as she had clearly expected, I wrote:

> *Anxiety at loss of G, feeling that I missed what should have been. The panic of loneliness has replaced the panic of feeling trapped. Catch 22 – whichever way I jump I lose… My therapist said it's common for people with a bad start in life to seek perfection: it always seems just around the corner. 'The reason I'm trying to be so perfect is to suppress my angry feelings and rage, which I'm not in touch with.'*
>
> April-May '79
>
> *Still labouring under a guilty feeling that I should have married Gilly – that I'm a coward and funked it. … I'm so bloody fed up with getting nowhere 'cos I'm shilly-shallying… angry with life for being such a strain, never a feeling of enjoyment… always chores to do, letters to write,* Whistler *or work to do. So bloody anxious to get things right. I take too long, and then they're wrong, cos they're late! No damned spontaneity.*

I, who never write poetry, wrote:

> *Uncrease the crinkled brain*
> *Of all the tired resentment*
> *That causes so much strain*
> *And deprives us of contentment.*

And then it seemed clear that I should propose to Gilly again - but retracted yet again. I can't bear to think about it – it fills me with shame. In July '79 (incidentally on Mrs P's birthday) I recorded:

> *Lord, I do feel bad again, for having brought Gilly to the point of saying yes, and then dashing her hopes again. Almost as if I do it deliberately in revenge, out of spite, to get my own back – as if it was Mrs P or Ma. And the terror of being trapped, of having to please her, putting on a pretence of love I do not feel… isn't that a transfer*

as well? The great empty feeling when G left – my sadness – yet relief. Am I just a coward, seeking to escape, or is it something over which I have no control? The best therapist is an understanding wife, and you've just passed up that opportunity. You need lots of reassurance, and G could have given it – she was marvellous – but as she said, it might have been an endless task – and thankless, too?

Then always there were moments too of acceptance and quiet resolution:

September '80

I surrender the hate and hurt of not having a father help bring me up – the colossal resentment of missing out on what a normal boy has… I claim and accept forgiveness for the hate and resentment, and healing from the hurt, from God through the agency of Christ, the propitiation for all our sins.

* * *

Back in January 1981 life had changed at the office. My request to work half time on publications had been granted. So every afternoon, often stopping off at Betty's flat to have my sandwiches and pick up typing from her, I went over to County Hall to a desk in the Monitoring & Development section – to tackle the growing requests for brochures and manuals. I was in my element. But still nagging away at my conscience was my philandering with Gilly – and now also Betty.

April '81

What do I really feel about Gilly now? I feel like a man who can't commit himself, a failure, a fraud – someone who is constantly arousing her expectations and then disappointing them. A rotten swine…now the time has come to choose.

Where and what is her future? What is right in thy

sight? Can I let this relationship just wither and die? Can we keep it up as friends… can we marry? The more you remain on your own, the more set you become. With Betty now you are much more involved, yet not in love, but dependent on her comradeship and care and concern, and her love for me – the unquestioning, accepting love she gives me is vital.

* * *

Three years on and I was still repining. Still uncertain, still fretting. I'm so ashamed I don't want to write about it, yet the tale must be told. We continued to be in touch occasionally.

February '84

Face the fact that my love for Gilly seems to have gone cold – or tailed off. It doesn't seem to matter so much if I don't hear from her… Running with the hounds and with the hare is exhausting and divisive – I've got to choose – can't string along with two, three or four women at a time. Clearly G knows I won't marry her – yet I harbour secret hopes that one day I will – when Betty's gone… but that's ridiculous.

A new therapist I'd chosen to see said I expected too much of myself. 'You can't give what you haven't got from your bank of affection. With your history it's very unlikely you will fall in love, so forget it. Come to terms with what you are – accept that, and make a pragmatic partnership – comfortable companionship. Don't feel guilty about Gilly; she too was free to marry someone else – but she has her own problems.'

In a book by Joan Grant and Denys Kelsey, *Many Lifetimes,* I found a most helpful and revealing new thought:

From infancy, most of us are deprived of the identification provided by skin-to-skin contact… very few children have the natural solace of being caressed in mutual nakedness even by their parents: so it is not

surprising that they grow up with such a pressure of unsatisfied longing that they try to assuage it during adolescence by premature and pitifully ineffectual sexual experiments. Ineffectual because ***it is not sex they really crave; it is the physical affection that is their right.***

Try not touching your dog… he will be at first bewildered, and then presuming that you are angry with him, he will produce symptoms of guilt. Continue for a day, and the dog, according to his character, will either mope, or whine, or snarl at you, or run away. By failing to give our children the comfort and reassurance that we still give to our animals we cause them to follow the same pattern of reactions.

This showed me how desperately I missed the cuddles and hugs in babyhood and later – just being held. It suggested the reason why I long to hold and caress a youngster – to meet my unconscious need.

May '85

I wonder if my 'need' to have several girlfriends is derived from early childhood where I was attached to no particular mother figure, but had two or three – multiple nurses in New York, Mrs P and her step-sister Auntie Ella, my own mother, Mrs Salinger and Mrs Heath at Folkestone, etc.

Today the director apologised to me, for y'day. I was so delighted I shook him warmly by the hand – and told him how upset I'd been, deflated, with loyalty shaken. He looked at me keenly, said he'd nearly rung me last night… I was so pleased I almost wept.

November '85

I bemoan my inability to love – or receive it – yet I do more of each than I realise. It's just that I hate being committed. Yet without commitment love is just dilet-

tante – dancing here and there. It's not tied in with the pain of love, of caring, of coping, when things go wrong. I fear I'd feel throttled – swamped, strangled, saturated – yet fear is faithless. .

July '86

I do not feel a happy man. I am not at peace when I ought to be. I have so many reasons to be satisfied: a home, job, friends, family, health, hobbies and money… But the real thing that bugs me is my relationship with Gilly – the on-off, hot-cold, will I/won't I attitude. Surely I must decide one way or another – cut clear or go in close. If I had to toss a coin, it would be to cut loose. But to lose the closest relationship I've ever had seems daft. Yet Betty's is probably the closest now – for sheer frequency of contact and the way we work together.

And then a two-year gap…

September '88

I proposed to Gilly at Hartley Whitney…! I was on a long walk with her two best friends, and finally, with a dry throat, I got out the words. Though clearly Gilly was not impressed with the lack of gallantry in my proposal, she did accept.

That night I went to bed in turmoil: At 3.15 am*:* I wrote what I believed to be the word of the Lord:

Until you obey, I can't act. Now you have obeyed, and taken the plunge, made the commitment, I will give you the love you need to make the marriage work. Have no fear, God is here!

Sadly I didn't rely on those words when, assailed by panic, I awoke at 6.15. But I was OK when Gilly rang at 7.15 – yet when she asked me how I was feeling it did seem a heaven-sent opportunity to express my doubts, to get out of it. And although I didn't say so in as many words, that is the impression I left with her, that I was *again* retracting, for the third

time. It was almost unendurable, for both of us. *She must be hopping mad,* I wrote – and she was!

> *O Father, am I snatching at marriage? Fear is a good servant but a bad master… I can think of several reasons why I should not proceed – but am I up against unconscious forces of which I am unaware and therefore powerless to prevent?... my inclination now is to call the whole thing off - finally and irrevocably. Yet that seems so negative – yet does leave me with Betty – or possibly Christine as well – or with going into a community. Or just staying as I am…*
>
> *[…] Why don't you face the fact that Betty is the one person who loves you at the moment – and that she is who you should be committed to – and let Gilly and Christine and whoever drift out of your line of sight. You should be jolly grateful that you* are *loved – incredible that you should spurn it or discount it so readily. That is sin – not recognising it or accepting the gift completely.*
>
> (After seeing Michael, my vicar) *He thinks I was too honest, in a sense, with G in expressing my doubts. Share them with God (as I did – see my entry for Tues 3.15am!) and He answered them mightily. Diana thinks I did right – and should wait a while and see who else turns up. My therapist was sorry I'd broken up, and feels it v important that I am not alone in retirement. Clearly felt that I could have made a go of it with G, though recognises that I felt I couldn't compete equally, and wasn't equal to the demands she might make. Thinks my lack of commitment may stem partly from my father's lack of commitment (if he ever knew of my existence, which I strongly doubt). And two unsatisfactory mothers.*
>
> *[…] As I drove away on Sunday from Gilly I felt a despair and misery – that I wasn't going to see her again – that the old familiarity and comfortableness together was gone, that our love for each other had dried up.*

I didn't realise how much there was until I had voluntarily turned it off – by abdicating from the relationship, saying don't bother with me, I'm not good enough, I can't make a good enough attachment. That's just it – perhaps it was *good enough for you, and I didn't let you say yea or nay.*

January '89

I'm reading Anthony Storr's Art of Psychotherapy*:*

'People who are unconscious of how aggressive they are, are often over-critical, too severe with their children, and make hurtful asides or denigratory jokes… Jung said: 'Good advice is often a doubtful remedy but generally not dangerous since it has so little effect.'

People who have been over-dominated… may rationalise their lack of initiative as consideration for others' opinions when… they are still behaving like frightened children.'

Yes, again and again I catch myself behaving as a child – fearful, submissive, or angry and rebellious, hurt or sulky or resentful. At work, especially after a bad session with the director. Because I'm so used to having my opinions and wishes ignored, I tend to put them too strongly, with emotive phraseology, because I don't expect them to be taken notice of otherwise. But I've learned that adult expression is more effective.

Grow up – that's the point of this therapy. To get out of childish ways, get free of childish fears – to realise I can take charge… The biggest reason for failing to marry is lack of trust – that I couldn't really trust Gilly not to hurt me, as we'd never rowed – and I didn't know how she was likely to react in anger… I knew the best in her, but not the worst, so couldn't love just in case. She's never seen me lose control, nor vice versa.

September '89

For a whole year you've been trying to force yourself

to make a marriage commitment… dithering on the edge, unable to pluck up courage to take the plunge… This year has been a dreary one, lacking in point and purpose, as I come up to the possibility of retirement.

October '89

Gilly said, 'Why don't you stop trying to marry me, and practise being good friends instead?' That gets me off the hook – is a great relief. I came home quite happy… without too much guilt or recrimination.

* * *

After this atrocious and appalling saga I think I found the cause of all my trouble(!)—in the shape of Dr Truby King. He was the child care guru of the Twenties and Thirties. I found this quote on Google from an article by Sebastian Kraemer, Consultant Child Psychiatrist, published in the *International Journal of Child and Family Welfare* in 1999*:*

The most influential expert of those days was ***Dr Frederic Truby King****, originally based in New Zealand, who launched a successful movement to convert mothers to breast feeding. Besides this laudable aim, almost everything else he preached was quite horrific. The key to the Truby King method was to feed your baby by the clock every four hours and never at night. If you gave in to him he would become spoiled and spineless and, by implication, no use as a soldier when he grew up. To toughen them up, babies were to spend much of the day on their own outside in the fresh air, and should not be cuddled or comforted even when in distress. Mothers were not encouraged to play with babies, because it would excite them too much. Fathers had no role except earning money.*

The nurses at the maternity hospital, and at the Junior League where my mother took me afterwards were clearly following his strictures. Evidently the total lack of bonding—and love—in my first six months must have done irreparable harm.

20

Retirement but no Let-Up

I HADN'T INTENDED to retire at 60. But at a party I got chatting with a doctor, and asked his advice on when I should retire. He pointed out that the highest death-rate occurred for men in the year following retirement at 65.

So as I approached 60 I explored the idea of going half time for two or three years; I thought it would be a good way of training up a replacement for me. The new director wouldn't hear of it. He and I didn't always get on. Whilst he was marvellous with money (he'd raised our budget against all prophecies) he was, in my opinion, poor with people. He was so competent in so many ways that he seemed to be contemptuous of those of lesser abilities. If you didn't have a degree I suspect he didn't rate you. One day he said to me, thinking he'd caught me out:

'Why are you wearing an Oxford University tie?'

'It's an Oxford University Press tie. I used to work there,' I replied.

'Oh,' he mumbled.

People went in fear of him, and many felt bullied. I now had to submit the finished proof of *The Whistler* to him every time, to await his approval – and sometimes that took days. The level of trust that I'd previously enjoyed had evaporated. I got so frustrated, leaving messages with his secretary, hoping for an answer. I felt humiliated at the offhand way he treated me. Things seemed to come to a head when I presented the Christmas edition in 1989. Time was short for it to be distributed all over the county before the holiday, and it was a bumper issue – one of the best I'd ever done.

For no apparent reason he just wouldn't look at it for several days. I felt he regarded my work as unimportant. I was so angry I wanted to institute what was called a 'grievance procedure' against him. I actually discussed this with the personnel director, who was very understanding of the problem. She'd come across it before; one Area Director had done that, she warned me, but whereas the director had cleared his desk for a week to concentrate on preparing for the tribunal, this person had been unable to give much time – running a very busy office – and had lost the case, and left her job.

One evening I was attending our fortnightly Bible-study 'house group'. As we sipped our coffee at the end of the meeting, the person sitting next to me asked,

'How are you getting on with your director?'

'Oh, I could kill him!' I shot back.

The room suddenly went quiet. They'd heard about my woes at work before.

'Would you like to talk about it?' asked Andy, our host, gently.

So I explained how furious I was getting over being constantly ignored. I felt full of hate at being humiliated and devalued. In the end Andy said he would like to pray for me – was that OK? I shrugged – well, it couldn't do any harm.

As three of the group prayed, one after another, I felt a change coming over me. The anger seemed to melt away, and I found I actually wanted to care for that man, not hate him. A compassion filled my heart in an inexplicable way – I can't describe it. Tears flowed; my whole attitude towards him shifted.

I went to work next day a changed man. I was no longer his victim, but an equal – concerned for him and his problems. I abandoned any idea of taking action against him; instead the difference in my demeanour seemed to trigger a more respectful response from him, and *The Whistler*

emerged from his office in time for Christmas.

The following March all arrangements for my retirement were in place, and a party was held at one of our new day centres in Bognor. To my surprise the director came and made an eloquent speech, and also wrote a warm appreciation in the following issue of the magazine. So what might have been a most acrimonious departure, full of bitterness and unresolved rancour, turned out well.

* * *

I'd heard the advice offered to people planning retirement: that you should not make any commitments for at least a year, to give you space before agreeing to join this committee or take on that responsibility, etc. But somehow I was already embroiled in several activities, and really, I'm not sure I ever did retire!

But in my 'need to be needed' I've often taken on more than I should, wanting to please and gain approval. I quote from my daily reading:

> *PACE YOURSELF: Too many of us are like the man who said, 'When I rest, I rust.' Here's a newsflash* – there will always be something else to do! *If you're constantly driven by 'what needs to be done', you'll burn out and fail to do what God has assigned you to do.*

On the first day, proper, of my retirement, in June 1990, I wrote:

> *Extraordinary feeling of being allowed to do nothing – of having earned the right not to work any more = after 45 years. A goal which many strive for all their lives, and some never achieve, becos they die too early or too soon after retirement. So I intend to enjoy it, even tho' it means making lots of decisions (not my favourite thing!) on how to spend my time.*
>
> August '90
>
> *Highlight of day was when phoning Cora (*God-

daughter in USA*) she told me how the night before my letter had arrived she'd sat down and worked out how much she needed to pay her debts - $917. When my unexpected cheque for $900 dropped out she'd cried out, 'Oh my God!'*

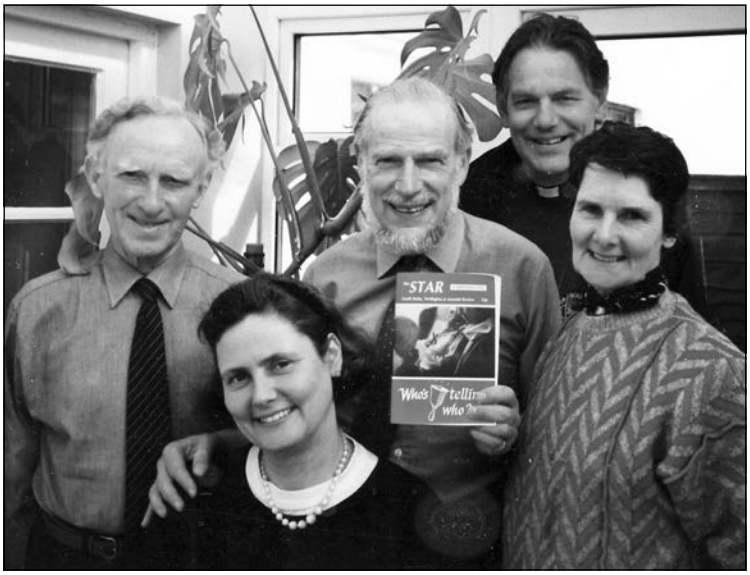
* * *

Around the age of 78 I was feeling overburdened by a long list of jobs and involvements waiting to be done—eighteen years after retiring! I counted 24 – a backlog that weighed heavily on me, dragging me down and defeating me. I told my friends John and Jeanne when they came to tea one afternoon; we had a time of quiet, and he wrote down: 'John will have a heart attack…'

Next morning I decided to cut out five activities; painful, but necessary. I gave up singing with *Sounds Sacred,* a group that performed concerts of words and music, which I enjoyed. But never having mastered sight-reading (despite taking a weekend course) I was finding learning the bass lines in our works harder and harder. If I'd had a piano and could play (like many of the choir did) I could have kept up. I really regret not having learnt the piano.

One of my regular commitments was editing the monthly parish magazine. I'd done a spell five years earlier, whilst working, then handed it on. But shortly after I retired the then editor moved away, and it seemed right to take on the job again. It was a bit of a 'busman's holiday' whilst I was working, but I felt it was a calling I could not refuse – and a privilege, too. Besides, I enjoyed it – another magazine to create!

We renamed it *The Star* - **S**outh S**t**oke & **A**rundel **R**eview - and increased it from eight pages to 20, with a different cover each month. I formed a Communications Committee which met each month to plan the next edition, either in my cottage or preferably in our secretary Stella Goren's home – because her coffee and cookies were the best! - to go



'The Star' s editorial team, with Stella in front, and our vicar, Michael, at the rear

through the contributions which had arrived.

Latterly we were printing between 300-400 copies a month, at 25p. Half were distributed to subscribers around the town by a dozen good souls, who also collected the cash. The new parish secretary, Jenny, did the typing and her husband printed it by litho, a tremendous improvement. We did the paste-up together, and were able to use many more pictures. It won the *West Sussex Gazette* annual parish magazine competition in 1992, and also the Diocesan competition in 1993. The following year I was asked to be a judge. And I organised a lively day workshop for parish mag editors in the Deanery.

* * *

One morning I had a treacherous thought. 'All this effort to reach just a small number of converted people - the elite

writing for the elite. Is this how God really wants us to use our talents?' Arundel had a population of about 3,500, and two other churches - the Roman Catholic cathedral and a Baptist church. What about a joint magazine for all three churches? More than that, a *town* magazine that could go to every home and business free, and not just the privileged few.

I aired these thoughts in 1991. I talked with David Clifton, the editor of the cathedral's monthly magazine, but he didn't feel the time was ripe. Two years later, a Lee Abbey mission arrived in the town, and together we produced a programme brochure, *Tell Arundel,* that went to every home. This was compiled and edited by me and our churchwarden, Joe Hayes, in his home, as he had just retired and had a computer. He typeset it all, and we included the twenty adverts from the *Star.*

A year later the thought returned. This time the editor of the cathedral's magazine said his magazine 'needed either the kiss of life or a coffin!' St Nicholas Church parish council gamely agreed to suspend *The Star* - they had most to lose; the Baptists had no mag at all, only a weekly news-sheet, so were very happy to come on board. So David Clifton agreed as well to work with me to produce a quarterly magazine, one-third of which consisted of church news and views and two-thirds community news and articles. We approached the mayor, who was happy to pay for a page for town council news each issue. The district council wanted to do the same, and to our surprise and delight so did the county council.

Churchwarden Joe

So we set up a start-up team, and got estimates from printers, and Joe worked out cash-flow forecasts. His business acumen and drive ensured that we started on a very sound financial footing - he insisted on selling the advertising space for the whole year in advance. As Arundel has no newspaper, the *Bell* provided local businesses with a wonderful medium, giving saturation coverage. We also set a limit of 20 percent space for adverts, and a maximum size of ¼ page (we often had a small waiting list later). It took nearly a year from that point to launch the first issue for Christmas 1995. Via the Churches Liaison Group we recruited two people from each church to form the editorial committee, which met about four times each issue. Those meetings, held usually in the home of one of the group, Emilie Bruell, were sometimes tests of our determination to be ecumenical, but we felt the Lord usually won in the end.

There was great controversy over the title. I was so sure that it needed to include the word Arundel, but finally we agreed on *The Bell* - short and succinct. We hit on the idea of having our Town Crier on the cover ringing his bell, with the cross of the War Memorial behind him.

As all of us working on *The Bell* were voluntary; we were never in debt. We negotiated with the Post Office to deliver it to every home and business in the town and surrounding villages for about 5p each. We were proud to say that we never missed the deadline for delivering copy to the printer, who in turn almost always delivered on schedule to the Post Office. And Joe prided himself on paying the printer's bill by return of post!

When I came to make an index

Part of 'The Bell's editorial team with the Mayor

of the first five years' issues, I counted 220 articles of a page or more, contributed by 66 authors. Not bad for a local magazine. I managed to resign after six years. I meant to go after five; I'd advertised the fact that I was looking for a successor 18 months in advance, but no one came forward. In the end Joe was the only person who could possibly take it on – even though editing was not his forté, he said. If he hadn't, it would have folded, but he'd already sold the advertising space for a year ahead! He soldiered on for six years, until Marian Webb arrived in town and gamely took it on. It's now 40 pages in full colour, and in its 17th year.

After I relinquished my editorship I received a most heart-warming letter from Eddie Monaghan, who was Mayor of Arundel when we launched in 1995:

September 2000

Dear John,

It has been a pleasure to read back copies of The Bell in their totality, and it is only now that I fully appreciate the variety of subjects covered these past five years—all so well written in an easy and friendly manner.

You have brought us news of interest to the community and the views of the churches in the town—some 180 articles contributed by some 80 people... We as a town are often congratulated for the community spirit we exercise, a spirit which is communicated throughout The Bell. And you, John, are very much one of the architects of our town's appeal.

Furthermore, the three churches work very much in close harmony as the result of your efforts and those of your team. As such, Christianity flourishes, lives and breathes in Arundel.

But publishing wasn't going to let go of me that easily…

21

Finding my Parents within Me

SHORTLY AFTER retiring I was asked by the editor of the *West Sussex Gazette* if I would write an 'Arundel Diary' for the paper each week. I was chuffed at the thought, but it entailed keeping up with the various events that took place in our lively little town. I began attending the weekly town council meetings, and joined the Arundel Society, which kept a watching brief on planning applications and all things to do with the appearance of the town – and it awarded a trophy for the best improvement to the town's environment each year.

The Museum Society held monthly meetings with fine speakers each time; the Agenda 21 group was formed to promote green issues, following the Rio conference, and helped make Arundel the first Fair-Trade town in West Sussex.

Soon after I had arrived in Arundel, I made my way to the Priory Playhouse. The many plays I've been in since were a great joy; also producing their posters and programmes made use of my calligraphy, before I had a computer. In 1980, to celebrate the 600th birthday of our church, Rosemary Hagedorn, a local historian, wrote the epic *Echoing Years*, a marvellous pageant depicting the whole of that era, with over sixty in the cast. It was repeated ten years later, too – Arundel's Oberammergau!

Meanwhile the Drip Action theatre started with Bill Brennan, performing on boats going up-river to South Stoke, a hamlet three miles upstream. The cast were scattered among the passengers; one day I took a friend, who was

quite disconcerted when I suddenly sprang to my feet on my first line. We all disembarked and finished the plays in the fine granary barn belonging to farmer Reg Haydon. We later performed in the town, at the 'White Hart' pub.

Arundel has offered me so many lovely places to paint, and the Art Society met Monday evenings at the Norfolk Centre. Later that clashed with rehearsals of the Arun Choral Society, which I enjoyed for many years. Then I joined *Sounds Sacred,* performing concerts of words and music devised by the Revd Peter Taylor and his wife Sue.

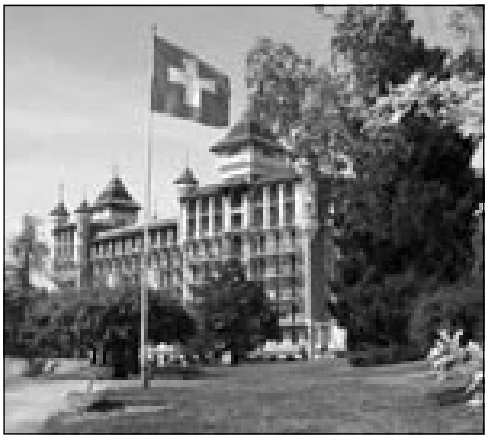
'Men's Breakfasts' on a Saturday morning have been a source of rich fellowship, as have the Bible study groups that met over the years. After retirement, fellowship also came my way via the Probus Club (for retired *Pro*fessional and *Bus*iness people) meeting monthly at the Norfolk Hotel. After coffee we have a speaker, followed by lunch. I became its press officer, then speaker secretary, and later president.

Initiatives of Change (Moral Rearmament's new name) brought me companionship too, in various homes across Sussex. An unexpected joy arrived when an old friend I'd met in MRA in 1953 moved to Arundel in 2003. John Faber had been in the book business, and I soon got involved in publishing several books with him and his wife Jeanne. In fact John had been the friend who drew me back into MRA after I'd had what I called a 'sabbatical' from its activities from about the age of 31 after leaving London for Edinburgh, until I retired.

John & Jeanne with Jemma

Another old friend from the fifties was David Locke, a fellow airman who had also been introduced to MRA by Padre King. He was now running Grosvenor Books, the publishing arm of MRA. He needed help in despatching books, and I arranged to go up to the new London offices in Victoria once a fortnight to assist. This coincided with the monthly national meetings held there, so I gradually got into the mainstream again. To my surprise, John, who had been Secretary of the organisation for some seven years, invited me to join the Association, and that made me feel I'd really been forgiven for my long absence!

* * *



Mountain House, Caux

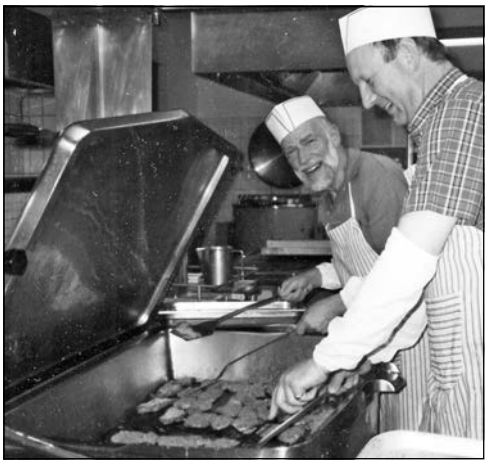
Nestling in the small village of Caux, 3000 ft above Montreux in Switzerland, Mountain House provides an idyllic setting as the international conference centre for Initiatives of Change, with panoramic views of Lake Geneva below. Built in 1898 as a luxury hotel, it closed as WWII approached. During the war it was used as a camp for refugees, and was due to be demolished in 1946. A group of Swiss supporters of MRA clubbed together to buy it, and with amazing determination and sacrifice they got it into a fit shape to open to receive guests for the first world conference that summer.

I had spent a fortnight's holiday there back in 1956 with David Locke, who was then working in an insurance com-

pany. Now, 43 years later I made a return visit – this time to attend a gathering of the ICF (International Communications Forum). The following year, 2000, I went to Sarajevo, where ICF hosted nearly two hundred professionals from all branches of the media in the Hilton Hotel, standing almost undamaged amongst the shelled and pockmarked buildings all around. The conference culminated in producing the 'Sarajevo Commitment' to greet the millennium. It was a bold challenge to all who work in the media to raise ethical standards. One paragraph of this document sticks in my mind particularly:

> *We undertake to apply and demonstrate in our own lives the values that we hope for, and often demand, in others. We shall confront hypocrisy, oppression, exploitation and evil, firstly by our own clarity and straightness, and then through the means by which we reach our audiences. We are unlikely to be perfect, but we shall try to be truthful and free of guile, selfish ambition, perverted behaviour and deception.*

Caux is like a magnet; it draws you to its jewel-like setting, and to the crowds of folk from all over the world whom one can meet, and work and dine with. Costs are kept down by each helping to run the place. One can choose where to contribute – in the cook team, the service team, laying up



Cooking veal escallops at Caux

the tables, washing up or preparing vegetables, or cleaning rooms, arranging the flowers, etc.

A minor miracle for me occurred when I was there in 2005. Lunching one day with a couple of women from Colombia, they told of their work with street kids. I began to choke up, and afterwards we got talking about my childhood, and how much I missed a father. They offered to pray for me. I hesitated for a week, but finally the day before I was due to leave they took me to their Roman Catholic chapel, and sat me in front of the Cross and prayed. After a bit I seemed to see a black tunnel, at the end of which I could dimly make out a figure approaching. I drew back; I recoiled - I didn't want to see him, my father. Then it seemed that Jesus spoke from the Cross: 'My son, if I could die for you, surely you can forgive him?'

I was speechless. The challenge in those words hit home. I wrestled and wriggled on my chair; the hands of my friend were still on my shoulders… and I suddenly felt that I really could forgive.

Something had changed in my heart - and it was a most wonderful moment. I felt a freedom I hadn't had for so long; a burden of resentment melted away (and it paved the way for something that happened a couple of years after). Later I heard the astonishing estimate that of all babies born in the world, over 60 percent may be either unplanned or unwanted. I realised I was just one of about four billion in the same boat! So I felt new confidence that God wanted me, and actually loved me (though that had always been hard to really believe). But I do feel a compassion for youngsters who've been through what I have – to show them they don't have to be imprisoned by their past, but can rise above it and make a difference.

* * *

I was back in Caux two years later, planning to join a media workshop. But it was over-subscribed, so I was

attracted to another, run by a Taiwanese family therapist, on healing the wounds we've been carrying since childhood. At 77 I was by far the oldest in the group, and felt a fraud. But Ren-jou Lui assured me I was right to be there – and it was a revelation.

First we each had to describe our family background, then recollect what hurts and difficulties we'd had in our youth that had gone unheeded or unresolved. That entailed a lot of digging back in my memory, yet as we talked and shared our feelings in the group, our painful honesty brought many a tear, but also feelings of release and recognition that we were in the same boat. We were encouraged to realise that as children we were often unable to express what we really felt to our parents simply because we didn't have the vocabulary, but mainly because we were afraid to. The balance of power lay with them, not us!

So, finally our mentor sat us down to write letters to our parents (living or dead), to say to them, as adults, what we had been unable to express as children. He gave us twenty minutes for each. I asked him, 'Who should I write to – my foster parents or my real parents?'

'Your real parents first,' he replied. Words tumbled out; and I could hear the scratching of pens all around me. This is what I wrote:

> *Dear Ma,*
>
> *How I wish you'd told me about my father – the whole truth – who he was, how you met him, what he was like, how long you'd known him… or what it just a single meeting? It would have made so much difference to me, to know* something *about him. Did you love him, hate him – or not even know?*
>
> *Thank-you for trying your best to provide for me – but you made the greatest mistake in putting me in that nursery. I'm sure you didn't know any better – perhaps*

you'd sought advice and that's what they told you to do. You must have felt very alone, and hurt, and unhappy. I know you wanted to find a husband and thus provide me with a father. But your best hopes floundered.

It's been so hard trying to overcome the anxiety I've always felt – a 'bundle of fears' I was told at 21. I've blamed you and I'm sorry. I just feel I missed you; a different 'mum' every so often in those first five years – yet no one really wanted me – I knew that early on – so why was I there? A big mistake to take me back to Mrs P at five… I wonder why? Why couldn't you see how unsuitable that family was?

And why at 14 didn't you insist *on my going to Dartington School? Why weakly give in to Mrs P – why didn't you stand up to her? And the year before, when I ran away from the new foster parents you'd found for me, why didn't you come and see me and* talk *to me? I never had a proper talk with you – nor did you tell me in advance of your plans for Dartington. Then I could have absorbed them, and withstood Mrs P's emotional blackmail.*

I would have loved *to have been Laurie's son – and to have had his love and attention. It could have worked out so well. I'm so glad I introduced him to you – it was an amazing thing.*

But above all I'm grateful I found you again at 23 – the most creative act of my whole life. And I thank you for all you strove to give me, of your time and advice and love in the ensuing years.

Bye – AJ.

Then we were told to write to the other parent.

Dear Father – whoever you are. I'd love to know all about you – where you lived, what you did, your name, your parents, and brothers and sisters – your looks, likes

and dislikes, hopes and fears – the lot. What nationality, colour (white, I presume) race (Jewish?) or creed.

So many questions. I don't condemn you for your one-night stand, or whatever it was – but it's left me feeling hollow and empty and without a guide in life. I would love to have had your help and encouragement, especially from the start – someone to show me the ropes. Someone to take an interest in my schoolwork, help with homework, come to Sports Day etc.

Do you ever think of me? Did you ever know I existed? Did you love my mother? She so badly needed love – she had little from her mother, only from her father – thank God! I miss you so badly – I imagine you could have been a great role model, someone to look up to and admire. Or am I just kidding myself – just fantasising? Well, I guess you'd understand, and I wish you all peace wherever you are.

Your son.

Unexpectedly we were then asked to read out to the group what each had written. To listen to the pain yet hope that others had expressed was both a privilege and an ordeal, but it was clearly therapeutic.

Then our tutor told us, 'Now write their replies.'

Oh, that's a different matter! Yet strangely, the words still came, swiftly and naturally, it seemed. I was amazed, and gratified. This was my mother's 'reply':

Dear Andre John,

My son, don't worry your head about your father. I hardly knew him, and he wasn't very nice. He may have made your life a misery – who knows?

For goodness sake, it's three-quarters of a century ago – surely you've got over all this by now. What's the use of digging up the past, when you can't do anything about it now? Be thankful for what you've got, that you

survived and did well, despite the difficulties you go on about.

Yes, I could certainly have done better – and we've talked about that… I think, didn't we? But don't go on harping on it—grow up (!) and put it behind you.

Yes, I wanted to look after you, but in those days it was unusual to be a single mother, and more common to use a foster mother. I didn't realise what went on in that house – why didn't you tell me? I would have moved you. Yes, I did fear Mrs P – she was overbearing and bossy, but I did think she knew best. I didn't know you were unhappy – why didn't you tell me?

I was so *disappointed you rejected me at 14. I too had wanted Laurie to be your dad – to give you some good fathering, and to leave you the business – instead of it going to a Cats Home! So you spoiled my future as well as your own. He didn't leave it to me either, you notice.*

Cheer up – it could have been worse!

Love, Ma.

And from Father:

My Son, What a privilege and delight to hear from you. I never *thought this might happen. An amazing gift – a lovely gesture on your part. You've made me very happy – though I understand, of course, your detestation of my fickle act in impregnating your mother – with no thought for your future.*

I am truly sorry, and only wish I could repair the past. But I want you to know that I admire and respect your approach to me in these most *unusual circumstances. And for your gracious act of forgiveness in that church two years ago in Caux.*

Respectfully yours, Father

I felt a bit knocked sideways by my mother's brusque reply, yet I could see the truth in what she 'said'! And I still treasure that supposed letter from my father. But I didn't get around to writing to my foster mother until much later…

* * *

A friend who read a proof of this book remarked that I'd not mentioned the death of Mrs P, or my mother, or of Gilly, or indeed of Betty.

I was shocked, but it underlined my lack of real attachment. I was away in St Ives on a painting holiday when I heard of the funeral of my foster mother, but I didn't go as it was so far off and the expense would have been high. I wasn't too put out.

I can't recall just when Gilly died, tragically early of cancer at 57. Again I didn't feel a great sense of loss, I'm ashamed to say.

My mother also died of cancer, very quickly, aged 82. She entered a hospice in Brighton in early December 1985, and I tried to visit straight after work most evenings. But by 7pm she was usually too tired to enjoy much real conversation, and it was mainly about the Christmas cards that had to be acknowledged, and gifts organised. I had really looked forward to talking with her at leisure. She died just after Christmas on January 2nd, and of course I handled all the probate, etc. I certainly did miss her, but I don't recall much real mourning.

But Betty's death came unexpectedly early, at 74. She'd had breast cancer some twenty years earlier, but it had returned with a vengeance, and she spent just four days in Chichester's lovely hospice. She was rather heavily drugged, and again I felt keenly the loss of really good talks before she went – on July 4th, 1997 – her 'Independence Day', free at last of polio.

22

Forgiving my Foster Mother

EIGHTEEN months later, in 2008, I was invited by my friends Gordon and Marjory Wise to accompany them to Australia. Gordon was born there, the son of a former premier of Western Australia, and at 86 he was keen to visit his relatives – of which he had about 56 – and we visited fifty of them! Marjory was the very practical tour manager, phoning and arranging all the appointments and venues; we based ourselves in Perth, but also flew to Melbourne and stayed in Sydney, and Bendigo in South Australia. A very full and eventful two months, with this former Sunderland pilot during WW2, who had then devoted his life to MRA.

I did most of the driving, and as a lover of maps I carefully planned the routes where I could. On one hot afternoon we were driving to see a couple in a remote suburb of Perth, and the night before I'd carefully made a study of the journey, and listed the route clearly on a piece of paper, pinned to the map.

Gordon, who'd had a serious stroke when he was 80, sat beside me; Marjory was in the back, giving directions when necessary. But at one point they didn't seem to tally with what I remembered of the route. I felt we were lost, and I juddered to a halt.

'Have you got that list I wrote out?' I asked.

'No, I didn't find it.'

'You mean you've not been using it all this while?'

'Well, I didn't need to.'

Suddenly I exploded. After all the effort I'd put into it, to

make sure the journey went well and on time, she dismissed my efforts as of no value. I felt hurt and put down. I exploded with rage, angry at being belittled, and jumped out of the car, opened the rear door, and angrily searched on the seat – and immediately found my list.

'There it is – didn't take much looking for!' I barked. 'You've taken us down the wrong road. If you'd looked at this we could have avoided a long detour.' I was so angry that she'd regarded my work as insignificant. After a sulky smoulder, I finally re-started the engine and found the way to our destination. I refused to go in for a while; our host came out and I confessed we'd had an argument, and I was all hot and sticky, and could I have a wash and brush up in his bathroom, please.

Gordon & Marjory receiving an award from the former Laotian ambassador

On the way home I realised that Marjory had pushed my buttons in just the same way my foster mother had done so often in childhood, frequently disparaging me, making me feel useless. So powerful were these feelings of resentment at the humiliation I'd so constantly suffered at her hands, that anyone who replicated those feelings of rejection and put-down, even unwittingly, was liable to get a blast from me – with the unintended explosive force of a child's pent-up, impotent rage. **'Humiliation is the nuclear bomb of the emotions'** wrote Swedish psychologist Evelin Gerda Lindner.

So poor Marjory got a lot more than she deserved, and I had to apologise to her. She in turn acknowledged that she should have made more effort to find my list, and I was mollified.

Next morning, Gordon's first words to me were, 'You must write that letter to your foster mother – today!' I knew exactly what he meant. After coming down the mountain from that heavenly place, Caux, the weeks and months had ticked by, and I never got around to writing to my foster mother – I procrastinated, not wanting to face up to the anguish of writing to the person with whom I'd lived on and off from the age of six months until I was 21.

So, back in Perth, I finally sat down and wrote:

Dear Missy, (my name for Mrs P when I was a child)

It seems very strange writing to you, so long after you've died, but I want to tell you how I really felt about being in your care.

I know you did a wonderful job on me when I first came to you as a tiny baby – six months old, because my mother's diary records that she took me to you – 'a wan, white little bundle' and came back a fortnight later to find 'a bonny, brown baby'. I believe you loved babies, and wished you could have had half a dozen. But you

were so frustrated by Pa, who only gave you Derek – a great sadness for you.

But I realise that when babies grew a will of their own, and were no longer totally compliant, and became troublesome toddlers, the fascination and attraction dwindled. What I'd really like to know is just when *I first left you, and whether it was my mother who then looked after me – and for how long; or if not, who?*

And when did I return? I can remember being at Victoria Terrace, Dorking, when I was about three, and sitting beside the fire with Derek who was eight, reading The Hotspur. *Suddenly I snatched it from him and threw it in the fire. Why I don't know, but it hardly endeared me to him. No doubt I was already a pain to him; he'd never seemed keen to have me in his home. Was that why I was put in a children's home in Folkestone, when I was about four?*

When did I first begin to fall out of favour with you? And why? I rack my brains to recall a time of happiness, when I really enjoyed myself – no incident comes to mind. I recall going down to Littlehampton for the day, and going to Butlins and being frightened by the big 'Caterpillar' train or whatever. And again, staying in a boarding house and sharing a bed with you, and you telling me not to fidget, and me desperately trying to stay still.

So why did life for me seem to turn sour – at home, at least? You seemed to regard me as dirty, second class, a little Jew-boy, a 'cunning Isaacs'. You wouldn't let me dry up, in case I got germs on the teacloth, and I could not clean my teeth in the bathroom as I would infect the wash basin. So I had to use the lavatory – and often didn't bother.

I certainly wasn't allowed in the pantry, or to touch food. I learnt no cooking, but I did have to wash my own

socks and shirt and iron it on a Sunday night for school the next week. I was never given underpants – until I joined the RAF.

Mealtimes became a menace to me. We might start OK, but usually there'd be a row before the end. Either Pa would be nagged, and get up and curse and take his plate out to his shed, or I'd be told to take mine and eat it outside in the yard, on top of the dustbin – or to my room, which was preferable.

I'm so sad that it seemed that whatever I did was wrong. I tried so hard to please you – I cleaned your shoes, bathed your feet, pulled out grey hairs from your head, and black ones from your chin with tweezers. Then you'd call me 'Ond' and I'd know that I was in your good books. But it would never last, and if we laughed before breakfast there'd be tears before bedtime. I could never be sure what mood you'd be in when I got back from school – if there'd been a row before I left I wondered how I'd be received on return. Anxiety was ever-present.

Well, this list of memories and gripes won't do much for you, but I felt you ought to know.

Much love,

John (Andre)

Phew – that was a load off my mind. Next morning I showed it to Gordon and Marjory. They registered approval. But what sort of reply would it elicit?

My dear André,

How surprising to hear from you – I don't know what to say. I don't really know what you want from me, or why you wrote. I do try to understand how you felt – it was difficult for me; I had so many things to deal with, to keep the ship afloat. Pa never helped, and his money didn't go far. That's why I worked when I could.

So I wasn't the ideal mother, and often I just wasn't well. Had headaches, and didn't sleep well. I worried too much I know, and I was lonely, too. No real friends, and always had to look after Grandma, and Ella too, a bit.

So I'm sorry I wasn't around for you as much as I should have been. To do things with you, to go up to the school, to take you places. Wartime was a strain – blackout, rationing; thank goodness you did most of the shopping. My legs were getting worse, and my varicose veins were painful. Derek's health worried me; when he was working for Frank Woods, the photographers in Epsom, he got quite white and anaemic, and had to take Metatone.

And I was taking in other children. Remember Monnie coming in 1938? Then Brian, and others. But you always had your own room – up till 13, that is. I didn't know you felt so unhappy – why didn't you say so? I just wish I could have done more – I got so tired and depressed. My marriage was a big mistake, but it was my fault – I'd been warned. Derek was a great delight, but I was worried when he went away to the RAF and war. So it's all a big muddle, but we have to muddle through.

You'll do it, I'm sure.

Love 'Missy P'

Again I showed this to my friends, and they were duly impressed, and urged me to continue the correspondence, sensing that I had more to say. Indeed I had; I didn't realise how much!

Dear Missy

It was when I had to choose between Dartington School or staying with you that is the chief cause of my lingering and long-standing resentment. And I'm sorry

I've held this grudge for so long, but I doubt you even realise quite what an effect it had.

Do you remember the letter arriving from my mother that August day in 1944? You read it out to me – I never got sight of it. It said I was to go to boarding school in Devon in September. Then you told me, 'If you want to go there, after all I've sacrificed for you – and go with your mother's foreign friends, then don't think you can come back here again'.

I wanted to go – and you'd told me to 'clear out' so many times, yet after that pronouncement I felt guilty if I did. So I mumbled that I'd stay.

But why oh why did you then say I must cut off from my mother? I had to write to her and tell her I never wanted to see her again. I can't believe I ever did this – or that my mother accepted it without a fight. She never came down to see me and argue me out of it – was she so frightened of you?

Then she stopped sending the weekly money. At Christmas I worked for the Post Office, and was able to give you £5 (four weeks keep). But you told me I'd have to leave school and get a job, to pay my way. 'After all,' you said, 'if Derek left school at 14, why shouldn't you?' (But he hadn't got a scholarship.) So after New Year's Day you sent me to the Labour Exchange – and I got an interview at J. Walter Thompson in London. I was lucky!

But it was only many, many years later that the full impact of that pressurised decision came clear to me. In one fell swoop I lost:

- my further education, and the chance of university

- my mother

- my step-father-to-be

- the chance of inheriting his business (Holman Advertising Ltd)

- my adolescence, also, since I started work so early.

Yet I must go further back in time. From about ten onwards you'd made it clear that you wanted me to go, that I was no longer welcome. Many times after a row you'd tell me to pack my bag. I'd go crying to my room, drag out the heavy leather suitcase from under my bed.

But each time you relented. I don't know what I had to do to worm my way back, but I was always 'on egg-shells'. Yet strangely I remember a whole kerfuffle about you wanting to adopt me, and the possibility of me having to go to court and stand up and say who I wanted to live with.

Because after my mother met Laurie Holman she went to stay with him at Bedford Square, and I would go up to London and stay for the weekend, quite often – once a month? I liked it, and Uncle Laurie taught me to ride a horse, and shoot, and I enjoyed his attention. He had no children, and his wife was in a mental hospital, long-term. And I enjoyed my mother's attention – she never rowed with me, or Laurie.

I remember, after the phone was installed, dreading a call from my mother, or Mr Punter, who worked for Laurie, in case it put me on the spot. My security was in you, and I suppose I couldn't risk losing it…

Yet when I was 13 you asked my mother to move me, ands she found foster parents in Banstead. When I'd gone there and was happy with the couple, you wrote me a nice letter, calling me your 'second son' – it made me cry; I've got it still – a treasured possession. Then you sent Derek to tell me that if I wanted to run away back to her I had only to get the bus going the other way.

Stupidly I fell for it. I did run away, but my memory is confused as to what happened. I was pronounced 'ill' and put to bed – can't remember why.

All through childhood I can never remember bringing a friend home. Nor did you invite any friends or neighbours. You'd spend hours on the kitchen doorstep talking to Mrs Streather next door, but never had her in for tea, or vice versa. The nearest I got was taking eggs to sell her, in exchange for her ration books to buy balancer meal to feed the chickens.

That's where my letter ended…clearly there was more to say, but it was late at night after a busy day. Next evening I sat down and this is what came:

My dear boy,

You've got no idea the strain I was under. I only wish I could have given you more time and attention. But you got on my nerves – and they were very taut in wartime. I missed Derek very much – he was my rock and salvation. So I'd tell him everything when he came back on leave – and tell him what you'd done as well!

I don't know what to say about Dartington School. I do know that I was so exasperated by you that the year before I'd told your mother to find somewhere else. And then I felt bad, and thought to let you know what I really felt. I'm so sorry to have confused you and muddled you up – I should have realised you had mixed feelings – about me and about your mother.

Pa was no help – I never discussed it with him. So I was alone, except for Monya. And she wasn't easy. Yes, I did favour her over you - after all, I adopted her. You were always 'different' – crafty, cunning and told lies. I couldn't trust you…that's why I never gave you a key to the house, in case you opened my drawers and looked at my papers.

And there just wasn't the time to go up to your school. Anyway, there wasn't the opportunity – they didn't do much, as I recall.

I'm horrified to hear those 5 'losses' you listed. It never occurred to me – I was too consumed with my own problems – and poor health.

So please forgive me for my 'carelessness' – I didn't understand what boys needed, and Pa was no help. He was a great disappointment to me, to Derek – to everyone. Except the Model Engineers Exhibition! He managed metal better than people.

But do get some more off your chest if you think it can help. Yrs, Missi (JMP)

I wasn't done yet, and wrote a third letter:

Dear Missy P,

I think it all boils down to this: that I never felt loved or wanted. Nor have I ever fallen in love, or loved. This is the great sadness in my life. I'm so grateful for a mountain of other things, and people – but there's one great hole. And for so long I've blamed you. And yet I now realise you weren't paid to love me, only to care for me. So why should I castigate you for lack of love?

It's just that it hurts so much to recollect that – and to recall all the hurts and humiliations you heaped on me, not out of spite, I'm sure, but just thoughtlessly (like the colonials did to the natives!).

But what mystifies me is why you kept going hot and cold – first rejecting me, then wanting me back? What needs did I answer in you? So many times, even after I started work, you told me to clear out, find digs. When I did, you then changed your mind – and I was made to feel a heel for upsetting you so. I would have been glad to go. Why didn't I? I suppose the umbilical cord was still unbroken…

It was only when I was 21, after you'd closed the door in my face at midnight after I'd taken Mary home to Tooting (and missed the last bus home) that I finally

packed my bags and left. Even then, whilst I was waiting for the taxi, you sent Monya to say I could stay if I wanted to. I certainly didn't, and stood by my decision – at last!

I've learnt that humiliation can be the nuclear bomb of feelings. It was the dread of being humiliated such as I'd experienced from you that prevented me from marrying Gilly, who loved me. You remember I brought her down to see you when you were bed-ridden. And you said to her, 'He's very reliable' – the only compliment I can remember you giving me! But I turned out to be the very opposite for her; as soon as I'd proposed I felt a choking feeling, as if I was trapped. I didn't realise it at the time, and it happened three times – I proposed, was accepted, and broke it off three times. Only later did I realise that I feared she might, if we had a row, subject me to the same humiliation – and I daren't risk it.

I've never been able to talk things through calmly – because this never happened in my childhood experience. If anyone disagreed with you, it was curtains. You were all-powerful, a dictator in your own home. Pa was a nonentity, and Derek (when he was around) had to agree, it seems to me. If I argued my case, and you got angry, you'd say 'Clear out!' – and then it was that awful feeling of rejection, yet again. Reasonable discussion seemed impossible – even agreeing to differ was not on the cards. So I grew up to be an appeaser – anything to keep the peace.

And I put up with far too much without complaining. What kids nowadays would tolerate thin Marmite sandwiches every day for lunch at school for years? I can't ever remember anything else with them. What kid would tolerate being locked out of the house when getting home from school – having to wait until you came back? I wasn't allowed to turn the wireless on, I

had no gramophone, no bookshelf. You had no books in the house – or music. I can only remember going to the cinema with you once – to see Charlie Chaplin in Modern Times. *It was a barren childhood, and a barren adolescence. Up early to travel the 15 miles to London, then evening classes to study for the exams I should have taken at school, then later classes in art and lettering, getting home late for my dinner at 10pm.*

I received no encouragement, as I recall, for any efforts I made. Once, when I was 14, you went away with Derek and Monya for a week's holiday (unknown before!) and you allowed me to stay in the house. I scrubbed and polished the floors and lino and made the place as spruce as I could, and you didn't even comment. As a child I was often bored and used to ask, 'What can I do?' but got no helpful steers or suggestions. Instead you'd say, 'Oh, go and tidy the buffet' or 'Clean out the chickens' or 'Cycle round and round'. Such a deadening of my spirit, when I could have done so much, I reckon – a stifling of talents.

So why am I all steamed up about it now – after all these years? Because it's only dawned on me recently how badly affected I was. I took it all for granted – didn't know any better. For example, only in my 40s or 50s when I was listening to The Archers *one lunchtime, and heard an argument going on, did I realise that one* could *say what one felt, and not be demolished.*

So now I'm trying to get the rancour and resentment out of my system, but it's pouring in even more strongly as I recall my life then. So I'm sorry to burden you with all this, and you must feel it's an awful cheek – but I'm trying to be adult and simply clear the decks and level with you, and be honest and have the courage to face you with what I really feel and what I actually went through.

Do you remember when my call-up papers arrived, you told me I needn't go because I was American? But I was determined to go – it was my release from apron strings. I enjoyed my two years away, especially the year in Egypt, and would have signed on for a further six months but for a message 'Mother dangerously ill' which brought me back to Blighty on compassionate demob. I found that you'd only hurt your knee, and were in bed, needing help in running the Rest Home. Yet within five days I had to eat my meals in the garage – I was 'persona non grata' again (as Derek already was as well – living away). And when you let slip that you'd only read the first few lines of the letters I wrote from Egypt – 'to see if I was alright' and then put them away in a drawer – well, that really hurt.

So you see, I want to be real with you – and appreciate your *side of the picture.*

Cheers – John

Wow, with that blast, I'm not sure I expected a reply. But sure enough, next day, I sat down to compose one. What an extraordinary experience this was, making up what she might have said had she been alive. But it was truly an exercise in trying to see things from the other person's point of view – 'to walk a mile in the other's moccasins' as the saying goes. And it seemed as if I was given 'help' from above in some remarkable way. It was quite cathartic.

Dear 'Second Son'

I'm sorry I'm such a disappointment to you. I never wanted you to come back to me at 5 – it was your mother who persuaded me. She was desperate to find a school – and evidently didn't think Folkestone was the place. Too far from London, perhaps. I don't recall where she was living at the time. North Cheam was accessible by tube to Morden and then by bus, for visiting.

So I was doing her a favour – it also helped me a bit with the money, which was tight. And I thought you'd be company for Derek; he had no brothers or sisters, sad to say. I can't help it that it didn't work out for you – you had problems of your own from birth, I suppose, or before! I'm no child psychologist, and can't be expected to solve all problems. I had no training, and in those days there were no social workers to support me and Pa, or you, or your mother.

So don't go on criticising me ad nauseum. I did my best – which I now realise was not good enough. I tried, but was unhappy a lot of the time. Remember how I used to have headaches and palpitations and need sal volatile *and smelling salts so often? I was overweight, and wartime food didn't help. You must make allowances – I didn't have time or energy to do much besides go to work and run the house – cooking and cleaning and washing and gardening.*

I'm sorry you felt so unwanted and unloved. But that wasn't really my fault. That surely started from birth, in that nursery. It's your mother's fault that she didn't raise you herself – she had the money. OK, she had no husband to keep her, so in those days it was pretty difficult – and she probably didn't have much choice, especially as her mother wouldn't have her in the house. At least when Monya had babies, I didn't turn her out.

So, my love, live with it, and be grateful you're not bonkers or boozed up, or drugged up. I'll always think of you fondly; you visited me faithfully up to my death – so we healed the relationship quite well. Thanks for everything you did.

Love – Missi P

Two days later – having talked it all over with Marjory and Gordon, and thought about it deeply, I felt impelled to write a final letter:

Dear Julie Maud (if I may drop the infantile Missy),

Just one more letter. Firstly, thank you so much for your last reply – it was really helpful, and seems to have settled the matter. As you said, you did your best with what you had at the time… and I feel I heaped on you a load of resentment that really is misplaced. When you wrote in your final paragraph that you'll 'always think of me fondly' I realised I didn't return the compliment.

In fact, I've held a whole heap of resentment against you, and it's been growing more and more in these recent years as I've become more aware of the effects of my upbringing. But now we've cleared the air, and discussed all this, I realise I must ask your forgiveness for holding on to these grudges for so long. I do feel my letters were necessary – to explain what I was feeling and what I went through – because I couldn't expect you to understand or appreciate my feelings unless I expressed them. And of course, as a child I was unable to, through fear and the natural inability to formulate the necessary words.

But now, at this very late stage in my life, I humbly seek forgiveness from God and yourself for holding this grudge for so long. I thought I'd dealt with it long ago, and later in Caux five years ago, but it was too superficial. Now we've gone through the trauma of writing (and receiving) these letters, I hope we can feel that it's all laid to rest.

Yours ever,

André John

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Consolation and Connection

THE FEELING of release that ensued after this exercise was completed was wonderful. I felt no longer a whinging, cringing infant under the domineering mother figure. Instead I'd achieved an adult-to-adult relationship, and could address her by her name, Julie Maud. I'd sloughed off the load of resentment, and was a free man. Above all, I felt forgiven, even as I had finally forgiven. 'There is no future without forgiveness…'

Why it took me so long I don't know. I'd often talked to friends about my childhood, and indeed to psychotherapists. I thought I'd emptied myself of all anger and bitterness, knowing how corrosive it is to both body and mind. And I was committed to the Lord's Prayer, and the words *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* So when I got into self-pity mode and would blame some incident on what happened to me as a child, I knew in my heart that muck still remained to be cleared out.

I found that as I got older, my emotions seem to become more volatile. I would choke up more easily, and seemingly unaccountably. Listening to a young man speak in an MRA meeting about his experiences made me cry almost uncontrollably for no apparent reason. At other times if I saw a father being nice to his son, on television or in the street, I would want to weep. In the conference on family healing work, Ren-jou Lui and his wife Grace also introduced the group to the work of John Bradshaw, and I bought his book *Homecoming*, which reinforced the work I'd done in the group:

> *The child must first be loved before he can love… the failure to be loved unconditionally causes the child to suffer the deepest of all deprivation… the frustration of a child's desire to be loved as a person and to have his love accepted is the greatest trauma that a child can experience.*

Bradshaw's subtitle was *Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Wounded Child.* He also talks about *toxic shame – the feeling of being flawed and diminished and never measuring up… worse than guilt… the core of the wounded child.*

Having never experienced 'falling in love' I've often imagined it might be something like finding an echo of the all-absorbing love a baby feels from its mother at the start of life, when it's the centre of attention, especially in those first months, and more so if it's been breast-fed (maybe that's why I've never been turned on by boobs!).

* * *

I have made up for lack of my own kids by being asked to be Godfather to five children. And then I added a sixth, the first of about half a dozen children I sponsored through the Save the Children Fund.

The first godchild was Susan, the baby daughter of Tom and Pat Peters, whom I'd met on a pony trekking holiday in Scotland.

Next came Hank and Cora, the twins I went Boston to stay with in 1970 when they were five.

Then Christopher, the son of James and Stella Bliss, who in fact I had proposed to earlier, who had studied with me at Ruskin, but she had turned me down! Sadly their marriage ended when the boy was six, and I did a lot of *in loco parentis* with him. Later, after his mother re-married, his stepfather Nick paid me a compliment, calling me 'the best godfather in the business'.

Then Jamie, the 30-year-old son of old friends, asked me

out of the blue if I would be his godfather as he never had one, but I evidently wasn't very effective. He already had two children, but later his wife left him. He re-married, had two more, but she then did the same. But I'm glad to say that he now has a new lease of life, with a lovely new wife.

Finally I was asked by my house-group leader, a doctor, if I would 'sponsor' his 11-year-old son Jonny at his confirmation. A privilege. And later I enjoyed watching him at school as Joseph in the *Technicolor Dreamcoat.* After university he became a primary schoolteacher, married and has two children. I'm so pleased, because I believe teaching is actually the most important profession of all – more so than medicine, law or politics – because training the next generation is so crucial. And there's a great shortage of men in primary schools, leaving many boys without role models, especially those from one-parent families.

Back in 1973 I saw a Save the Children (SCF) advert in the *Radio Times* asking people to sponsor children abroad. They gave me a six-year-old boy in a boarding school in Kenya, Samuel, whose father had died and his mother had jiggers. He grew to become captain of his house and captain of the band. He went on to university and got an MBA, and worked for Securicor, British American Tobacco and then 'turned over a new leaf' and became marketing manager of the Kenya Tea Association. He married and had two children. In 1998 terrorists blew up the American Embassy in Nairobi; I phoned him to find out if they were OK, and his wife Damaris answered: Yes, but a friend had been killed. However, she asked, 'When are you coming to see us?' I went for Christmas; they killed a goat in my honour and we feasted with about twenty friends from 2pm to 3am.

Damaris worked for a travel agency and asked if I'd like to go on a safari. 'Yes, but for just two or three days, please,' thinking of the cost. But she was wiser than I, and arranged a superb 8-day trip with the top agents. It was wonderful, and

Damaris with Melanie, and Sam with Johnny

I *could* afford it – I was just being mingy with myself, as usual.

I have sponsored several children overseas, both with SCF and with World Vision, feeling that was the most effective way to send aid abroad. Both organisations encouraged the children to write letters, and initially Sam had an older boy as mentor who wrote on his behalf until he'd learnt English. Through this sponsoring work and the letters I received from the children (translated by aid workers) I got to know about Bangladesh, Lesotho, and Brazil, as well as sponsoring three more youngsters in Kenya.

Samuel certainly became better educated than I did, and as a student he represented Kenya at the Duke of Edinburgh Awards annual conference in New Zealand. He travelled widely for his firms, and visited me several times, bringing his wife twice – a great joy.

* * *

'FAMILY' TREE of God-Children

Pat & Tom Peters
I met them in Aviemore, Scotland in 1962. Tom was an Immigration officer in Edinburgh. They had two children, Susan and Stephen, b.3-9-69, and finally moved to Ewell, Surrey. Tom died in 1999. Pat raised guide-dog puppies for the blind.

SUSAN

b. 20-3-1966
Sue became a nanny, then m. John Brotchie, an accountant, in 1986. They moved to Aberdeenshire, and ran a hotel for a while. Then Sue trained as a teacher, and is now working in a primary school.

James b. 26-7-93—at St Andrews University studying medieval history and Spanish.
Elsa b. 21-7-95

Maggi & Ken Peirce (& granddaughter Alyzza). I met Maggi, who hales from Belfast, in Edinburgh in 1963. She m. Ken, a science teacher, and moved with him to Fairhaven, Mass, USA. Maggi is a folk singer & storyteller and author.

HENRY (Hank)

CORA-DOT

Twins, b. 10-11-1965

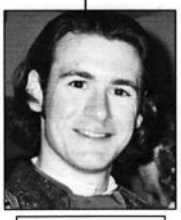
Hank was a Roadie with a band, then became a Unitarian minister in Cambridge, Mass. His first marriage ended in divorce He then m. Rebecca in 2002, and they have two daughters.

Ruth b. 4-1-2005
Bethiah b. 16-7-2007

Cora first married Eric Callahan and bore Alyzza. They broke up, but Cora then had two more children. She became a social worker and community activist in New Bedford, Mass.

Alyzza b. 8-8-88 graduated 2010
James b.25-9-92 in last year at school
Sophia b.14-9-99

Nick & Stella Downs (James Bliss inset) I met Stella on a child care course at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1968. She m. James in 1972, their son was b. 1977, but they divorced six years later. Stella later m. Nick Downs, and they now live in Portugal.



CHRISTOPHER

b. 6-12-1977
Chris started out in computing, then took a degree in Theology. He m. Francesca in 2000, who is a librarian & counsellor. But he realised he was not called to be a priest, but a primary schoolteacher instead. But unable so far to get on a course, he maintains IT and computers in a senior school in Bristol.

of John Munro

September 2011

Alick & Ann Bartholomew & family.
I met Alick in New York, where he was an editor with Macmillan's, then in Boston in 1971. They moved to London in 1972 and set up Turnstone Books. After 25 years Alick left Ann and later m. Mari, and moved to near Bath, starting Gateway Books. Ann moved to San Francisco in 2010, where her daughters Sara & Katie live.

JAMIE *with Jacob*

I met Jamie when he was 12 in Boston, and back in UK he went to a Steiner school I'd worked at in Sussex. He became a photographer and m. Linda. Aged about 30 he asked if I would be his Godfather! They had two children,
Jacob Graduated from Syracuse, USA.
Emma At Edinburgh Uni on a PhD in poetry.

Jamie has two other children from a second marriage, **Tilly** and **Alex.**

Andy & Linda Mott
We met in Arundel at St Nicholas Church, and I joined their house group. Andy was a GP and became my doctor. When their youngest son was 11 he wished to be confirmed, and Andy asked me to be his 'sponsor'. Jonny (as likes to called) has brothers, Tom & Jamie, and a sister Rosie.

JONATHAN

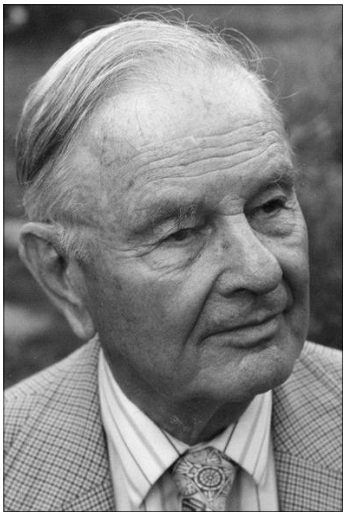
b. 23-8-1982
Jonny became a primary school teacher (much-needed male role model) in Worcester, and head of music. He m. Laura and they have two children.

Finlay b. 28-9-2006
Eleanor b. 24-3-2010

Samuel & Damaris Karima
In 1973 I answered an ad by Save the Children to sponsor Sam, aged 6, in Starehe School, Nairobi, Kenya. He became House captain and represented his country at the Duke of Edinburgh Award conference in New Zealand. He went on to university, gaining an MBA. He worked for Securicor, BAT, Kenya Tea Association, Sameer Tyres, and is now running his own marketing business. He m. Damaris, and have two children, the first named after me. I spent Christmas 1999 in their home, and enjoyed a wonderful week's safari!

John b. 8-1-1997—just started in Starahe, the same school as his father.
Melanie b. 5-1-2000

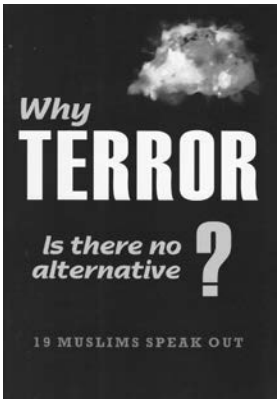
I made this spread to tell my 'God-family' who everybody else was. I counted up, after the initial eleven parents, plus the six children, now they in turn have produced 15 children of their own. Quite a lot of birthday and Christmas cards!



David Young at 90

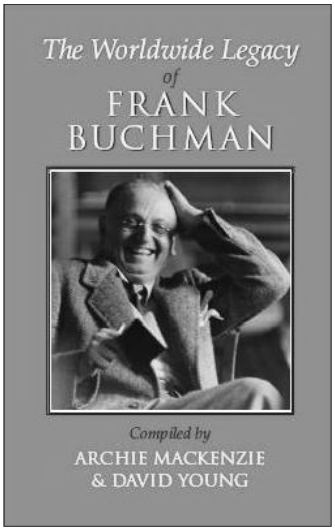
A leading member of the group of I of C supporters that I meet with regularly, David Young, who had worked in India for many years, wrote a book on his experiences there called *Initiatives of Change in India – over six decades,* which I helped to publish. Later, in 2003, I was at Caux when one morning at breakfast he came up to me and asked what I thought of an idea he'd had – to produce a booklet of stories by 19 Muslims who had found a better answer than hate and bitterness, and a better way to fight for justice, freedom and peace than the nineteen who had toppled the Twin Towers. He proposed to ask the former Imam of Brighton, a friend of his also attending the conference, to be the editor.

I was immediately keen on the idea, and agreed to produce it on my computer if the Imam could gather the contributors together. This took much time and effort, but *Why Terror? – Is There No Alternative?* came out in June 2004 and was reprinted two months later.



Later that year I travelled to America for a holiday, to meet up with my godchildren and other friends, and also to attend the 100th anniversary celebration in Allentown, Pennsylvania, of Frank Buchman's birth. I have mentioned him throughout this book: he founded a movement of the spirit that later became known as the Oxford Group,

and was re-launched in 1938 as Moral Re-Armament. The keynote speech was by a former diplomat, A R K Mackenzie, which so inspired me that when I got home I produced it as a pamphlet. This intrigued David, and together we developed it into *Frank Buchman's Legacy,* a 32-page illustrated booklet.

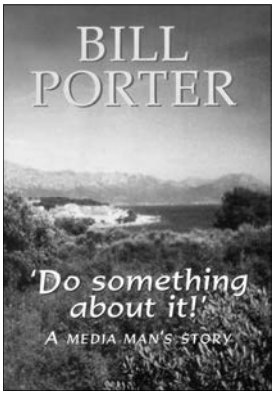


Then in 2008 he and Archie Mackenzie compiled a 320-page volume containing the experiences of 33 people from all walks of life and parts of the world entitled *The Worldwide Legacy of Frank Buchman,* which again I edited on my laptop. I so revelled in desktop publishing, such a far cry from the slow and laboured hot-metal composition and proofing of the old days. Being able to email proofs to the various authors, and take in their amendments and corrections so easily made life very productive.

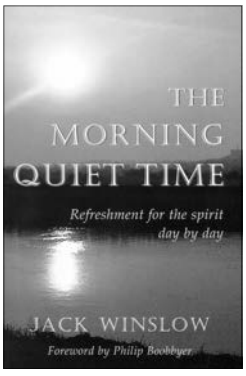
* * *

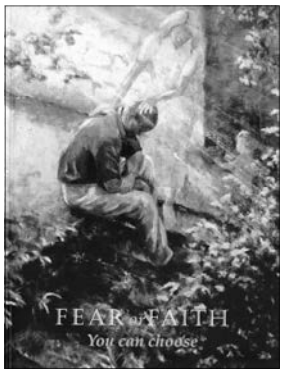
When John Faber came to live in Arundel even more opportunities to use my desktop skills presented themselves. He was publishing the autobiography of Bill Porter, the founder of the International Communications Forum (ICF). He needed a title, and a jacket design. Bill, who'd just retired from publishing, knew that the communications industry had become the largest in the world, but wondered if it was the most responsible. He was bemoaning low standards in the press to his wife one morning at breakfast, when she replied, 'If that's how you feel, why don't you *do something about it?*' He did, and the ICF came into being. Those four

words became the title of his book, and I produced the cover design.



Other titles I rejoiced to work on were *The Morning Quiet Time* and *Fear or Faith: you can choose,* an anthology of stories and poems by people who were anxious about growing old, but had overcome their fears. It was a book that John and Jeanne had compiled together and was almost the last he published before his death at 84. The last was in fact a slim booklet aimed at young people, *Finding a Purpose in Life,* giving his own brief story.





24

Finding my Father

SHORTLY before John died, as I described in chapter one, we had the conversation over tea about why I was trying to write this book, and – to my shock – he suggested I write it for my mother.

Despite feeling this was pointless, next day I felt impelled to go upstairs and rummage through my mother's papers and diaries. She'd been a prolific letter-writer and diarist. In one large exercise book, called 'Saga', written in 1976, addressed to me and which I thought I'd read, I flipped through the pages when suddenly I came upon a page I definitely had *not* read. It was talking about her time in Paris in 1929 as an actress at the English Theatre, and also as a model for the Russian sculptor, Serge Youreivitch.

> *While I was being sculptured for* The Flame*, Serge had been commissioned to make a bust of an international lawyer, Sam Archibald, a French Canadian Scot. Tall, soigné, cultured – the man of the world for whom I had been searching (I didn't know then that I was father-fixated)… He came several times to the studio and admired my statue. It was near completion, so I had arranged to go on tour with* Rose-Marie. *Therefore I should lose him.*
>
> *I began to pay him visits at his office. I can't remember or imagine what excuse I made – I just wanted to see him, to be with him… I must have been in love. I asked him to take me out to the Café de Paris – but I was poor company – naïve, very earnest, quite besotted… I went away on tour – France, Belgium, Italy,*

Switzerland, Africa – I was still besotted. I kept my secret love to myself…

The infantilism that 'guided' me so tragically through life was too strong an influence. I shrank from involvement with anyone (except what other people termed a 'Sugar-Daddy'). I didn't take that gay, light-hearted view: I was deadly serious. And so you came along.

'And so you came along'. Those five words transfixed me. At last I had discovered the name of my father, at nearly eighty years of age! I was overjoyed. I could hardly believe my eyes. So my friend's seemingly incomprehensible suggestion had borne unexpected fruit!

This was the most wonderful revelation. All my life I had felt I was a mistake that shouldn't have happened, that I wasn't worth it, that I shouldn't really be here - especially in an over-populated world. One reason I never married is that I didn't want to add to that problem.

Sue—a wizard with Ancestry.com

I shared this amazing news with a close friend, Sue Paterson, who lived just opposite me, a fellow social worker specialising in child protection. She was also a genealogy enthusiast, and offered to see if she could trace that name anywhere. I was doubtful, but she was resourceful. Within days she had come up with 'Samuel George Archibald' on the passenger list of a liner going from Cherbourg to New York in 1912, giving his home address as Paris. Could that be him?

Then came a listing on the *Lusitania* sailing from Liver-

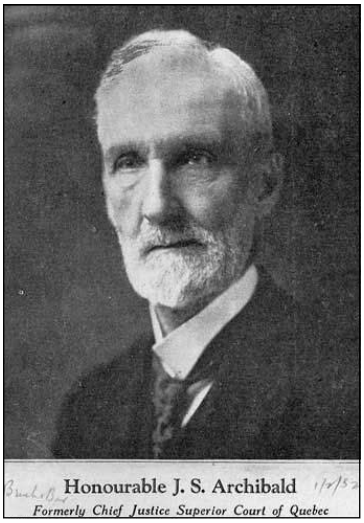
pool to New York in March 1909, as *attorney, Canadian,* travelling to *113 McKay Street, Montreal.* Followed in February 1910 on the same boat, *advocate,* travelling to *Judge Archibald,* of the same address.

Sue continued her research. 'It's fun,' she said, 'like being a detective, following clues', and came up with seven more sailings for Samuel. One from Naples to New York in 1905 sounded interesting: described as a *barrister, 29, married, English, last address Cairo, final destination Montreal, Canada.* Others followed, in 1911, in 1913, September 1914 (with his wife Anna – were they fleeing from the Great War in Europe?) then 1928, 1931 (with his son Roy, 24, also a lawyer) – all from France or England to USA, and finally in 1944, to my surprise, from Cuba, aged 69.

So we deduced that Samuel was a busy 'international lawyer' (as my mother had described him) crossing the Atlantic frequently.

Sue then tracked down the Canadian census for 1901, and discovered:

> *John S Archibald, 47, born in Nova Scotia, Presbyterian, lawyer*
>
> *Ellen Archibald, 40, born in Nova Scotia, Presbyterian*
>
> and five children, *Edward 18; Samuel 15* (my father)*; Nancy 10; John 6 and Kenneth 3.*


Honourable J. S. Archibald
Formerly Chief Justice Superior Court of Quebec

John and Ellen - they had to be my grandparents. 'It's 99 percent likely,' said Sue. Then she turned up a page from *Bench & Bar, Montreal* about the Honourable John Sprott

Archibald, *Lawyer, teacher, politician and Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Quebec, born Sept 8, 1843 in Halifax, Nova Scotia… married Jane Hutchinson and they had four sons and a daughter. He died January 16, 1932.* He was 89.

Wow – so that was my grandfather. I swelled up with pride; how clever Sue was to find that. But more was to follow. Somehow she stumbled upon a professor teaching in Nova Scotia who had made a study of the Archibald family in that province. Email by email through an intermediary she told him of my search, and finally, actually on my 80th birthday, I received the best present I could possibly have had - a photo of my father! With it was the address of a living relative, a grandson who turns out to have the same name as mine should be – Andrew Archibald.

The following Sunday in church as I stood up to sing the first hymn, a feeling swept over me: 'I'm now a *whole* man – complete – the two halves are one.'

I immediately wrote to Andrew, who lived in Paris, and he phoned me on receiving my letter. It was a magic moment. He spoke perfect English; in fact he told me he was born in England, at Gerrards Cross, in 1943, and had returned to France with his parents at the end of the war. Later, at 15, he was sent to Stonyhurst School in Lancashire for three years, which he enjoyed. He was 67, recently retired. It did seem strange, finding a new relative just like that. Especially as I have no any other nephews or nieces.

He'd followed in the family tradition and studied law, but ten years later he decided to train as a clinical psychologist, and had been working with alcoholics for the last 27 years, retiring in 2010. That really impressed me, knowing something of what that requires in patience, understanding and dedication. He was the only son of Henry, the youngest of my new half-brothers, and had married a Japanese, Lumi, but they'd had no children. Sadly she had died six years earlier; he lived alone in a house near Chantilly, north of Paris.

He hadn't been back to Britain for forty years, so I invited him over, and he came for a busy four days. He brought as a gift the 1,000 page volume that Professor Allan Marble had produced, *The Archibald Family of Nova Scotia,* a large, magnificent compilation, sub-titled *No Reward without Effort* – the family motto. It showed that my forebears came from County Londonderry, N. Ireland, circa 1719, and about forty years later six of their children moved to Nova Scotia and settled in Truro. One of them was called Samuel. It seems that later my grandfather moved to Montreal – perhaps to study law, and settled there.

On page 506 I found this entry about my father:

My Father!

SAMUEL GEORGE HUTCHINSON ARCHIBALD was born at Montreal on 29 December 1875, and died at Geneva, Switzerland, on 27 December 1946. He was married on 8 April 1901 to ANNA FRANCES JACKSON MILES, b. at Montreal, 24 December 1877, d. in Cuba 1943, dt of the Hon Henry and Emma Miles.

Samuel attended the University of Montpelier in France and McGill University, graduating BA in 1897, as well as winning the gold medal for studies in English Literature. He graduated from McGill Law School in 1900 with his BCL, and like his father before him was awarded the Elizabeth Torrance gold medal in law. After law practice in Montreal with Archibald, Lynch & Foster, and teaching English literature at

McGill, he accepted an appointment in 1904 as a Professor of Civil Law at the Khedivial Law School in Cairo, Egypt, and became acting Principal there in 1906. When he resigned he moved to Paris and established a law practice which he operated until shortly before his death.

He and Anna were forced to leave Paris in 1940 and were on the last boat out of France prior to the arrival of the German invaders. From England they went to Montreal where they lived during WWII.

His children *(my half-siblings)* were:

Noemi Constance, b. 1902, d. in Paris 1984

Nanette, b. 1908, d. 1990

Roy Miles, b. 1909, d. in Lausanne.

Henry Lawrence, b. in Paris 1912, d. 1975

My nephew Andrew

So now I look forward to getting to know my 'new' nephew more (he came over again for Christmas) and then delving into his great tome and finding out about my erstwhile brothers and sisters – and their children, and their four uncles and aunts, and then work my way back all the way to 1719 when my ancestors first set foot on Canadian soil.

The big high spot of Andrew's visit here was going to Blackwell's bookshop in Oxford – he's a great reader and collector of books. And in what seemed to clinch my father's identity, Andrew confirmed that he remembers a bust of my father, but didn't

know where it was now.

Three months later I spent a week with him in France. On our first morning he drove me into Paris and showed me where my father used to live, and where his office had been, and I took photos. He also took me to a place near Versailles to lunch with his half–brother Sosthène, 77, who lived alone since his wife died. I learned more about my two half-sisters and two half-brothers, all sadly long dead. Henry, the youngest, and Andrew's father, also worked with my father in the family firm. Allan Marble records:

> *Immediately following Henry's graduation from law school he went to London to prepare for his bar exams and work for his uncle John who was a solicitor there. During WWII he served with MI5 as an intelligence officer collecting and checking information coming from France, which included everything concerned with the V1 and V2. At the end of the war he returned to Paris and became a partner in a law practice with his brother Roy… he was a great golfer, tennis player and skier, winning the golf championships of both Germany and Belgium, and was twice runner-up for the French championship.*

Andrew as a toddler being presented to his grandfather by Henry

Henry's son Andrew is now my closest relative, and I value the late, heaven-sent chance to get to know him. We've had two more holidays together, in France and England, so with emails and phone calls and maybe Skype soon,

plus Eurostar, and a forthcoming holiday together in Scotland, we're making great progress.

Every memoir is selective, and no story has an absolute beginning or end. But I will end here with a sense of things coming full-circle; and with at least some healing and resolution. My life was hindered and some might say sabotaged by difficult beginnings. But I feel a great sense of hopefulness that my inner struggles have shown me something of the indomitable power of the human spirit, and the possibility of unexpected healing and consolation. Every human life is precious, and every hindrance an opportunity. From this vantage point I look back and, despite everything, feel blessed.

EPILOGUE

FROM the first time I met MRA/IofC when I was in the RAF in Egypt, my association with it has given me a sense of purpose. It has helped me make a reality of those twelve words in the Lord's Prayer - *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*. I try to work towards reconciliation and the healing of wounds, so that all who hold grudges against family or friends - or indeed, enemies - can know the amazing power of forgiveness, and release from bitterness. As Archbishop Tutu of Cape Town said, 'There is no future without forgiveness.'

I have found that it's never too late to learn, and never too late to seek forgiveness or healing, however grave the hurts. Mine, I think, had started at birth – or even at conception. When I think of the millions of kids conceived without thought for their future, it is my passion to help free them of the burdens that can so often follow from a sense of not being wanted. So often the unborn child's right to both parents takes second place to the momentary pleasure of the adults involved. I'm told that the child *in utero* has no legal rights at all. To me this seems very unjust.

Nevertheless, whatever has befallen us in our lives, *we can get beyond the past,* as my 'Word for Today' told me recently:

> *By God's grace you can learn to live in the present and let go of the past. How? By spending time in God's presence and allowing His love to touch the hurting*

places within you. Give all your secrets to God - and leave them there. He can take the misery out of the memory, like drawing the poison from an insect bite; then your healing will begin.

Go ahead, stand in the stream of God's grace and release it. Let it all go. It was night, but now it's day! Let God hold you safely in His arms. There, you can allow the past to fall from you like a garment. You may remember it, but you won't have to wear it any more: 'You shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.' No more pacing the floor, no more bad dreams, no more fear of tomorrow. Shame has been removed and grace enthroned. Rise up in Christ's name and take authority over every memory that keeps you linked to the past. Allow God to heal your scars, break your chains and set you free.

Almost all my adult life I have tried to seek wisdom and direction – to help steer my wobbly self through the choices that had to be made day by day.

To that end I have usually risen early to spend time quietly in reading and prayer, to seek correction and direction from God, and jot down thoughts which may come into my head. Sometimes just a few minutes, sometimes up to an hour. Since retirement I have often added a 'prayer-jog' of some fifteen minutes along the bank of our local river.

I start that jog with my 'expanded' Lord's Prayer (embroidering it; e.g. *Thy will be done on earth* – then praying for the crises of the day, and others on my mind); ***thank you*** *this day for our daily bread*…(becos my frig and larder are stocked) and help us to supply the needs of all peoples everywhere, etc…. Then I give thanks for the countryside and the people of the town, and for my ability to appreciate them through all five senses, with gratitude for my health and healing, my wealth, my home, family, friends and for things to do that are of value to the community.

On the return leg I try to pray for particular people; on Sundays for our churches, on Mondays for our Government, Tuesdays for the US President and the UN General Secretary, Wednesday for my family, Thursdays for my godchildren, Friday for my friends, and Saturday for our town council, etc.

I realise that living alone allows me the freedom to choose my time of quiet, undisturbed by family demands (one of the few advantages of the single state). So my aim is to set my moral compass from the moment I awake. I have a small olivewood Cross on my wardrobe door, and I say:

> *Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name.*

And to really button it all up, as I end with a verse from a hymn:

> *Lord - direct, control, suggest this day*
> *all I design or do or say,*
> *that all my powers and all my might*
> *in thy sole glory may unite.*

* * *

This may all sound rather pious – but it's true. I have to be strict with myself. I was 22 when I surrendered my will to God, committing myself to seeking His guidance. That evening, in a cold Glasgow bedroom, I seemed to hear him say: 'You will have a life of iron discipline yet deep contentment.'

Readers will know that it hasn't quite worked out that way for me; yet I do know that when I'm not disciplined, when I lack self-control, give in to fear, or over-indulge – then I lose that feeling of self respect, and contentment flies out the window.

I should add that besides all this concentration on the mind and spirit, I do not forget the body: on getting up I do

ten minutes exercise, and five minutes at bedtime. Little and often (and an occasional swim) seems to keep me mobile—so far!

Life is rarely dull – there's so much to do and see, and read and hear and watch and enjoy, and people to talk to. But I *can* get bored and drowsy, wading through the pile of papers and mags on my trolley. I don't get a daily paper – too big; I rely on Radio 4 for news and views as I dress and breakfast and do the dishes. I take *The Week,* and the *Radio Times,* in which I mark what I choose to hear or watch. My TV is hidden behind my armchair, to discourage random viewing (and save space). And I try to Keep Sunday Special; I don't open my computer, and I don't do any shopping.

* * *

As I conclude this story I realise I still seem to blame my mother for things I thought I had forgiven her, despite that amazing reconciliation at 23. As I grew to maturity and beyond, I became increasingly aware of the pain that still existed about my early days. The more light was shone into those years, the more hurt I felt – of being 'unwanted', of just having been 'parked'.

But in the same way that I received the marvellous gift of forgiveness of my father in 2007, I feel I have at last faced the remnants of resentment about my mother, and offered them to God, and asked for healing. I still feel occasional stabs of pain, and tears spring to my eyes, but I tell my little wounded child inside me, 'It's OK, I'm here to protect you.' If it comes to it, and it has to be, perhaps we can mother (or even father) ourselves…

Looking back, I'm so grateful to have met the Scouts when I was ten, and MRA when I was twenty. B-P's *Scouting for Boys* really made an impression. His philosophy of self-discipline and character-building made up for a distinct lack of such in my home life. The values embodied in the Scout law, which we recited at each troop meeting, have lasted all

my life. Without those years, I would have undoubtedly been poorer in body, mind and spirit.

Together with MRA/IofC they have been my salvation, and set me on a path which, though I have deviated so often, and worried so needlessly, has finally led to an evening of greater peace and satisfaction than I ever believed possible.

In these latter years I have increasingly felt the presence of what I like to call my 'guardian angel' – an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So often I've been nudged into action, or stopped from doing something, or miraculously rescued, plus a host of seemingly felicitous coincidences. Albert Einstein said, *Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous.*

So life has been rich and varied. There's never enough time to do all I want. Last Christmas I was given Jonathan Stedall's autobiography, called *Where on Earth is Heaven?* It made me realise that when I walk along the river bank, or curl up with a good book, hear sublime music, or watch a fine film - I experience a little bit of heaven - several times a day!

* * *

And now I feel I must address my last words to my dear parents:

Dear Ma and Pa,

From a full heart I now embrace you both, putting the past behind me. I am now ready to thank you for bringing me into the world. Although it's been tough, it's been worth it. I used to think otherwise, but now I value all that I have been able to experience.

What have I learnt as a result of the 80 years you gave me? 'To do unto others as I would have them do unto me'. To see things from the other person's point of view. To realise that being so critical is so negative; that if I want see the world a better place, the place to start

is with myself.

I now realise, Mother, so much more of what you went through: the rejection you felt from your mother, the shame, the loneliness, the lack of support from your brothers, and how much you missed your dead elder sister – all leading to depression after you arrived back in Britain with baby me.

You did what you thought was right at the time. I cannot blame you any more for not being 'maternal' as you said, unable to care for me after I was born. I realise now how much you tried to find the best way to bring me up. No social workers around in those days.

No, it wasn't easy for you, without a husband - until I introduced you to Laurie! Then it would have been lovely to live up in London with you. He was so nice – but the war meant it wasn't very wise to risk the bombs, with many schools closed or evacuated.

I just wish I'd talked with you more openly, and deeply, and more specifically. I am sorry that I wasn't a better son to you – free of the suspicion and fear that strained our relationship (on my part, not yours). Having read and re-read more of your diaries and journals I have a much deeper understanding of you. Pity it's come so late; I might even have managed to love you properly. You tried so hard to love me – but I was so difficult to reach.

But now I've come to realise that relationships are the most important things in life. More so than achievements at work, or the money we make. I want to thank you for all you strove to give me, in trying to make up for the poor start. I'll never forget your challenge: 'Stop whingeing – you've got Scottish spine, French flair, Jewish tenacity and American drive. Get on with it!'

And now, Father, the first time I wrote to you, you

were a totally imaginary figure – of whom I knew nothing. This time it's different. I can't tell you how much it's meant to me to find out about you, and explore your family tree. I feel a 'whole man' for the first time in 80 years. How I missed you – but of course I realise you could never have been there for me without wrecking your family set-up. I'm resigned to that and have truly forgiven you – especially as Ma has told me in her diary how she met you, and fell in love – the first man who ever evoked that response in her, I believe.

And now I'm enjoying getting to know your grandson Andrew, and together we've investigated our ancestry with the help of a huge history of the Archibald family by Professor Allan Marble. So that will keep me busy for a while – till perhaps I join you both soon.

Your son,

Andrew John Archibald-Munro

* * *

. . . Not till the loom is silent
and the shuttles cease to fly,
shall God unroll the canvas
and explain the reason why
the dark threads are as needed
in the weaver's skilful hands
as the threads of gold and silver
in the pattern He has planned.

Benjamin M Franklin (1882-1965)