JOY'S JOURNEY

A Memoir

‘And now abide faith, hope and love, these three:
but the greatest of these is love.’

1 Corinthians chapter 13: v. 13

JOY’S JOURNEY

A Memoir

Joy Hunter

UMBRIA PRESS

For Felicity, Matthew and Caroline

Umbria Press London SW15 5DP
www.umbriapress.co.uk

Printed and bound by
Ashford Colour Press, Gosport

ISBN: 978-1-910074-00-8

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people I would like to thank but I can only name a few – partly because their names would fill the book and also because their encouragement was mostly in the form of pats on the back of the marathon runner urging me on.

I owe the original idea of writing a book to Elizabeth Grice who first interviewed me for the *Daily Telegraph*. She first sowed the seeds. They have grown slowly. My warm thanks to her for suggesting that my reflections were worth recording.

Even so, this book would never have materialised had it not been for the ceaseless encouragement of Terrie Rintoul of the Memoir Group at Guildford Institute. A big thank you to her for persevering and giving me so much of her time and advice.

I owe enormous thanks to my editor and publisher, Alan Gordon Walker for his patience, skilful guidance and helpful suggestions.

Introduction

Perhaps the highpoint of my life was working on Churchill's staff during the Second World War. My parents had spent valuable savings to send me to a top ranking secretarial college, Mrs Hoster's. It also functioned as an employment agency and while there I was given a pink form and sent for interview at the Offices of the War Cabinet at 54 Great George Street abutting onto Bird Cage Walk and St James' Park. I was interviewed by Captain Rawlins and Miss Brown. I had no idea who they were or what their titles meant. I naturally accepted the post as there was no prevaricating about jobs in wartime; you went where you were sent.

I was eighteen when I went to the Offices of the War Cabinet in January 1944. That was call-up age and it would have been a munitions factory or whatever was needed if I hadn't become a temporary civil servant on war service. We all had to sign the Official Secrets Act and government work was restricted information.

Looking back, I can see that working in the Offices of the War Cabinet was the exciting beginning to a long, varied and deeply rewarding career for me. Had I been allowed to pursue my interest in nursing, my life would certainly have been very different, just as it would have been had I elected to become a permanent civil servant after the war, but it's hard to imagine how either path could have been more amazing than the one I was dealt by my parents' choice of secretarial training.

This was followed by my inclusion in the momentous official delegation to the Three Power Conference at Potsdam in 1945, between the victorious allies, Great Britain, USA and the Soviet Union. I was only twenty-one at the time and I was thrown in at the deep end, but it was the experience of a lifetime. It was fascinating seeing high ranking delegates such as Marshall,

Leahy, Brooke, Zhukov and Cunningham at close quarters and even more awe-inspiring to shake hands with the three leaders themselves: Truman, Stalin and Churchill. I could hardly believe it was happening and I felt completely overawed, although working in Churchill's underground war rooms, I had seen him a good many times. We all worked hard, but we were young and I, for one, was thrilled by all the new experiences.

After this, there followed a long official visit to Washington with Professor Lionel Robbins, involved in the Bretton Woods Agreement, an unbelievable opportunity to visit a country where every luxury could be found, and where there was no rationing. I then had the opportunity to serve the Archbishop of Canterbury, particularly apposite as my father was a priest.

It was during this period that I met my husband. Marriage and children followed and some very painful experiences which I have never described before.After my husband's death, I had to support my family, but this was followed by a stimulating new career in teaching and teacher training, the NHS and a whole range of leadership positions in the Girl Guides, as well as a new area of self-employed work after I had officially retired. With the unstinting support of my family, my life has been full of adventure, excitement and challenges and, most gratifyingly, the making of a vast number of friends.

Since 2009 I've taken on a new lease of life following an exhibition commemorating the opening of the Churchill Underground War Rooms which runs between the war rooms themselves and the museum. Newspaper features, radio, press and television interviews have led to a vast email correspondence and numerous talks to groups big and small about my wartime work. All exciting, challenging, totally unexpected. And this is still unfolding with the most recent invitation being to contribute to a new exhibition in the Cecilienhof Palace where the Three Power Conference at Potsdam held their meetings in 1945.

Following the opening of the War Rooms exhibition in 2009, a major publishing house sent a senior editor to see me but they wanted thousands of words in a very short time, principally on life in wartime London and working on Churchill's underground staff. This was impossible and so I began to think about the way life has changed since my childhood. Perhaps my family would be interested in the contrast. It was slow going as it felt strange to be writing about myself but I abandoned my original idea of a batch of essays on some of the fascinating places I have visited and battled on.

It is now finished and here it is!

Vicarage Children

'Joy cometh in the morning,' quoted the psalmist. And I did and at 6.30 a.m. I was born on 15th September 1925 in Brockmoor Vicarage, South Staffordshire (now West Midlands) in the district of Brierley Hill. This is, perhaps, a not very original way to begin, but it fits with part of the reason for my writing at all. There were three of us: my sisters Rosemary born in 1927 and Anne born in 1931. We were about twenty-five miles from Birmingham and maybe fifteen from Wolverhampton with Dudley, Stourbridge and Halesowen all within a few miles. There was beautiful country not far away: the Clent Hills, Kinver Edge and Albrighton in Shropshire, as well as farmland round about but, not having a car, we didn't make many trips.

Brockmoor was what might now be described as an urban village – grey and colourless. There was a mixture of tradesmen and poor people with children wearing clogs and probably sewn into their clothes in winter. This was customary in those days to keep the cold out as best they could. There was a boy known as the yodeller and another boy with a tin can on a long piece of wire containing fire which he swung round and round as he raced down the street. We weren't allowed to play in the road or mix with these children.

It's hard to imagine what it must have been like for my mother coming from a well-off comfortable home with four live-in servants and a huge Daimler and chauffeur. Her father owned the first car in West Bromwich. It was not an easy appointment for my father either who had been brought up in Stoke-on-Trent.

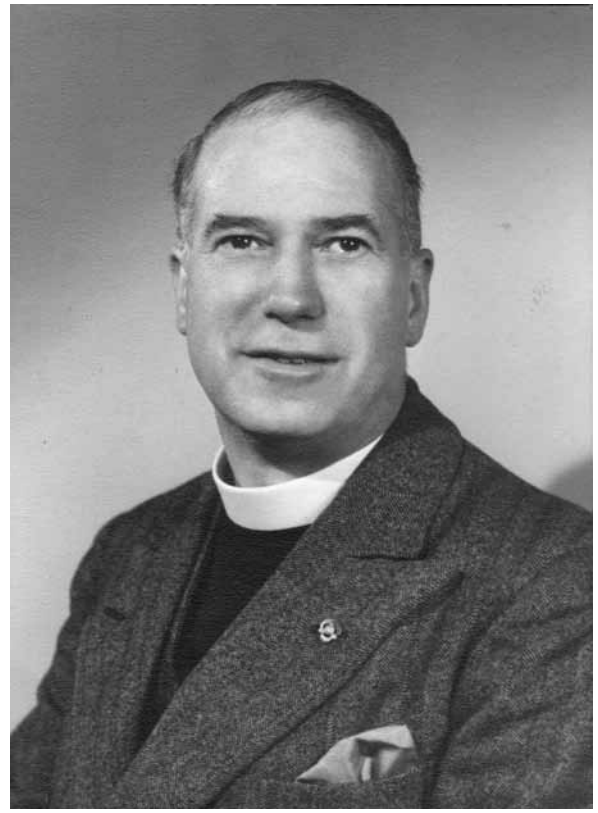
My father came from a humble background and his own father had left home when he was young. His mother and aunt worked in the art department of Copelands, the nearby Spode Pottery, hand painting beautiful china. His deaf sister learned her teaching

Joy (holding Laddie), Mummy and Rosemary, Brockmoor garden, 1934

skills under a mentor in the local school in Penkhull, with Miss Podmore, where she spent the rest of her working life. My father left school at about fourteen and he too went to work in Copelands as a junior clerk, determined even then to become a priest.

He sang in the choir at Boothen parish church (near Stoke City Football team's old ground) and learned to play the organ with Carl Oliver, who many years later, became the organist at Hanley parish church to which my father was appointed in 1943. After attending St Aidan's College, Durham, my father was ordained in Liverpool Anglican Cathedral – the other end of Hope Street from the now famous crown-shaped Roman Catholic Cathedral and served his first curacy in the parish of St Anne's with Hope, Liverpool.

He then went to St Philip's, West Bromwich where Mr Solly was vicar and it was there he met my mother. They were engaged for seven years before being married in 1924. My mother told me that when they were allowed to be in a room on their own, her father would knock on the door at ten o'clock indicating it



Daddy, Vicar of Leek, 1936 – 1943

was time for my father to leave. Mr Solly had at some time been a missionary in Japan and I have a tea set which he gave to my father – perhaps it was a wedding present.

I remember my father always had trouble with his legs and I was told it was caused by putting his puttees on too tightly for a route march when he was in the Royal Army Medical Corps during the First World War. Photographs also show him to have quite a protruding belly which may well have resulted from his poorly nourished youth. All his family worked hard, wages were low and there wouldn't have been a lot of money coming in.

I understand my maternal grandmother had been brought up a Methodist but it was later considered more suitable in her public

Joy aged 1 year 1926

Joy aged 3 1928

position in the community for her to join the Church of England. Her father was Martin Dunn, a builders' merchant of standing, and she married William Fred Smallman whose father owned the Crown oil works in West Bromwich. So between the two families there was considerable wealth and on Martin Dunn's death, my grandfather became owner of both companies.

Grannie Smallman, or Big Grannie as we called her to differentiate her from Little Grannie, my father's mother, was a very strong character. She worked tirelessly to improve conditions for mothers and children in West Bromwich and founded a number of welfare clinics. One I remember was at Hilltop in West Bromwich and the nurse there was a Sarah Smith who often visited my Grannie's when we were there. A conversation which I remember was when she was talking about some event at the Grosvenor Hotel in London and mispronounced the name by sounding the 's' and emphasising the 'e' in Grosvenor which my mother, always keen to put things right, later pointed out to me.

Grannie was involved in public life. As well as being a magistrate

she was also on the Council later becoming the first woman Mayor of West Bromwich. She would frequently be out when we arrived at 'Silverdale', their house, on a Saturday morning. I can see her now coming into the sitting room in her long squirrel cape, hat and gloves and stick, always smartly dressed. My mother had an elder sister and three younger brothers.

Grannie never complained and led a very busy, hardworking life but when we stayed with our grandparents I noticed she had a weekly massage from a local nurse, also something to do with the births of her children but I don't know what exactly as we were never told those details.

Silverdale seemed enormous to us as children. In fact, it was big, having had an extension of a lounge running the width of the house added to one side with a master bedroom and private bathroom above. The lounge with its parquet floor and exotic furniture and tiger skin rug was my haven and I would spend many hours there dancing to the windup gramophone.

On one occasion my grandfather came in to watch and became too intimate saying my lace trimmed silk knickers and lace top were too tight for me. Instinctively I knew that what he was doing was wrong but I never said anything as I think in those days my mother would have laughed it off saying I was being ridiculous or naughty. I just kept out of his way and eventually he gave up. I'm sure I wouldn't have been believed if I had told my mother and certainly I don't think she would have known how to deal with it.

There was a large dining room and my uncles used to join us for lunch on a Saturday as well as a family friend they called General (we had to call him Uncle General). I don't know where this nickname came from or what his real name was. All the furniture in my grandparents' house seemed very big. There were highly polished mahogany sideboards, dressers and a table with a number of leaves which could be inserted so that it could easily seat twenty.

My grandfather always made much of the stilton, especially at Christmas when a whole cheese would be brought in wrapped in a damask napkin, served by my grandfather with a silver scoop and topped up with port from time to time to keep it moist. He used to say it wasn't really edible until it moved of its own accord. It didn't occur to me then that he was talking about maggots and I do wonder whether it really reached that stage.

Granddad always had a stock of funny stories which he told over and over again and, of course, we always laughed. One was to do with a man from Stockton-on-Tees who had one hundred and twenty-nine teas or was it one hundred and forty-nine? and another about a doctor who said, 'Ahem, dear Madam, do not fret, we will surely cure your little pet'. Why this should be thought funny, I cannot now remember or imagine.

As well as the sitting room, dining room and lounge, there was a morning room to which the men would retire to smoke and I managed to collect a number of sets of cigarette cards – Churchman's, Players and others. There were sets of sportsmen, kings and queens, famous buildings amongst others. I kept them for years, as I have done so many things, but have them no longer. I suppose nowadays they might have been worth something on E-bay.

The morning room had a strange octagonal shaped table, with a leather central table-top sitting in the middle of an ornate wooden surround. The wireless was in there and we would be allowed to listen to the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. One year Rosemary and I were given necklaces of pale and darker blue daisies which, for no other reason since none of my family had been to university, determined me to support Cambridge from then onwards.

Grannie would send her car to take us to West Bromwich on Saturdays and driving through Dudley always terrified me especially if mother wished to visit a wool shop in a side street as there was a great build up of traffic and we seemed to be the prime obstacle.

We would be taken to my grandparents for lunch and football at The Hawthorns, the home of West Bromwich Albion football club since 1900. A rare treat for me as my uncles and father usually had family tickets. One afternoon when I was allowed to accompany them, Albion were playing local rivals Aston Villa, my vociferous uncle stood up shouting loudly as they entered the pitch, "Dirty dogs". I was startled, being sure that my father disapproved of such language.

Mostly on match days we children were taken out for a walk in the afternoon by one of my grandmother's maids but we always stood with Grannie at the window when the men streamed back on foot stretching right across the road only giving way to the occasional tram. Grannie would knock on the window with her rings and it would be thumbs up or down with the appropriate number of fingers held up to indicate the goals.

When going to Grannie's for Saturday lunch, I always sat in front with Frank the chauffeur except for one occasion when Ada, one of Grannie's maids, had spent a few days with us and was returning to West Bromwich. My parents said it would not be appropriate for her to sit in the back and she must therefore sit in the front. As always I was hopping mad to get out as soon as the car arrived and when Frank asked me why I was not sitting in the front as usual I eventually repeated what my parents had said.

Later that day when Ada was taking us for our afternoon walk, she tackled me about this saying, "Your father is far too much of a gentleman to say such a thing" and I must have been lying and said she would speak to him about it. To begin with I stuck out and said that he had but when she threatened to challenge him I gave in and said I had made it up. I suspect anyway that it was my mother with her 'people in their place' upbringing who had decided that this was proper; not my father, but he would always support her. However, I don't wish this to reflect on my grandparents because my grandmother was always considerate

and polite to her staff. Someone with more intelligence would have realised that a child could never have devised such a story but I was terrified of my parents finding out that I'd told Frank what they had said to me and so in the end I gave in and lied, feeling awful that I'd not had the courage to tell the truth.

On another walk along the Birmingham Road I was looking backwards at something which caught my attention and I walked into a lamppost giving myself a very painful black eye. My grandparents' remedy was to give me some brandy which I spat out. Some of our walks were through the Sandwell pits. This was a shallow coal pit which was closed on a Saturday afternoon but to a small child this was quite frightening as, even though the pit itself was closed, the trucks continued to rattle along the rails coming past us in a sinister way without warning.

This walk often took us through a field where one day the farmer came out and shouted at us causing me afterwards always to be afraid if we ever went that way again. It depended on the length of the walk and I suppose the inclination of whoever took us as to whether we did the whole circle and back through the park or simply stayed on the main road. I don't know why I was such a nervous child but I was always terrified of being found out and told off.

One Christmas I spent over a month in bed at my grandparents with a swollen neck and very painful glands. Undiagnosed and looked after by an uncle who was a doctor, a hard gland remained in my neck for many years and I've always suffered from severe earache and sinus pain. Some years ago, when I realised I was deaf in one ear, it transpired that I had a perforated ear drum, no doubt from all the trouble I had as a child.

That Christmas Grannie gave me two books by Juliana Horatio Ewing – *Mary's Meadow* and *Jan of the Windmill*, illustrated by M. V. Wheelhouse, which I still have. Children were given books rather than toys in those days, just as had been the case with my

mother. I have a number of beautifully bound copies of Dickens' novels with mother's name on the flyleaf and dates such as 1910 and 1913 (she was born in 1899).

I was often ill as a child with frequent sties on my eyes which continued to my early adulthood, causing me much pain and unsightliness which was embarrassing later on when I was working. Because of illness, I had to miss several parties and sometimes our annual Christmas visit to the Theatre Royal in Birmingham for the pantomime. But I do remember being dolled up in our party dresses sitting in the front row of the dress circle, dreading the cat walking round the edge in 'Dick Whittington'. Cora Goffin was the principal boy in another pantomime – her phrase 'Shall we turn?' as she walked backwards and forwards along the front of the stage arm in arm with her partner for some reason causing much laughter. I also remember the breathtaking transformation scene before the interval, a veritable wonder land. Evelyn Laye was another very popular principal boy in pantomime. In one she sang 'Spread a Little Happiness' which was revived and made famous again years later by Sting.

On one occasion my parents took Rosemary and me to the theatre in Birmingham to see Bobby Howes in 'Bobby Get Your Gun' about which I remember nothing except saying in a whisper loud enough to be overheard by the people in the row behind from their obvious amusement: "All I want is the lav and an ice cream".

One of my mother's closest school friends Phyllis Thompson (whose husband's family owned Banks's Ales in Wolverhampton) invited me to accompany her and her daughter Elizabeth to Puccini's 'Madame Butterfly' at the Prince of Wales theatre in Birmingham. Much as music has been a passion all my life, at that time I was too young to appreciate opera without any preparation and found the long drawn out action very tedious. I kept asking questions and getting told to be quiet, unlike the happy experience of later years.

In my grandparents' house there were two maids' bedrooms up a steep staircase off the main landing which we were never allowed to go into. I don't know what they did for a bathroom. Sarah was the parlour maid and Eva the housemaid but often roped in to help serve at table. Before serving lunch they both changed into dark green dresses with beige frilly aprons and little bandeau caps – no deodorant then and I'm sure they were very smelly. Annie, the cook and Ada, who did the laundry and the mending, were sisters and wore brown cotton dresses and white aprons. When there are scenes in 'Downton Abbey' of the servants eating their meals round the large kitchen table, I'm reminded of Saturday lunches at my grandmother's when she used to send me out during the meal with messages for one of the staff.

One day when I was ill, Ada and Eva were making my bed and Ada threw one of the pillows over the end of the bed. It landed on the electric fire which she hadn't noticed and burst into flames which she quickly smothered. I was far too scared to tell anyone in case it got her into trouble.

Looking through my many scrapbooks kept over the years, I keep coming across 'treasures' which are hard to tear myself away from. One day I found a small card in my maternal great-grandmother's hand saying 'To Baby Joy' and £5 – a not inconsiderable sum in those days as a christening present. She died when I was six months old and I have a photograph of her holding me with my mother and grandmother sitting beside her. In another album there is this endearing letter to Father Christmas from my younger sister Anne then aged nine:

> Dear Father Christmas
>
> It will soon be Christmas Eve when you come to see us. If it is possible please bring me a pair of winter gloves and a box of handkerchiefs and a pair of stockings.
>
> With love from
>
> Anne Milward

Rather different from the sort of requests Father Christmas gets these days and reflecting the need for necessities rather than toys in wartime.

Visits to my father's mother, her sister, Auntie Rose and her daughter, Auntie Ethel (another sister of my father's died in childhood but as with my father's father, these things were never talked about) were rare and therefore a major event when Grannie Smallman lent us her car and chauffeur for what seemed like a mammoth day's outing. Auntie Rose had a humped back which I have inherited (sometimes called the dowager's hump). I was always being told to sit and stand up as a child and mealtimes were very uncomfortable as it really hurt to sit up straight. When I was teaching many years later, a school doctor told me that adolescents can develop this curvature as well as older people so it must have originated when I was young and become more obvious as I've grown older.

When my second teeth came through there were obviously too many or they were too big for the size of my mouth and consequently I had to make frequent trips to an orthodontist in Birmingham called Mr Ormerod near Snow Hill station, then part of the Great Western line. He fitted me with both an upper and lower regulation plate which had to be tightened each day, causing me a great deal of pain.

Going to the dentist soon became one of the horrors of my life and regardless of the rough injections supposed to ease the pain of fillings, I was terrified and screamed and writhed my way through subsequent visits until finally in my sixties my mouth contained more fillings than teeth and the extreme pain subsided somewhat. I think my mother rather looked forward to our Birmingham visits as we always went to Marshal and Snelgrove (a grand department store) afterwards where I was allowed a meringue and ice-cream.

My parents were displeased when I lost the plates supposed

to correct my teeth. I had to take them out to eat and several times lost one or both as I put them in my pocket and forgot about them. I didn't have any teeth extracted to give room for my teeth to move so the suffering was for nothing and many years later I went to Eastman's Dental Hospital and had eight upper front teeth removed surgically as well as part of my palate and replaced with a denture with seven teeth. For the first time in my life I felt entirely comfortable with my teeth although I still have to this day a ferocious bite which one dentist told me was the equivalent of forty-five pounds per inch.

Life for me in Brockmoor was coloured by seemingly endless summers. We had a large garden with a sandpit refilled each year after our summer holidays on the south coast with a lorry load of real sea sand. Old photographs show us in the knitted bathing suits our mother made for us; one green with green and white stripes on the bodice, the other a sort of gingery brown. We were all dressed the same and, being wool, when they were wet they used to sag between our legs in a most uncomfortable way.

My father loved the garden and took pride in growing yellow tomatoes in his greenhouse. I can taste them now and never think red ones taste or smell as good. There were two formal flower beds on the other side of the drive which he always kept full and in spring the wonderful scent from the wallflowers and forget-me-nots has endeared me to them ever since. Outside the kitchen window was a huge and very beautiful apple tree and beyond it a big kitchen garden where my father grew all our vegetables.

The sandpit and the greenhouse and a swing roped to a huge tree were all on the edge of what seemed like a field. Certainly a farmer came each year with his horse and cart, scythe and pitchfork to cut the grass for hay. In the summer, the parish garden party would be held on this field under a huge marquee and Rosemary and I had to present bouquets to the openers, climbing onto a rickety platform. One year, and possibly more

often, Lady Hanson of the brewing and pub company Mitchells and Butlers was the opener, wearing a long flowing pink flowery dress with a huge brimmed black straw hat decorated with artificial flowers to match her dress.

Running round the edge of the field hidden by overgrown nondescript trees and bushes and a large patch of raspberry canes was a ragged and very rough path. When visitors came, especially if it were Michael Bates (the actor), his brother Colin and their sister, Rosemary, we would unearth an ancient wicker bath chair from an outhouse with one of us riding inside desperately trying to steer the long metal rod attached to a tiny front wheel. We would take it turns to tear round and round the 'cat path' as we called it with everyone else pushing, laughing hysterically and thoroughly enjoying ourselves.

Michael's mother, Sally Bates, neé Barlow, had been at school with mother and was her lifelong and closest friend and one of my godmothers. When Sally's husband Stuart joined the Indian Civil Service, she and mother wrote to each other every week for forty years. During the Second World War when Sally and Stuart were unable to return from India for school holidays, Rosemary lived with us.

Auntie Sally often sent us presents from India and I still have a rather battered collection of Indian figures made of clay moulded on wire and painted. They were Indian servants, the ayah, seis, mali, kitmagar, chiprassi, dhobi, sweeper and so on. On one of the Antiques Roadshow programmes, similar figures, in good condition, were valued at £200 each. Like the Dinky cars I sold at auction for a small sum, my figures had been lovingly played with by generations of children.

While in Brockmoor, I remember going into the churchyard adjoining the vicarage where Alfred, the verger, was digging graves, and being intrigued by the depth – six feet which I think is the regulation. One day, when my grandmother visited us, she

must have spoken to him and said something about Rosemary and me. His reply, which my family remembered long after was, "Them's angels. Them's just like wax!" Praise indeed!

There was a high brick wall right round the garden except for the part which adjoined the churchyard. I used to sneak to the corner by the lychgate and peer over the wall to watch the funeral cortege arrive. It consisted of horse drawn carriages with black horses, their black feather plumes waving on their heads and a seemingly wizened man like a monkey sitting atop the coach with a whip which had long black streamers. It was intriguing. The curtains of the houses near the church would be drawn shut and the children kept off the street. When younger I used to think this a strange thing to do but when I grew older I realised that this mark of respect gave the mourners a respite for grief from prying eyes. For weddings the horses would be white but I didn't find that nearly so fascinating. My mother had strictly forbidden us to watch, so I became a good liar, but I was usually found out and doubly punished for lying.

When we were small my mother hired Celia, a local fifteen year old girl to take us out for walks in the afternoons. We'd go down the humpty-dumpty path or along the canal. The humpty-dumpty path was nicknamed by either Celia or us because it literally went up and down over a series of mounds of very solid grey coloured earth presumably caused by some earlier earth works.

If we turned right past the dilapidated house where the yodeller lived, I was always rather frightened because walking along the canal we passed the brickworks with women in headscarves, long skirts and aprons throwing pairs of bricks from one to another along a chain from the factory to the canal boats moored alongside. They sang as they worked and I seemed to think they called out disparaging remarks as we went past but maybe that was my childish nervousness again. I know that several afternoons on the humpty-dumpty path a local boy called

George, who had a liking for Celia, tried to kiss her and she pushed him off. High drama.

Another of our walks was to Wordsley on the road from Stourbridge to Wolverhampton and there was one particular shop that I always wanted to stop at. In the window was a tantalising display of paper dolls and clothes to cut out. I still have a suitcase in the attic containing some of them. I think they cost 6d and I used to beg Celia to buy one for me but neither she nor I had that sort of money.

It was in Brockmoor that Gladys Green joined us and stayed for many years until we moved to Hanley. She had periods of very dark moods and at one stage she did leave us for a while as my father told her that her behaviour had become unbearable. She had an oddly shaped body with her bottom seemingly on top of her knees and she was expected to do everything for something like £1 a week and half a day off. Called a cook-general she made the beds, cleaned the house, scrubbed the stone floors, cooked the meals, laid the table, did the washing and ironing and I suppose anything else that needed doing. It must have been a grim life. In the morning my mother used to put on her 'work clothes' with a pinny on top and presumably helped with the chores. She certainly cleaned the silver and did the flowers. She always changed into an afternoon dress after lunch and would then sit and read or embroider beautiful afternoon tablecloths or knit, mostly clothes for the three of us.

Luckily for me, my father was very musical and arranged for me to have piano lessons when I was around four or five years old on the piano in the parish hall which he had raised funds to build just next door to our home. I'd wander over often and tinkle the ivories and considering the poor pay of clergy in those days, I now realise how extremely fortunate I was that he saw fit for me to have lessons. My sister Rosemary reminded me recently that after one lesson I had run into the room saying

"I can play the piano!" Probably the very first piece in the book with simple repeated chords which I can still play from memory. I think it was called 'Down by the Farm'. Music has been the centre of my life and at one time I hoped I would make a career of singing. I still play the piano every day although I have lost much of my skill. Unlike other instruments, the piano can give so much pleasure even if one isn't very good.

My mother took me to dancing class in Dudley when I was four and I remember wearing a lemon organdie party dress. The teacher was the partner of Miss Parsons who taught dancing at Lawnside where I eventually went in 1936. My only memory of the Dudley class was of having to skip round the teacher in a circle holding out our frocks and a feeling that she must have told me to do better.

Behind the Vicarage was a branch of Richard Thomas and Baldwin, the steel works. Celia's father worked for them all his life and I remember my mother saying how awful it was for him that he had to leave home at 5 am every day and travel ten miles to another one of their factories when there was one literally across the road from where he lived. He died almost as soon as he retired from some type of lung infection.

Occasionally we went to tea with Ruth and Mary Messiter whose father was Vicar of Kingswinford, a small village between Wordsley and Wolverhampton. Each year there was a Sunday School festival when we lined up behind the local Boys' Brigade band and the choir and clergy in full attire and walked several miles all round the parish in our Sunday best, straw hats and gloves of course, and my mother not really liking my holding hands with a girl called Vivienne Marley as we led the children behind my father. I could never understand why my mother was worried about my holding hands with Vivien

In 1935, the year of King George V and Queen Mary's Silver Jubilee, my sister Rosemary and I planted trees on a spare bit

of land opposite the Bannisters' shop in the High Street in the middle of the village and had our photographs taken by the press. One Christmas, Rosemary and Anne developed chicken pox and I was sent with my grandparents and aunt to spend a week in Llandrindod Wells where my grandparents went quite often to the Pump House hotel. I wasn't then at boarding school so I don't know why I wasn't at home when the disease developed.

In those days I was prone to warts on my knees (as well as the recurring sties) and I remember my mother rushing to the car just as were setting off and dabbing my knee with undiluted Milton which burned all the skin and caused me considerable pain for quite a long time. She was very remorseful when I told her about it afterwards.

It was in Llandrindod Wells that my grandmother bought me the first pair of really grown-up shoes – size 6 (a size I still take today) brown suede with two leather straps. I wore them for years and was sad to see them eventually wear out. For the first time I had a pair of shoes that fitted me perfectly. As an adult I took a very narrow fitting and can only think that because my parents hadn't much money or perhaps because children's shoes weren't made in widths then, they bought me shoes slightly too small in order to compensate for the width, hence my toes slant from my little toe to my big toe instead of being nice and straight along the top. That has become modified since I've had to give up wearing high heels and not so long ago I got rid of some really beautiful shoes knowing I would never wear them again, but I hated to see them go. Christian Dior, Rayne, silk brocade and leather that fitted like the softest gloves.

I remember a day when the full church choir was photographed in our Brockmoor garden. My copy of the photograph shows there were thirty-two of them. Interesting when compared with the difficulty some parishes have these days in recruiting even a handful and those mostly adults. During this photographic

session, a group of locals, mainly lads, pushed the big double gates to the drive open to watch and my father sent me to tell them to go shut the gates. I received a mouthful of abuse and ran back to my father in tears feeling very stupid. An adult was then sent to deal with the situation. Vicarage children were expected to do all sorts of things with authority just because we were who we were.

My mother, as I've indicated before, was very critical. We had to do everything perfectly and were never allowed to question any decision. Even at mealtimes if we started to discuss something or express an opinion it was seen as being argumentative. I've never understood why because I don't think my father had the same attitude. Sadly it was many years after he died that I began to analyse their very different approaches to life. They adored each other so there was never friction where our upbringing was concerned, but I've often wondered since whether there were bedtime conversations where conflicting ideas were expressed.

One of my earliest childhood memories was of being very ill with bronchial pneumonia. Rosemary and I lay in cots in our parents' bedroom and Dr Gifford called regularly. His two grown up children were also doctors and worked with him in his practice – Dr Rupert and Dr Helen. One of them, either Dr Gifford himself or Dr Rupert, remarked one day to my mother that he had never seen a child as ill as I was and survive. I suffered from severe bronchitis for many years afterwards and it was only when I was sixteen and having a medical before joining the Girls Training Corps that I discovered I had a four inch chest expansion and must therefore have overcome this affliction. Perhaps elocution lessons and singing helped

Another early memory was of my mother's fear of thunderstorms. If we were upstairs she would rush us into a dressing room and close the door and lie shivering, hugging us tightly to her until the storm had passed. If we were downstairs,

she would immediately hide all the knives – thought to be attractors of lightning – and draw the curtains. During one particularly heavy storm in the middle of the night my father came into our bedroom to see if were all right and it seemed as though a thunder ball passed through the open window and up the chimney in front of us. Highly unlikely I should think but I can still see it.

My mother can't have found her role as a small town vicar's wife at all easy although her heart was in the right place and she always supported my father. Of course, attitudes were very different in those days and the clergy, along with the squire or lord of the manor, if there were one, were looked up to and treated with a kind of deference by the people they lived among. While my mother had been brought up in very comfortable social surroundings, my father's situation had been very different having been brought up with no father and having to go out to work at the age of fourteen.

One day my mother took me to a street I'd never been in before to visit a young girl lying outside in a wicker carriage on wheels. She was clearly very ill although my mother never told me what was the matter with her. Rather shyly I gave her a bar of Cadbury's chocolate, presumably then thought to be a really super gift for a dying child.

All sorts of people came to the house to see my father. One I remember had a large scarlet birth mark down one side of her face (I wish I could remember her name as I can clearly see her – it might have been Charlotte or Lottie); another brought her choirboy son for my father to admonish for cutting off all the buttons on his cassock during a sermon. I'm not sure how my father dealt with him but parents were very conscious of their children's behaviour in those days and made no secret of being displeased. Certainly my mother would threaten us with our father's displeasure on hearing about something she disapproved of when he got home from

Girls' Training Corps 1942

parish visiting and I'm sure that on one occasion I was spanked on the bottom with a hairbrush. Looking back, I can't imagine my father relished this nor would he have done it of his own accord, so it may be a figment of my imagination.

On one occasion we had a visit from the Bishop of Lichfield and Rosemary caused our mother great embarrassment by remarking in front of him that he was wearing knickers and we both giggled profusely. He was dressed in what was then formal

bishop's attire with knee length socks and shoes with silver buckles and I suppose purple breeches.

Once when I was unwell my mother placed a small one-bar electric fire on a washstand next to my bed to keep me warm. I remember playing with it by running a knife up and down the bars to produce exciting sparks. Something hard to imagine now with the Health and Safety regulations in place today. I think that so many of these are actually wrapping children in cotton wool and preventing them from experiencing the many pleasures that freedom gave growing children but that little amusement of mine could have been fatal.

Like all children, Rosemary and I often incurred the wrath of mother – probably led by me I have to admit. One day we climbed into a bath full of water with all our clothes on. I can see us now, wearing pale blue cotton dresses with matching knickers.

On another occasion, in the nursery, which was three steps down from the landing next to the bathroom, I got very angry about something and threw a metal farm object at Celia who was ironing. She ducked and the object broke a window pane. My mother was in the room and there was a great row. Another time, I dangled a stick with long streamers of paper into the fire with very satisfactory results from a pyrotechnics' point of view but not from my mother's. We also had a goldfish in a round bowl on the chest of drawers which jumped out frequently and had to be picked up quickly with wet hands. Twice I cut my sister Rosemary's hair – an incident I remembered well when my own son Matthew aged three cut his sheets, curtains and the seat of a chair while supposedly resting after lunch. I was so shocked that I found it impossible to say more than a few surprised words to him which I think actually made more impression than if I'd lost my temper.

My constant fear was of not being good. Indeed, recurrent in my memory of my childhood is of asking my mother "Am I

being good, Mummy?" Mother never gave me a straight answer, presumably to keep me on my toes.

I remember Rosemary and I being at a party at a close friend of my mother who lived near Wolverhampton. Her name was Freya Keys whose husband was owner of the then well-known lock factory in Birmingham. We were dressed in full party style; the pink full skirted net dresses we had worn as bridesmaids and the child whose party it was kept calling us bridegrooms although I constantly corrected her and all she said was "Yes, bridegrooms".

When I was five or six our parents employed a governess called Miss Harris to come and teach Rosemary and me each morning in the nursery. Rosemary learned to read much more quickly and apparently more easily than I did. I can still see the reading book with a picture at the top of each page and phrases like 'the cat sat on the mat' underneath. There seemed to be a lot of red in each picture which appeared to indicate what the cat was doing, as far as I remember.

One day Miss Harris invited us to tea at her home in Stourbridge adjoining the Blue Coat School. She had to come and fetch us by bus of course, walk us up the hill to her house and bring us back again. Goodness knows how long all this took but since few people had cars, we were used to it. Nowadays when I drive through Stourbridge on my way to visit Rosemary in Shrewsbury I think I can recognise where her house was, adjacent to the spacious grounds of the local Bluecoat School, although it has been pulled down now and other buildings stand on the site. This was all prior to our going to an independent junior day school in Stourbridge called Redhill School, brought back to my mind when I began a teaching post at a school in Redhill, Surrey forty years on.

Redhill School in Stourbridge was run by three sisters known as the Misses Tomlinson. Miss Margaret was headmistress. She was of small to medium height with glasses and grey wavy hair pinned into a bun. She had a kindly disposition, I suppose she must have been the most academic of the three and I don't remember ever being afraid of her. We probably didn't see her all that often although I think she taught what was then known as scripture throughout the school. Miss Hilary came next. She was probably second in command and the tallest of the three sisters. I don't remember her teaching me and my memory of her is hazy but I think she may have been in charge of the housekeeping. Last was Miss Lily whom I remember very well. She was petite with a sharp face and manner and looked perpetually displeased.

All three sisters ate lunch with us. Miss Lilly supervised my table. On the first day I couldn't eat the piece of gristly meat on my plate and the whole table was made to wait until I had finished, hardly able to swallow it and feeling utterly miserable and embarrassed. To add to the horrors of the first day, Rosemary and I were dressed in red cotton dresses carefully chosen by mother (the colour of the school's red blazers and berets) because our uniform hadn't arrived. At breakfast, I spilled egg down the front of mine. Mother was furious and we had to change into green dresses in a hurry.

At first mother walked us the mile or so up to the Dudley Road where we met Mrs James who taught at the school and lived near the bus-stop which was outside yet another branch of Richard Thomas & Baldwin, the steel works. We took a double-decker bus which went through Brierley Hill to Stourbridge bus station where we were joined by other children and marched up to school in crocodile formation.

I remember the names of some of the girls in my form – Pat Siddons, who I met again later at my next school, Diana Sheridan,

Anne Blakeway, Valerie Tredgold and Doreen Gough. I found their names in a programme of 'Dramatic Entertainment' dated 11th and 12th February, 1936 in one of my scrapbooks.

I have often wondered how long I really ought to go on with my scrapbooks and I now can see the value! I note that I was Chief Weasel in 'Toad of Toad Hall'. In fact, on the same page are two postcards posted in America dated 1889 and 1893, the first addressed to a W. Howard Inckson, Englewood, N.J. and the second to Miss Lilian Lamb, Highfield, Heaton Mersey, Manchester, England, and an empty book of stamps with the cover 'Silver Jubilee 1910 – GVR 1935, Postage Stamps – 12 at a halfpenny, 4 at a penny, 4 at a penny halfpenny two at tuppence. On the back are the words 'Bovril puts beef into you'.

At Redhill, we had Swedish gym and tap dancing – both rather modern for those days I should think. I loved both. Dancing has always been a passion so tap dancing was a real treat. We wore bright red tap shoes with a ribbon bow and would happily tap one, two, three; one, two, three; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven for what seems like most of the lesson.

I was good at Swedish gym too. I don't know why it was called Swedish except that we had no apparatus apart from benches and we did a lot of what might now be called eurhythmics. We wore dark red cotton romper suits and as well as balancing on bars I excelled at putting my foot in my mouth. This exercise entailed lying on our stomachs on the floor, bending our legs back over our heads and pulling one foot into our mouths. Few could do it so I became a star for one of the very few times ever in any kind of gym lesson.

Finding I had kept three reports in my desk at home, I was surprised to see the improvement from 'poor, must try to be neater' on the first to 'good, working well' in a term or so. I've always been very flexible, though the days are long past when I could do the Swedish gym exercise, but it's stood me in good stead throughout

my life, especially after a run of orthopaedic operations which I had over a seven year period from 2002 to 2009.

Soon Rosemary and I walked up to the bus on our own. On Fridays I was given 2d to buy a weekly children's paper on the way home – probably a comic like 'Puck' or 'Bubbles', I can't remember which one. One day we were fighting as children will and a parishioner called Mrs Thompson, wife of one of the churchwardens, telephoned Father to report on our behaviour. She was obviously one of those people who sit at their windows watching the world go by.

I kept forgetting to remove a lead pencil which had gone through a hole in my overcoat pocket and continually stuck into my leg. To this day I have the marks made by the lead and despite that and having a lead-based painted cot as a small child, which I must have licked, I have survived to tell the tale.

Even at that tender age, I had feelings of inferiority and when girls had done interesting or exciting things like going to the horse show at Olympia, I always maintained I had been there, too, though I realised at the time that the teacher didn't believe me. Whether true or not, I felt I was always in the midst of childen who came from more wealthy homes than mine – and, to a large extent, this was probably true.

Home Life

Before we left Brockmoor my father bought an Austin 17 (registration WP 1729) from the local baker and grocer, Bann (Mr Bannister) and his wife Blanche. Rosemary and I took it in turns to have lunch with them on a Sunday and I loved going into the bakehouse where Bann usually gave us a little bread man which he baked specially for us. Then we had to spend a rather tedious half-hour or so sitting with Blanche in her Sunday best, a black shiny dress fitting tightly over her small but full figure. We hardly ever went into the front parlour even on Sundays but that was not unusual those days. Front parlours were only used for funerals or very special occasions. The Bannisters had no children of their own and probably revelled in having us to lunch.

This life came to an end in 1936 when my father was offered the parish of St Edward the Confessor in Leek, the capital of the Moorlands, half way between Stoke-on-Trent and Buxton, which was practically the other end of the Lichfield diocese. Among other things, Leek is well known for Sir Thomas Wardle and the William Morris connection. There seemed to be almost constant periods of fog on that moorland road and many times I had to walk in front of the car to guide the driver over the highest parts around Flash (the highest village in England) and past the Roaches with the 'winking eye'. The road was incredibly steep and there were places where we all held our breath as the driver would rev up and take a run hoping to get to the top without stopping or the engine boiling over. On one or two winters the road to Buxton was closed by heavy drifts of snow and I have photographs of us standing on six foot drifts while men with shovels laboured hopelessly to clear the road. The upside was that my return to boarding school after Christmas often had to be delayed for a week or two because although Leek was, I think, 1500 feet above

sea level, it was surrounded on all sides by very steep hills.

A vivid memory of that time was the day when my mother drove me over to see my godmother, Auntie Sally whose mother lived in Buxton. We went to a bicycle shop and Auntie Sally bought me a BSA bike for my birthday. It cost £5.10 shillings and she bargained with the salesman to reduce it to £5 which he reluctantly did eventually, much to my embarrassment. She lived in India and bargaining was second nature to her. It was my pride and joy and I used to travel many miles on it all round Leek to beauty spots like Rudyard Lake and the Dane Valley. Later, when I went to college in Lincolnshire it was a godsend.

One year on holiday in Aldwick my uncle John bought me a budgerigar for a birthday present. My mother, always on her mark that we should be polite, warned me before I entered the room so I had to feign surprise but the pleasure was certainly truthful. We carefully brought it to Leek in my grandmother's car stopping for lunch in Crown woodlands alongside the Guildford to Bagshot road. The journeys were quite long in those days and we always stopped en route, for a picnic, sometimes in places like The Pantiles in Bagshot or Shillingford outside Oxford where there was a swimming pool. These were tremendous luxuries for us children.

My father made a cage for the budgerigar and bought it a companion and we used to let them fly about the nursery (still so called despite our ages). I spent many hours in there either with the birds or dressed in a red lace top and cream silk knickers dancing to a wind-up gramophone. My high kicks were phenomenal (should I have become a Tiller girl?). I lost myself completely in the music and release of tension.

It was while we were in Leek that I began writing to pen friends of whom I eventually accumulated eight. They came from various parts of Europe and three of them, Jacqueline (from France), Imppa (from Finland) and Anne (from Estonia) remained lifelong, very dear friends. Anne finally settled in Canada and died in the

'nineties, Imppa died in 2007 but Jacqueline although very frail lived until 2010 and I've kept in touch with her family. She was actually in England as an au pair to a family in Welwyn Garden City and spent Christmas with us a couple of times before I went with her to Paris when she returned to France in 1947. Our birthdays are on the same day but she was a year younger than me and had to finish her Baccalaureate. They all brought me much pleasure and opened my eyes and mind to the possibilities of travel.

I used to go to sleep at night planning canoe trips down Canadian waterways, stowing necessities for the journey meticulously in lockers down each side of the canoe. What inspired this line of thought I don't know except that I loved camp fires and 'land of the silver birch, home of the beaver' was a popular Guide song from Canada.

Anne Vemees was from Estonia and I kept in close touch for many years. She and her family had been in a concentration camp in Germany. Her mother died there, her two brothers were sent to Switzerland because they had TB, her four sisters went to Canada and I met two of them many years later when visiting great friends in Vancouver. Sadly Anne also died in the late 'nineties. She was a talented artist and I have a collection of her paintings and pressed flower cards as a continuing reminder of our close friendship.

During our time in Leek we used to have wonderful parties at Christmas and New Year given by various local families. We girls all wore our best party frocks and the boys wore DJs. Murder in the dark was a great favourite and other simple party games provided happy and often hilarious evenings.

The vicarage in Leek was Jacobean and, legend has it, had been slept in by Bonnie Prince Charlie, about the furthest south he got (records state Derby so this may be local myth). The drawing room was upstairs and the staircase wound round a number of corners up to the second floor. Rosemary and I slept

Leek Vicarage: Joy and Anne with Peter and Bubbles, 1942

The Rectory Hanley: Joy, Father, Rosemary. Anne (sitting) with Peter and Bubbles, 1944

on the second floor and had to put on our overcoats to go to bed because it was so cold in winter. In the mornings, we had to air our underwear by an electric fire (no guards or safety precautions then) and I can still see the steam rising out of their dampness.

I believe there were some very primitive radiators but we relied on coal fires for which Gladys our cook-general had to carry heavy buckets of coal upstairs while we huddled our chairs

as close as we could to keep out the draughts. Even so, there's nothing to my mind quite as good as a real fire glistening with huge chunks of coal.

In 1943 we moved to Hanley in the Potteries. The Rectory was in the centre of the town with a bus station and busy streets all round us. This was when Carl Oliver who had taught my father to play the organ as a young boy joined us as organist. We were also able to see my father's mother and sister more regularly, but obviously we rarely visited my maternal grandparents once we moved to North Staffordshire.

My father always came home for lunch and had twenty minutes sleep afterwards which we all respected before waking him with a cup of tea around 2.15pm. He was then ready to go out on his rounds – visiting people in their homes or in hospital, meetings of one sort or another and never home until late evening by which time we were in our dressing gowns eating our usual supper of gorgonzola cheese and bread and butter.

He laid great stress on visiting and was well loved for it. Looking back he was the old-fashioned type of parish priest. He never took a day off and only had four Sundays off in August when our grandparents generously took all their family and servants on holiday either on the south coast, Middleton and Aldwick where we stayed in the Duff Coopers' house, or Seaview on the Isle of Wight.

When we were very small, we originally stayed in the very end house on Horstone Point, now lost into the sea through the local blue slipper clay. Also in this row of large houses opening onto the promenade the Garnett family stayed and I was reminded of this when Virginia Bottomley spoke of her father's passion for making his three children dive into the sea at high tide and swim out to the Martello tower: I'm uncertain of the actual distance. What I do remember was my family's anger at Mr Garnett's attitude towards one of his two sons who was clearly terrified.

There could easily be twenty in the house party with family friends joining us from time to time and large parties going to Goodwood for the races when we were on the South Coast. It was in Aldwick that my dream of horse riding was fulfilled. My parents bought me some tailor-made jodhpurs and a crop and I saved every meagre penny, added to by gifts. There was a riding stable adjoining the cottage in the grounds and I used to go every day and groom either Pinkie or Blackie – the acme of perfection being when the owner gave me a two hour trip to Slindon a few miles inland. It cost twelve shillings and my family rallied round to pay for it.

My father was always there for people and worked very long hours. On festival Sundays for example, he would have Communion services at 6 am, 7am, 8am, Matins at 11am, 12 noon Communion and every Sunday afternoon there was Sunday School and Bible Class plus baptisms and Evensong at 6.30. He did this all single-handed with a little lay help when available. On New Year's Eve there was always a Watch Night service late in the evening.

In Brockmoor he had organised the building of a new parish hall and was also chairman of the Brierley Hill District Council for a spell. In Leek he organised the building of another new parish hall there. Both were named after him. On leaving each parish, the whole population turned out and we still have presents given to him by the different groups in Brockmoor, one fondly known as the Chapel Chair which my elder daughter now has in her home. A nephew has my father's desk and in my hall I have William Morris design curtains at front and back doors which were made for my father's study in Brockmoor in 1924.

Lawnside

In May 1936, at the age of eleven, soon after we moved from Brockmoor to Leek, I was sent to boarding school in Great Malvern. My father drove my mother and me down from Leek one May morning. The transformation from the bleak moorland town to the blossom-filled land of Worcestershire was a wonder to me because I don't ever remember seeing blossom in such profusion before. We were of course much closer when we were in Brockmoor in South Staffordshire actually bordering on to Worcestershire but my father only bought the car a short time before we moved to Leek and as children we rarely went out for drives. The old apple tree outside the nursery window was really the only blossom we saw although many years later I was to enjoy the beautiful white blossom of damson trees with my Worcestershire friends and the plethora of prunus and hawthorn in Surrey.

Lawnside was an independent girls' boarding school which my mother and her sister and lifelong friends had attended and enjoyed enormously. I can't say I did although I desperately wanted to, but I do appreciate the amazing arts education and privileges we received.

Many years later when I was teaching in Guildford Girls Grammar School, I remember remarking to one of my sixth form social studies groups that, although my IQ was probably no way as high as theirs, my all-round education had been much superior as they had had to specialise early on and often lacked general knowledge.

Sadly we had no science teaching while I was at school (a lab only being built two years before I left). We had nature study in the first year but even that didn't progress beyond the birds and bees although the very mannish teacher regaled us with tales of the Passion Play at Oberammergau which she had visited for