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Born 29.05.1955

Autobiographical Life story

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk

for Leslie, James, Gordon & Catriona

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1. Introduction - Tree Tunnels

Tree Tunnels has been a working title for my memoir exploration for a couple of reasons. When I was a child, my parents used to shout excitedly “tree tunnel” if we were on a road trip in the countryside and approached one of those long avenues or winding lanes canopied by leafy trees. I agreed that there was something magical about them, especially when the sun was shining through the foliage, and the tunnel plunged down a hill or round a bend, mysterious and immeasurable, suggesting we were heading into another land.

Exploring the memories of my childhood and youth feels a bit like diving into one of those tree tunnels. Sunbeams glinting in the trees conjure up the most vivid and exciting memories. Dappled shadows are like memories that are hazy and hard to retrieve exactly, hovering in corners of the mind. Spreading branches shooting out in varying directions resemble the way one memory or event can shift and radiate out into different places, and you find yourself burrowing, like tunnelling into sub-folders on a computer or plunging into a rabbit-hole like Alice. Dark areas where you can't see your way or where you worry you could veer off the road might symbolise painful memories of uncomfortable events. In some respects, much of it seems distant and long ago, reflecting L.P. Hartley's words in *The Go Between* “*The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there*”. And yet some memories seem as fresh and close as though they had bloomed just the other day.

Just as the different shades and depths of foliage make up the canopy, so different tones in the palette of memory make up a life. Another analogy which other writers have used is the patchwork quilt or tapestry. That also speaks to me as my grandmother was a wonderfully creative seamstress who made bedspreads and quilts for our family, including a memory quilt for me, embroidered with names and places from my early life. That is more personal than a tree tunnel; however, tree tunnels have another quality rather like lives, in that they are alive and growing, and they look different depending on the season and the weather, and also because they change over the years. We may think our memories of the past are going to stay the same, but I suspect they alter subtly as the years go by and experiences overlay previous events, and we may change our views about some people or events.

When I started making notes about my early life I intended just to write about my own childhood, with only brief lines about my immediate family, but so many paths I start on lead inexorably into others, big branches spreading out to narrower but more numerous, complex and fascinating ones - illustrating why genealogical research is often described as creating a family tree. Some areas produce foliage and blossom, others are dead ends like branches that don't flower, wither, break off – or are just lost. This epistle is not intended to be a systematic family tree or provide reliable genealogical data (that is my husband Leslie's domain) but is rather a foliage patchwork of memories and pictures, not just of my life but of others who have shaped my past and future or who are connected to me. There might also be some references to food since I've always been keen on eating - but as I have minimal interest in alcohol there will be no treatises on fine wines etc!

2. My mother Nancy & her family

In the earliest years of my life (as for many people) my dear mother was the most significant person, so it feels right to start with a focus on Nancy. One reason I am attempting to compile memories of my early life is that I regret my parents did not do this, and I hope that my recollections (however muddled) may be of interest to my children, James, Gordon and Catriona – and perhaps even grandchildren or other family and friends. I am particularly sorry that my mother Nancy did not leave a memoir, because she often recounted stories of her childhood and youth to my brother Colin and myself which fascinated us, and we said she should record them.



Nancy Noell early 1940s

In the last few years of her life Nancy did begin writing out some memories, but sadly she did not progress far with this record, and I do not have the notes she made. I was surprised that she did not type them as she was a trained secretary with fast typing speed on both a manual typewriter and electric machine (which she used in the last years of her secretarial employment). She even attempted to use a computer in the last few years of her life, amid much sighing and swearing, periodically assisted by my IT whiz husband. But she was never fully comfortable with the computer, and the few Memoir notes I saw her make were hand-written.

The biggest change in my lifetime is probably the computer revolution ranging from word processing to the phenomenal development of the internet. When I was a child my mother typed on a manual typewriter, most letters were handwritten, and my essays at school and university were handwritten. When my husband Leslie was a wee boy at a village primary school he started writing on a slate! Now we have moved from enormous mainframe computers – which Leslie worked on at IBM before going to university – to sophisticated word processing, PCs, laptops, iPhones, iPads, mobiles, emails, microtechnology, and all the related internet exchange of knowledge and information, social media and professional networking – hard to imagine how we'd all function without this technology, yet amazingly in the past we did! And somehow the ping of an email or text does not equal the thrill of opening an envelope to read a hand-written letter or card.

In theory computer would have been a great way for my mother Nancy to keep in touch with her relations in the USA – and email was burgeoning in the last decade of her life. But I think she preferred the old fashioned handwritten blue tissue airmail letters – thousands of these must have passed between her and her American family over the 54 years she lived in the UK, along with cards and longer epistles, penned in her beautiful italic American style writing (much admired by my son James), with similarly pretty, cursive script in the many letters sent by her mother, my beloved grandmother, while her brother Ted wrote more sporadically in a spikier version of this script. Perhaps Nancy also preferred to write her personal correspondence and memories at odd moments curled up on the sofa or during trips away from home; maybe typing was too strongly associated with work, although she did occasionally type some personal letters.

For many years, in addition to paid secretarial work, my mother typed out correspondence and a variety of other written material for my father – concert programmes, concert notes, committee papers, minutes, reports, reviews etc (typed submissions were sometimes a requirement, and even if not, they must have been a relief for the recipients given my father’s messy and sometimes illegible handwriting). However, as the years went by, I suspect Nancy found this an increasing chore which she resented, especially against the backdrop of Dad’s other extra-curricular activities, so that might have meant handwriting remained her preferred medium for personal communication.

The fact that Nancy had several personal griefs to contend with as the years went on may have been another reason that she felt less inclined to make a full record of her early life. It may just have been too painful to focus for too long on hopes and dreams, several of which were shattered. But in her early years Nancy was an optimist; outgoing, adventurous and good-natured, and life looked rosy to her, despite what might have been considered to be disadvantages in her personal and domestic situation. And although I don’t have her memoirs, I do have a random collection of letters she wrote during a period of over 50 years, which give me quite a good picture of her life, along with my own multifarious recollections of her.

My mother was born Nancy Reade Noell, on 29 November 1924, in Durham, North Carolina and lived in the USA until she married her British husband Louis. Her birth was initially a shock to her mother (who was born Margaret Finger Coulter but called Margie - pronounced Marjee - and always known as Granmargie to me and my brother). Nancy was born with a large growth on her neck, and apparently Granmargie fainted on seeing her. When she awoke, she thought perhaps it had been a bad dream and was horrified to find it was not. Luckily, doctors were able to operate to remove the tumour, which was benign, and Nancy suffered no ill effects, and grew into a healthy, active child – and looking at the hand-tinted photo of her as a beautiful baby girl you would never guess there had been anything wrong.

Perhaps Nancy had a pre-disposition to such benign tumours, as when she was in her 20s, another lump was found in her breast. Unfortunately, doctors then performed mastectomies more routinely than now, and Mother woke up after what she thought was a preliminary investigation to find her breast had been removed. Further tests revealed it had not been malignant; a relief in one way, but deeply frustrating to know the operation had been unnecessary. It happened soon after she was married and may have contributed to subsequent problems in the marriage, as it left Mother feeling disfigured, and my father may have shared that feeling a bit even if he did not admit it. There may also have been more serious ramifications in their first baby being born with a mental handicap – although not certain, it is possible this could be linked to Mother’s anaesthetic during early pregnancy.

Decades later a tumour was discovered in Mother’s brain which led to her death, even though it was also technically benign. Doctors said it had probably been there for many years but had eventually grown enough to start affecting brain functions. However, this gloom and doom was way in the future, and when Nancy was a young girl, she was attractive and lively, with a sunny nature, albeit with a fiery temper! She also had a good relationship with her mother from early on (despite their rocky start) and she always said her childhood was a happy one.

Nancy regarded herself as a Southerner, but she was mainly brought up in Washington and Baltimore, having moved away from North Carolina when she was about five years old. She and her brother Teddy (Paul Edward Noell, later known as Ted) lived in an Episcopalian Children's Home in Washington (5901 Utah Avenue) because their mother Margie was divorced (but still known as Mrs Noell) and had to work – but despite (or perhaps because of) this, the trio of mother, daughter and son remained very close. One reason they went to the Home was because initially Margie got a job there (although later on she moved to doing secretarial work in Baltimore). What might seem surprising is that Nancy was extremely happy in the Home (as she referred to it) and had many tales of jolly events and friendships there, making it sound like a benevolent boarding school when she spoke about it. The children at the Home attended day school, which she enjoyed, and she made several close friends, a couple of whom she kept in touch with even after moving across the Atlantic to the UK.



Nancy Reade Noell 1940s

Summers for the Home children were spent in happy pursuits like swimming in the River Potomac. Mother even spoke affectionately about the superintendent of the home (Mrs DeVaal) although she was quite strict and once made Nancy wash her mouth out with soap for swearing! This was probably counter-productive, as I believe that the swear-word concerned was “Darn”, and Nancy decided that if she was going to be punished for using such a mild expletive, then she might as well start using proper swearwords.

In my years growing up I can remember the air getting quite blue sometimes as “*God dammit*” or “*Bloody Hell*” rang through the house! Although Mother was a wonderful person, she had a terrible temper, so the cursing could happen quite often. Strangely I did not pick up this habit, and my husband also failed to acquire the custom of regular cursing, despite living with a father who swore like a trooper (though he does dredge up some of these expletives if cut up by a car when cycling or plagued by a cold caller ...). Our children are sometimes more Anglo-Saxon in their vocabulary so perhaps this tendency alternates; maybe each generation rebels against the habits of the one above.

I don't recall Nancy's mother, Granmargie, swearing and she was quite genteel in her manners, even though she had been brought up on a poor farm in North Carolina. Margie recalled her upbringing as less happy than my mother's although she lived at home with her family. Born in 1903 she was one of seven children and life was quite hard. She recalled suffering hookworm because of going barefoot in the farmyard. She was fond of her father, but she talked about her mother as being rather strict and uncaring. As one of the older daughters she said she was expected to do quite a lot of chores, helping in the house and with the younger children.

Margie particularly resented the youngest daughter (ironically also called Nancy as this was a family name; Margie's mother was Nancy Catherine). Nancy Mills was supposedly quite spoilt and rather unpleasant. But if so, the poor girl got her comeuppance as she died young, unlike Margie and her closest sister Aunt Lois,

who both lived into their late nineties, as did most of their brothers. Margie and her children saw quite a bit of Margie's family when Nancy was small, following the break-up of Margie's marriage, especially Lois and her husband Uncle Doc (local doctor in a small N.C. town), and Nancy's godparents, known as Uncle Lewis and Aunt Peggy. I believe both couples helped look after Nancy after Margie's marriage broke down, when Margie was trying to sort out work and accommodation. But I suspect regular contact became more difficult when Margie moved from North Carolina to Washington and then Baltimore.

When I knew Granmargie, I saw her as creative, artistic and intelligent (if a tad erratic in her spelling!), as well as caring and affectionate. But she believed she was regarded as stupid and clumsy by family and friends (a feeling that lingered on since, years later when I showed some similar traits, dropping or spilling things, she would wail – *"oh no Ally, you've got my spastic hands"*!). However, she once told me that for a while she studied at Duke University, although I am puzzled as to how this would have been affordable for a poor farm-girl. She also said that she worked in a photographer's studio, and hand-tinted some of the black and white photos, which seems a more likely activity. Despite her humble origins, she could trace her family back to earn the pedigree label *"Daughter of the American Revolution"* and was proud to attend and host DAR meetings in later life.

Anyway, being sensitive and feeling unappreciated, yet also very pretty, it is perhaps unsurprising that Margie was ripe to be swept off her feet romantically, and in 1923 (aged 19) she eloped with a charmer called Percival (Percy) Edward Noell. When Nancy was born, she must have hoped they would enjoy a happy family life. Unfortunately, he turned out to be a feckless gambler and wastrel, who would not work to support his wife and children. It is possible that they lived with his parents for a while – there is a picture of Nancy aged 2 ½ with a nurse and I don't think Granmargie could have afforded a nurse without the Noell family paying. I think Percy lived with his parents most of his life. Allegedly Percy had a good natural musical ability and when not losing money at cards, could play the violin well by ear. It is one of life's strange ironies that his daughter Nancy ended up marrying a violinist – a different man in many ways, being hard-working and a loving father, but a man who later proved to be charmingly unreliable in other respects, which may have confronted Nancy with an uneasy echo of her father Percy.



Nancy's paternal grandparents Lizzie & Paul Noell + aunts (Emma & Lizzie?) Durham, North Carolina



Margie as a baby 1904 with Nancy's maternal grandparents Nancy Catherine & Philip Elkana Coulter, 2 of her brothers(Harry and Philip Plonk) and her older sister Nancy's Aunt Lois. 3 more children were born later.



Percy & Margie Noell c.1924



My grandmother, Margaret Finger Coulter) aged about 17 c. 1921 (Margie)



Nancy 2 ½ with her nurse April 1927



Nancy as a baby c.1926 (she was born 29 November 1924)

3. The three of us – Margie, Nancy & Ted



Ted & Nancy – brother & sister c.1940

Margie tried to leave Percy when Nancy was a toddler, but was persuaded by Percy's family to return, and it was only after the birth of Nancy's brother, Teddy (Ted) that she finally felt obliged to cut off communication with him. Nancy never saw her father after her parents divorced when she was 5. It appears he did not attempt to keep in touch until much later in life, when he wrote to Nancy - but by then she had decided she should not establish contact with him. I think this was because of her deep loyalty to her beloved mother Margie, fearing it would upset her if she communicated with Percy. Whatever the case, there was to be no further chance, as he died in 1981, two decades

before Margie. As far as I know, Percy spent most of his life living with his parents; after their death he moved in with his sister, apparently still not supporting himself, while Margie had long since headed north to Maryland seeking a place to earn her living and bring up her children.



Ted, Margie & Nancy Noell c.1941

One might have thought this separation would have been traumatic, but Nancy genuinely did not appear to have missed having a father or have regrets about the lack of contact. Her only comment about it in later life was that it must have been hard for her brother Ted not having a father around. However, it seemed like the three of them had such a close and loving relationship, that this compensated for any paternal void, and it must have helped that Nancy and Ted were able to stay in the same Home together. In Nancy's teenage years, her mother

Margie acquired a gentleman friend named Willis Jones. They remained close until Mr Jones died, and he became a father figure to Nancy and her brother Ted. Mother said he was married to a Roman Catholic wife who refused to divorce him, but I do not know if there were other complications.

It was never clear to me (or maybe even to my mother) whether Margie and Mr Jones were just platonic friends – looking back it seems likely that the relationship was more intimate than made public! But if so, the affair was conducted discreetly. He was a lawyer and at one time ran for the Democratic Party nomination as senator for Maryland. When my father first met my mother during his music studies in Baltimore, he encountered Mr Jones and was puzzled and slightly discomfited by

the friendship – another irony in view of Dad’s later activities. In a strange way Dad was a bit of an innocent abroad. In an email to me many years later, my Uncle Ted described “Mr J” as *“the only father I knew”* and said it had been very upsetting for him that the Naval Academy did not allow him to attend the funeral of Mr Jones *“despite the deep personal relationship”* because he was not a blood relative.

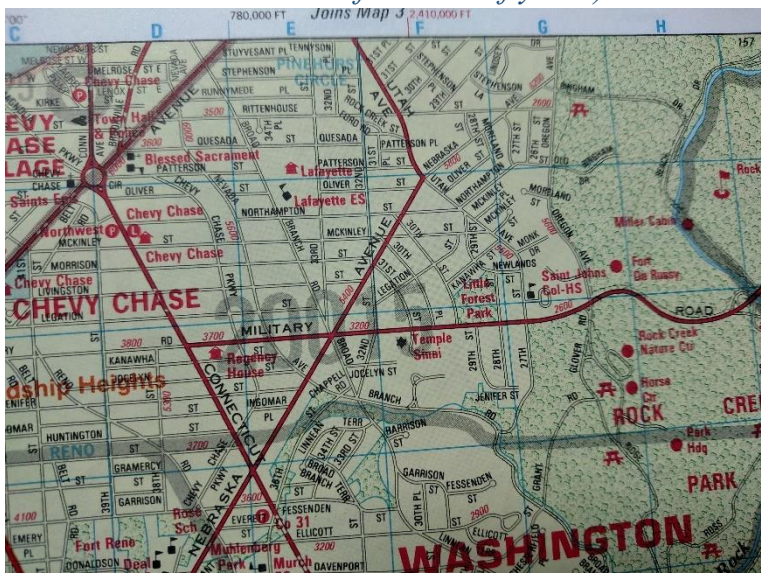
When I wrote to my Uncle Ted once enquiring about his memories of the Home where they lived, he wrote:

“We did, indeed, live at the Episcopal Home for Children, located at Utah & Nebraska Ave. I thought the address was 3901 Nebraska Ave. but from the map detail it had to be more like 5701, the entrance being on Nebraska. No matter.

I remember well a "Miss" Lee (everyone was Miss or Mister to we kids!) would drive in for a periodic visit to see how, presumably, everything was going, making a splendid entrance in her grandiose, tall horseless carriage, all electric [none of those tacky, smoggy things called cars for her]. It was the Lee family and, I think, in conjunction with the church diocese and a local charity called the Community Chest (with a red or blue quill feather for a logo) that funded its operation. She used a tiller stick to steer!

... three large buildings on a rather high hill, fronted the intersection, the entry drive from Nebraska between the central Administration Bldg and the Boys' Bldg to its right. The Girls' Bldg was located on the other side (facing Utah), all roughly making an arc. Interestingly, all buildings were connected via underground tunnels. I could add more detail but not now! Our elementary school, labelled Lafayette ES (black block w/pennant), a public school, in the lower left corner of the map.”

“I graduated from USNA in '52. 6 E. Franklin St. was our apt. at the time (we had previously lived at 20 W. Franklin St. for a no. of years).”



Street map showing location of the Children’s Home in Washington DC where Nancy and Ted were brought up (where Nebraska Avenue meets Utah Avenue)

Soon after Nancy died Ted wrote about how close he, Nancy and his Mom Margie had been, saying *“it was the three of us against the world”* That was probably true, although in later life when Ted and Margie lived together and Mother would make visits from the UK she was aware of a quite a bit of bickering that went on

between them and would find herself having to act the peacemaker (rather a novelty for her!). I believe they were devoted to each other but had a knack of driving each other a bit mad. Perhaps that is quite often the case when 2 different generations co-habit and one ends up being dependent on the other, willingly or unwillingly.

Years later (after Percy had died) Nancy, Ted and I finally got to meet some of our Noell cousins, all still living in North Carolina, when my mother and I made a visit to the USA in 1983 (while I was expecting my first baby). Uncle Ted took us and Granmargie on a road trip from Baltimore to North Carolina to meet many of the Clan Noell. It was strange meeting so many cousins whom I had never known before, and whom I've never seen since, but it was also interesting to find out a bit about a whole different branch of family. They were mainly farming folk and I recall us having a great big barbecue and being told about various family relationships. Some of the male cousins had fought in the Vietnam War. One had survived that, only to be shot dead in a bar brawl. It seemed a far cry from the cosy and refined atmosphere of my grandmother's Baltimore home on Rexmere Road, which exuded an atmosphere both genteel and artistic.

One feature that struck me in the home of one cousin's family where there were three children, were the heaps of casually folded children's clothes left on the bed. I wondered idly why their mother did not put the clothes away in drawers – years later when I had three of my own offspring, I understood just how this could happen! Stacks of laundry would be regularly left on a settle in our hall, often not reaching the bedroom chests of drawers before they were worn again – sometimes I was lucky to get the washing done at all. The frantic panic of trying to find a clean school sweatshirt if the washing schedule had been interrupted. But my own mother was better organised with her housework and it was a treat when she came to visit and whipped my kitchen into shape, even if I had to withstand a whiff of disapproval implying that I was too pre-occupied with extra-curricular activities such as amateur dramatics, choir or even church!

But Nancy aspired to creative activities herself, and she continued to pursue these to some extent in her married life. She loved drawing and painting, and she was a talented artist. She tried to sell some of her work to greetings card companies, but had no luck commercially; however, she continued her artistic endeavours in an amateur capacity all of her life, and in later life she sold a few paintings at small exhibitions through a local Art Club. But she was also fascinated by science, including space exploration. Perhaps her main regret in her youth was that she could not afford to go to college (university). When Nancy left school and she and Granmargie were both working, she and her mother and brother were at last able to live together in an apartment in Baltimore, until Ted went to the Naval Academy, and subsequently into the American Airforce. It was quite small – I think Nancy said Ted slept in the living room under the boudoir grand piano! Amusingly they called the piano Rosamund – and years later my mother-in-law would be Rosamund. Like Granmargie, Nancy trained as a secretary, and she had planned to become a medical secretary and to fund herself through college – but then she met my father and the course of her life changed radically...



*Nancy c. 1950 – Pin-Up Girl I think Dad used to carry this picture in his wallet.
And it makes Mother's hair look the auburn red colour she always wanted!*



Ted –enlisted in US Navy Airforce c.1948



Granmargie c. 1950



*Paul Edward Noell – Uncle
Ted in the US Air Force.*



Nancy & Mr Jones late 1940s



Ted, Margie & Nancy late 1940s



Nancy & Louis – newly engaged? c.1950



*Nancy in wedding dress in Baltimore 1951
beside the piano Rosamund*



*Ted, Nancy & Margie 1951 "Wedding Photo" in Baltimore before
Nancy sailed from USA to England to marry Louis*

4. Louis & Nancy

There is artistic ability on both sides of my family. As well as loving drawing Nancy was keen on music, which is how she met my father. He was Louis Carus-Wilson then, although after he began pursuing his professional music career in earnest, he dropped the Wilson, deciding Louis Carus would be a simpler, more memorable name for publicity and general professional use, and that it would be easier to use the same name in both professional and private life. Louis was an Englishman - a product of Empire, public school and music conservatoires. He had gone over to the USA from England to study violin at the Peabody Conservatoire in Baltimore (having previously studied at the Brussels Conservatoire after his schooling at Rugby where he



Nancy & Louis – newly weds 1951

had a music scholarship). Nancy and Louis both went to Grace & St Peter's Episcopal Church and met when they were singing in the church choir. Dad was also interested in art and asked to see Mother's sketches (an interesting variation on "*come and see my etchings*") and thus began their romance.

When my parents became engaged and my father had to move back to the UK looking for a job and a home, they wrote to each other almost every day. Most of the surviving letters are ones that Dad wrote to Mother; they are very romantic and the references in them show that her letters must have been equally romantic and loving, but I fear that Nancy may have destroyed those at a later date, when she was feeling particularly disillusioned with Dad, but kept his. It is poignant to look at the letters now, written in the first flush of ardent romance, with the knowledge that Dad eventually went on to be unfaithful, causing Nancy huge distress and resentment. Yet there remained a strong bond between them all their lives, and they never divorced, though Nancy was deeply hurt by his affairs, especially the last one which resulted in a child, born after Dad was already a grandfather to my children.

As one grows up, one realises how contradictory people's lives and emotions can be. On the night that my mother died in July 2005, Dad was in tears, exclaiming what a wonderful wife and mother she had been, and I believe he was genuinely distraught at losing her. It was a shock to all of us; although Nancy was 80, we had expected she might live into her late 90s since her mother and aunts had done so, and we imagined she would outlive Dad, who had suffered from angina for many years as well as a bout of prostate cancer and some TIAs. But first Nancy suffered a series of dislocated hips following two replacement hip operations, and she found the effects of these increasingly debilitating and upsetting, as well as becoming extra anxious that her hip would dislocate again. She also had a heart attack. She had got to the stage of wishing she could "*shuffle off this mortal coil*", although she

remained very stoic. Finally, she became ill with what appeared to be a stroke since she lost most of her speech. But it turned out she had a brain tumour.

When the doctor operated, he warned that the chances of a successful outcome were low (but the outlook without intervention was also grim). Nancy was brave and pragmatic about the prospects of a risky operation – it was Dad who fell apart. Our family were lucky that we all had a chance to see her while she was ill, and there was a brief window of consciousness after the operation when coherent speech returned. I was fortunate to be with her then. When she told me that I had been a good daughter, I knew she thought she was dying, and my heart contracted. All I could do was to reassure her that I would keep up visits and contact with my autistic brother Kenny, to whom she had been so devoted.

Sadly, complications set in and after a week in a coma she died. My last memory of my mother as she was wheeled away in a lift was her waving, saying “*Give my love to everybody*”. Even when I think about this years later it still makes me cry. That is partly because, although she lived a good long life with many happy experiences, and she could be great fun; she also had to contend with pain, disappointment and disillusion. I feel sad that she had to go through such personal tragedy, and I admire her for being so courageous in enduring the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

After seeing Mother in hospital after her op, I had to return to London by coach, due to a train strike, (a nightmare for me because of my travel sickness) and I remember being in floods of tears on the bus because I was sure my mother was dying. She lapsed into a coma that day and died a week later, on the same day as the 7/7 bombings in London, which makes that anniversary particularly poignant for me and my brother Colin.

Ironically, this event meant I was near her when she died – I had returned to the Midlands to pay her another visit, and I was due to return to London to resume my work as a School Administrator, but as my brother Colin was driving me back to the station, we saw big, illuminated signs on the motorway saying London was closed – somewhat surreal! I called home to check that my family were ok; thankfully yes. This meant that both Colin and I were at our parents’ house with Dad when the call came from the hospital that evening, and we were able to drive in to spend time at her bedside just after she had passed away. Colin and I had been on difficult terms during the months before our mother’s illness, but I am glad that we were able to put our differences temporarily to one side and operate a truce which enabled us to support both our parents at this sad time.

Nancy had a life that was full of ups and downs, but she met the tragedies and disappointments with courage and loyalty. I used to tease her that she could display a pessimistic and restricted outlook on life, comparing her to Eeyore, but after she died many of her friends and relations reminded me of the sunnier and outgoing side of her nature, her hospitality to friends, and her glamour and elegance in her wardrobe and makeup. She was someone who could savour the joys of life, and she created a loving and welcoming home for her family and friends. She also used her artistic imagination through her life to draw, paint and produce lovely creations. And she could be like a bold tiger when defending her children – even when we were grown up! As Dad said, she was indeed a wonderful wife and mother, and I

think he was truly devoted to her despite sometimes behaving in a way that caused her so much pain, which seems so contradictory. Yet she too could make life difficult with her fits of rage and gloomy forebodings about new projects. But the longer one lives, the more one understands that relationships are mysterious and contradictory, and they cannot be fully comprehended from the outside.

Nancy was also a woman with contradictions in her own character. I realise now that she was very brave in agreeing to marry Louis and cross the Atlantic to live in the UK, as it was a much more significant and more expensive journey in 1951 than nowadays, and much harder to keep in touch with family across the ocean – no social media or emails and only limited telephone contact and no affordable air travel. At the time it probably seemed a romantic adventure, and Louis was also prepared to consider returning to work in the US if he could get employment there, so Nancy may not have thought she was coming over to the UK forever.

But having made that one big voyage, she became very fond of the UK and was often reluctant to leave home, whereas Dad had perpetual wanderlust. Yet Nancy was also keen to investigate the world. Although her main hobby was sketching and painting, she maintained an avid interest in science reading science and nature journals like *Scientific American* and *National Geographic*; and watching TV documentaries on nature and scientific research, and she was also keen on detective fiction. But exploration in the world outside became less appealing to her, although in their latter years together she and my father went on several cruises all over the world, which I think they both enjoyed (apart from one disastrous occasion when she suffered one of her hip dislocations). Mother also liked making trips to Cornwall where she and Dad would attend concerts at Dad's beloved St Endellion – where Dad played so often in his youth, and now in the last years I was lucky enough to sing in the chorus and we could enjoy some family time together.

Nancy was particularly fascinated by astronomy, and said she would love to travel into space, so she was deeply interested in the American space programme that culminated in the 1969 moon landing. I remember us watching the Americans landing on the moon, on a tiny black & white TV in a Skibbereen guest house when we were on holiday in Southern Ireland. Nancy also loved reading science fiction like John Wyndham, Arthur C. Clarke and Asimov, and enjoyed films such as *2001*, and on television *Dr Who* and the early series of *Star Trek* – I suppose she was one of the first “Trekkies” though she would never have wanted to attend a convention!

But it was one of the paradoxes of her life that while she had this passion for space exploration, loved flying, and wished she could have learnt to fly; yet she was strongly attached to her home, and became more reluctant to make expeditions or take risks as the years went by. It was as though the one big leap in emigrating from the States to the UK used up her adventurous spirit. Maybe this diminution in embracing adventure was due to the tragedy of having a severely handicapped son, along with the challenges of a difficult and flawed marriage. Yet although she may have become embittered and fearful on the surface, in a more fundamental way she was one of the bravest people I have known, and incredibly stoic and cheerful in endurance of some devastating blows inflicted on her.

And when Nancy first sailed in a liner over the Atlantic in 1951 life must have seemed rosy and romantic, if frugal (rationing was still in operation and the first home where she and Dad lived was a small flat in Glasgow). The only real sadness about the marriage was that neither Nancy's mother nor brother or indeed any friends or relations could afford to make the transatlantic journey for the wedding in London. She knew no one at the ceremony apart from her husband-to-be, and she was given away by a female friend of Louis' Aunt Nora. I see from correspondence that she had some hope that her brother Ted would be able to get leave from the forces to come over and give her away, but that did not happen. Neither Nancy nor Louis had much money; they became engaged when my father was still studying the violin at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore and was only 22.

My father proposed when they were on a walk out in a park. They could not afford to go out for expensive dates, Louis came for quite a few meals at "Mother Margie's" when they were not out sketching or singing in the church choir. Although she was 25 Nancy shared an apartment in Baltimore with her mother – partly to save money, but probably also to make up for those years when they had to live apart. They remained extremely close for the rest of their lives. However, Nancy said that when she returned home after the proposal, her mother told her off for staying out late, so she didn't tell her about the engagement till the next day!

I am sure Granmargie was delighted and charmed by Louis, just as most people were, and especially when he was still so idealistic, and I expect he truly intended to remain faithful to Nancy. In his studies and demeanour, he had shown a capacity for hard work and integrity, which meant that neither Margie nor Nancy had misgivings about the marriage – and at that stage there was no reason for concern, as must often be the case at the start of a marriage. I presume the reason they did not marry in the States was that Louis had to find a job and, having not found one in America, he went back to the UK. There may also have been visa complications for Nancy entering the UK. For years after they were married and living in the UK, Nancy had to make periodic visits to the police station to report as an alien!

Louis sent an engagement ring to Nancy after he returned to England and started earning a living, a modest pearl with small diamonds either side, but very pretty. Unfortunately, it has disappeared – I don't know if Mother could have thrown it away after Dad's last and most earth-shattering affair or if she just hid it away. However, I can speculate that it was replaced in their later life by a ring with a small band of emeralds which she wore on her ring finger in her final years, and she was wearing that when she died. Thus, I hope an element of reconciliation was achieved in their final years despite the emotional upheaval and disillusion of preceding decades. And I believe their early years together were genuinely happy ones.

After finishing his course at the Peabody in Baltimore, Louis did a spell at Tanglewood Summer School in Boston. His letters show that he tried to find a post in the USA, but evidently had no luck, so he went back to the UK ahead of Nancy to find a job and place to live. Louis found a job as first violinist in the Scottish National Orchestra, and a flat in Hyndland, the west side area of Glasgow, so it was relatively pleasant despite their limited means, but they lived modestly. Although it was 6 years since the end of the Second World War, Nancy recalled that food rationing was still in operation in the UK, (as depicted memorably in Helene

Hanff's book *84 Charing Cross Road*, where she sends food parcels to the London bookshop). Having berthed at Liverpool Nancy travelled to London to set off for her wedding from Aunt Nora's home Hanover Lodge, in Holland Park (more likely to be described as Notting Hill now following gentrification and the film!).

They were married at a church in Paddington (Holy Trinity I think – since demolished), with a reception at a nearby hotel in Queensway, followed by a honeymoon in the tiny cathedral city of Wells. I understand why Nancy was married from Hanover Lodge, because that was regarded as the family home in London, the house where Louis' father lived until he went into the army and where his sister Nora lived all her life, while Louis' parents lived out in Suffolk at that time. But it is a mystery why the church where the service took place was in Paddington. My Grandfather and Great Aunt Nora had been regular attenders at St Mary Abbot's Kensington and St John's Notting Hill, so one of those churches would have seemed the more obvious choice. I can only speculate that perhaps it was a church attended by Aunt Christine, my father's sister, who was the one bridesmaid; she lived somewhere in West London and was a regular churchgoer. Sadly, there is no one left to ask now, so it remains a puzzle (but maybe I will find the answer in one of the family letters that I have not yet had time to look at!)

The conventional black & white photos were taken at the wedding – but back in the USA, before she came over, a photographer friend of Nancy's called Glenn took some stunning high quality colour photos of Nancy in her wedding gown with her mother Margie and brother Ted – so at least they had some wedding photos to enjoy, even though they couldn't attend the ceremony. I presume colour photography was available earlier in the U.S. – just like colour TV, which I first remember seeing as a child on a visit to the USA. Louis' parents attended the wedding, but I am not sure how happy my Grannie was about her son marrying an American girl (especially a feisty Democrat who was 3 years older than Louis). When Louis was writing to Nancy from his American summer school, he made anxious references to not having heard anything from his mother about his engagement, and this was perhaps an early warning to Nancy about difficulties in the relationship, and a hint that Louis' mother Enid was not the warmest of mothers and would not be a very affectionate mother-in-law.

As I was growing up, I thought of my mother as being a splendid homemaker and the reliable rock in our family (despite her volatile temper) – she was the person I would run to for comfort if I'd hurt myself – though I might also be wary of her temper if I'd been naughty or I heard her and my father Louis arguing, which happened occasionally. I never remember my father being cross with me, and we had an extremely close relationship, but I was aware that my mother was the most constant, reliable presence in our home, and I was equally devoted to her.

Nancy was also a glamorous woman who could be a delightful hostess at the parties my father enjoyed giving (even though she was not really a party person) and she had a wardrobe of pretty dresses, high heels and jewellery (mainly costume), as well as the more mundane slacks and flatties that she wore. Because of having suffered a mastectomy soon after being married, she was self-conscious about trying on clothes in stores. This also hampered her swimming in public pools, which was a shame as she loved swimming, and by middle-age she was a bit over-weight, and

she would go on sporadic diets, getting frustrated that the weight rarely stayed off. But she loved to order clothes by mail order. She also liked to wear make-up (especially bright red lipstick and nail varnish). I would sometimes tell her it wasn't necessary (I only wore make up for parties) – but she would say in her gentle Southern drawl “*Ally I can't go out without my face on*”. She did have quite sallow colouring, but that would probably be desirable nowadays – I don't recall her getting sunburnt unlike myself.

Occasionally Nancy dyed her hair for fun. She had naturally lovely brown curly hair (which only went grey quite late on in life, like her mother and me). But she always wished she'd been a redhead. One time after she was a grandmother and our kids were at primary school, she had dyed her hair, hoping to achieve a rich auburn hue, but it turned out more of a flamingo pink. She visited us and eldest son James (in his usual charming, kind way) said something about her looking pretty. Gordon said nothing – finally Mother said, “*Gordon you haven't told me what you think of my hair?*” whereupon he said, “*It's horrible*”. Luckily, she laughed at this blunt response, as she prized honesty, and she was devoted to her grandchildren.

It was not until I was a teenager that we got a pet dog and cat. Mother was fond of them, but she often told me that it would be even more fun to have little children of my own. She was a creative and artistic person with an enquiring mind, interested in art, music, science, gardening and many activities, while also being hard-working and conscientious. But I think it was her family that was the most important element of her life – both her birth family in the USA and the family she acquired in the UK after she married. However, while she adored her own children, her mother and brother, and was thrilled when the grandchildren arrived, I think that she did not always find it easy to get on with all her in-laws, apart from Louis' father Martin. Yet her letters to Dad's family which survive are friendly as well as polite and considerate– she had been brought up to behave courteously, and she had a generous and warm personality. Although she had a hot temper, she was far removed from the stereotypical brash American, and was a stylish, gracious and principled lady up to her final years - and beautiful. I still miss her.



*Mother & daughter – Ally & Nancy Christmas 2002,
at Hanover Lodge, Notting Hill*



My parents' wedding July 1951: *Martin (Grandfather), lady who gave Nancy away, L's brother Alan, Louis, Paul Watling (Best Man), Nancy, Aunt Nora, Great Aunt Ethel, L's sister Christine, Enid (Grannie)*



Nancy Reade Noell Carus - Mother



Nancy c.2003



A late picture of my parents, Louis & Nancy on one of their cruises, 2002

5. My father Louis & his Family

Louis & his Parents

Although in material terms my father Louis came from a more affluent and superficially settled background, I suspect he suffered more emotional deprivation as a child than my mother Nancy. He was very fond of his father Martin, my paternal Grandfather (Martin Macdowall Carus-Wilson), but being in the army Martin was often away, and spent many years serving abroad during both World Wars as well as in between, mainly in India. By the time I knew him he was retired back in the UK, so I probably saw more of him than his children had when growing up. Louis' mother Enid came across as a cold and intimidating person, sometimes quite sharp, and I think Dad also had some traumatic experiences at boarding school. As I grew up, I learnt that my paternal Grannie Enid was a difficult woman, and I would wonder why my warm, affectionate grandfather had married her.



My grandfather Martin Carus-Wilson

Even if Enid had reservations about her son Louis marrying an American girl, Louis' lovely father, my dear Granddaddy was happy to welcome Nancy as his daughter-in-law and had a close relationship with both Louis and Nancy. Nancy was delighted to call Martin Father. But I felt her addressing Grannie as "Mother" was pronounced in huge quotation marks, particularly as she had her own darling Mother, my beloved Granmargie. I presume that Enid issued an edict that she wished to be called Mother, as I cannot imagine Nancy would have used this epithet otherwise. But in Martin Nancy had a real father figure, who was able to take over the mantle of her mother's friend Mr Jones, and to compensate for having never seen her own father since her parents divorced so long ago.



Enid Carus-Wilson (nee Revell -Grannie)

Divorce has supposedly become more commonplace over recent generations, even though infidelity and incompatibility have no doubt existed for as long as marriage. However, while both my parents and parents-in-law stayed together in marriage, and Leslie and I have also stuck it out (happily I hasten to add – even my mother said we seemed happy as bees!) yet, perhaps unusually, there were divorces in the generations above on both sides of our families. Not only were my maternal grandparents divorced, but the paternal grandparents of my husband divorced, while my father's maternal grandparents also divorced, which seems particularly surprising as this would have been back in early Edwardian times.

My Grannie Enid was not able to see much (if anything) of her father after her parents split up – apparently in her case there was a sister Violet who went with the father and Enid was left with her mother. This was probably frustrating for Enid as her father Roland Revell was a musician, and passed on this talent to Enid, who we

were told was “a concert pianist” (and she also played a double bass although she was only about 5 feet tall!). Leslie and I only discovered recently, when Leslie was doing genealogical research, that Enid’s sister lived on into the 1960’s/70’s, was married twice, and that she had a daughter.

When Leslie tried to find out what had happened to the daughter it turned out there had been quite a tragedy. She had sailed on a ship to America and was lost overboard, leaving a brief letter of apology, making it likely that she had committed suicide, perhaps because she was pregnant out of wedlock. When such poignant human dramas are revealed by research into the past, I understand why people get hooked on genealogy (so I shouldn’t laugh at Leslie as he pores over pages of letters written in French by his Belgian Huguenot ancestors back in the 16th and 17th centuries – but it is quite hard not to giggle at epithets like “Walloon”). It seems that Enid and her sister Violet remained estranged all their life. There was some odd and bitter correspondence to my father from Violet following Grannie’s death in 1973, which my brother Colin recalls arriving at our Scottish address, but I’m not sure whether Dad even replied to it. Although the sisters lived separate lives, there were some intriguing similarities, particularly a shared love of dogs – Leslie discovered that Enid’s sister was a dog breeder. But it is tantalising not knowing more about her and about her ill-fated daughter.

According to her birth certificate my paternal Grannie was christened Madeleine Enid Thaxter Revell in 1898, but later reversed her name order to Enid Madeleine, presumably preferring the name Enid (can’t think why?). She was at St Paul’s School when the composer Gustav Holst was there as Music Master. This perhaps assisted her musical development as a pianist, coupled with talent inherited from her father. My Great Aunt Nora (Eleanora Mary Carus-Wilson) also attended the school, which is how Enid met my Grandfather, Martin who was Nora’s brother.

Enid was a striking looking young woman, petite with dark eyes and long dark hair. However, pictures of her look a bit comical nowadays because she wore her hair up in coiled braid “earphones” like Princess Leia in Star Wars! Reportedly she was accomplished, witty and charming, though Colin and I did not see that side of her, and we found her gruff and scary. Yet our grandfather Martin was presumably entranced initially– though I think he too found her a little intimidating later on, and they seemed to lead rather separate lives, even when he had returned home from his army postings – which went on for many years abroad. She was quite self-reliant, organising things like house hunting, house purchases and driving a car, unlike Granddaddy. My father recalled accompanying her on car journeys during the war to visit churches and photograph them – he said she was being employed to check on what condition the churches were in and make a record of them, but I am not sure if it was the Church of England or a government body that was employing her.

Enid’s musical talent passed to her two sons who both ended up professional musicians; my father Louis became a violinist and my Uncle Alan a cellist. Enid encouraged (forced?) them both to do music, along with their elder sister, my Aunt Christine, who played the piano for a while. But Christine either lacked the ability or the stamina to pursue it professionally - or else she did not receive sufficient encouragement from Enid, as they certainly had a difficult and fraught relationship. The children were set to learn instruments when they were only a few years old.

There are sweet photos of them posing as a miniature trio, although I am not sure how much actual chamber music they played. Since both Louis and Alan went on to become professionals, Enid was perhaps right to push them to do music. Although Christine did not progress as far, she gained much pleasure as an adult from attending concerts and from singing in a choir for many years, and she was proud of her brothers' musical achievements.

Strangely I have no memory of seeing or hearing Grannie Enid play an instrument. But one of my most vivid memories of my father is hearing him practise his violin, for many years almost daily, although slightly less frequently as he moved into his late seventies and eighties. Despite suffering from vascular dementia, Louis was still playing chamber music in the last year of his life, aged 86, and enjoying being taken to concerts by friends who were former pupils of his. (Staff in his Care Home commented that he had a more active social life than they did!)

Dad said he could not imagine living without music, and his main fear about moving into a Care Home was that he might be deprived of music. Luckily, this was not the case, even though he had to be escorted to concerts in the last year or two. Perhaps in music he found a peace and harmony that eluded him in other realms of his life, as he always seemed to be quite restless, constantly wanting to move on to the next place or activity. A friend of Louis from his Music Studies in Brussels, who had gone on to become a priest and a Dean at Westminster Abbey, gave the address at Dad's funeral in 2012, and he conjured up a lovely image of how musicians like Louis march to a different time, somewhat in the sense of a different dimension. Happily, he had given an equally visionary address at Mother's funeral in 2005, providing inspiration and comfort on both occasions, along with apposite appreciation of the two individuals and their special qualities.

But returning to Louis' youth and his quixotic mother... It may have been partly the trauma of her parents' divorce and being separated from her father and sister which meant that Enid was not good at human relationships and appeared quite fierce to us. I can now appreciate (a little!) that she was nevertheless an interesting and talented person, despite her lack of warmth, and some of her letters show more affection than she was able to demonstrate in person. When she stopped pursuing her musical career, she became a "Mrs Good Life" character keeping animals like ducks, hens, geese and goats, particularly when living in Suffolk, in a half-timbered house called Wood Hall with a big garden (where I recollect my first experience of a bee sting as a small child, when touching a purple buddleia blossom).

Enid had a series of dogs and cats; grew fruit and vegetables and made preserves. She cut an eccentric figure, tramping around in a large aertex shirt, baggy Bermuda shorts and sandals as she worked in the garden. She was a good cook, though I do not recall many main courses – but I do remember enjoying her baked egg custard with delicious homegrown raspberries and helping pick berries in the garden. She seemed to like her animals more than people, and my brother and I were frightened of both her and her big dogs. When we were small (about 5 or 6) she had a Pyrenean mountain dog called Fleur and a full-size black poodle called Dillo, which barked at Colin and me, and when we ventured timidly to tell it to be quiet Grannie snapped at us "*Don't you shush my dog!*", making us even more nervous.

Grannie was fond of changing houses. Perhaps unusually it was she who took charge of buying and selling and moving-house arrangements, maybe because her husband Martin lived abroad a lot as a soldier; or because Enid had private means of her own; or because Martin was co-owner of Hanover Lodge in London where his sister Nora lived – or perhaps a combination of these factors. There are some letters from my father Louis to his sister Christine expressing disquiet about Grannie's plans for moving again; a little ironic since Louis himself had itchy feet and was much keener later on to move or go to new places than his wife Nancy.

Enid's house locations included Folkestone and Abergavenny in North Wales as well as Suffolk. But my main memory of my grandparents' home is their last house at 109 Holden Road in Woodside Park, North London, where Grannie continued to grow produce in the garden, which could be reached from a cast iron balcony upstairs with wrought iron steps. In my mind, it was quite a big house, but maybe it wasn't so large as, when we visited with my parents, my brother Colin and I first had to sleep end to end in one bed, and later, Colin was put on a camp bed in Granddaddy's study. He was not very keen on this arrangement despite being devoted to our grandfather! (Perhaps foreshadowing his trip to South Africa many years later when Colin went wilderness camping with a group but got so fed up with the primitive conditions that he checked into a hotel while the others stayed in a tent on the beach by the Indian Ocean!)

Although it was hard for us to feel much fondness for Grannie Enid, Colin and I adored our paternal Grandfather Martin – Granddaddy. As we were equally devoted to our maternal American grandmother Granmargie, we used to wish secretly that the two of them were a couple! I don't imagine they shared this ambition, and they came from very different backgrounds, but they seemed to get on well when they met and, occasionally, they both shared holidays with our family. Martin was a Lt Colonel in the army – mainly working in the Education Corps, but he had also served in Afghanistan during the First World War, and then out in India where my father Louis was born (christened Louis Revell Carus-Wilson – but later he later decided to drop the Wilson to make a snappier musician moniker).

When Louis was a toddler out in India, he fell in the river and was allegedly saved from drowning by his floating topi (pith helmet). I have no idea if this is true, but I do have an old photo of Louis and his elder sister Christine, both wearing pith helmets! Dad also had a narrow escape later at school as a teenager when he was extremely ill with meningitis; but fortunately, he made a full recovery. Perhaps the genes of his family were quite robust, as his brother Alan was also seriously ill as a young man with tuberculosis, but he too survived to live into his 80s. Aunt Christine seemed frailer, but her fragility was mainly to do with her mental health.

Granddaddy told us about his own medical crisis – he said he had a dangerously high temperature in India when suffering from a bout of fever – probably malaria, and it was only because there was a working fridge that meant his medical attendants could cool him down with ice and so he too survived a brush with death. He spent many years out in India serving in the army before coming back to England to work in army education. I don't recall hearing of him having any other medical emergencies until the heart attack he suffered in his early 70s.

When I was a child, Granddaddy would come from London to visit us in our Bearsden home (where we lived in my primary school years), bringing chocolate and other gifts, a twinkle in his eye, and a pipe with tobacco in a gold and blue tin (I don't recall the brand), which intrigued us. Colin would quiz him artlessly about whether there were any Mars bars lurking in his luggage, or other goodies. He did not drive (unlike Grannie) and he enjoyed travelling up to Scotland on the train (usually steam in those days). He would bring little pots of marmalade and jam from the train buffet car (those were the days!) to us as souvenirs of his trip.

He was always good fun, and he took a great individual interest in us, including writing long beautifully scripted letters to each of us. He sometimes accompanied my mother on her visits to see my autistic brother Kenny at the children's wing of the Crichton Royal Hospital, Ladyfield West, and took some charming photos of Kenny and Mother. He was a very thoughtful and kind-hearted person. However, after he died Mother told me that letters were found in his desk from Germany (presumably from his days in the army there) which were addressed to "Daddy" – so perhaps he too had feet of clay? It so often seems to be that the more charismatic and wonderful a person is, the more likely that there may be a secret lurking that reveals a human frailty or a different side to them. Humans and their situations can be so complex that I guess one should never rush to judge.

Granddaddy liked to ask us what we wanted for birthdays and Christmas, and took great care trying to find the right gift. He bought me a fancy double-layered powder blue nylon nightgown, and a navy blue "skip" hat that I had requested when I was turning 12. [*this skip hat was a bit like a soft beret or cap with a peak – reminiscent of the floppy Victorian caps worn by characters like Jack the Dodger!*]. He took many beautiful black & white and sepia photographs of us, although his real passion was depicting landscape views and buildings. He was extremely keen on architecture (probably an architect manqué) and every Christmas he would draw a detailed and accurate picture of a building such as a cathedral which became the Christmas card from himself and Grannie. [*Leslie & I seem to have followed in the tradition of making our own card with my addition of a Christmas letter!*]

Pursuing his interest in architecture, Granddaddy had created an amazing dollhouse which looked like a mansion or chateau. He expanded and developed it from a basic box structure house that his father Ashley had made for his sister Nora. It was then ostensibly Christine's dollhouse, but was really Granddaddy's big hobby, and it was left to my father when Granddaddy died in 1969. During the war, one of Granddaddy's main concerns when he was abroad in the army and London was blitzed and Grannie moved out, was what had happened to the dollhouse? I don't know, but maybe it was evacuated to the country too as it survived the war.

It had a tower with an electric lift (installed by Dad; I remember it working when I was a child but I fear no longer) and a clock in the top cupola, a basement area for coaches, and rooms filled with delightful furniture, plus fascinating kitchen accessories like tins for foods. I was also intrigued by the white and blue glass chandelier that hung in the dining room, and the beautiful painted dining set. Colin and I loved playing with the dollhouse when we visited my grandparents in London, and my own children also enjoyed playing with it when my parents had it at their home in Worcestershire, years after my grandfather had died. Colin now has the

house squeezed into his terrace house in Wimbledon, so I don't know when any children will get to play with it again - but it was so elaborate that perhaps it was fated to end up as more of a museum-piece than a plaything.

I don't think Grannie ever accompanied Granddaddy on his trips to stay with our family (presumably partly because of needing to look after all her animals, but also being less interested in her grandchildren) so we only saw her on occasional visits to London. She died in 1973, before I went to university in London, so I did not get the chance to know her as an adult. Granddaddy passed away even earlier (1969) but because of all his visits to us in Scotland, joining us on holidays and his letters, both Colin and I felt we loved and knew him much better than Grannie, and we were very sad when he died, quite suddenly, of a heart complaint. We were barely teenagers, and this was our first experience of the death of someone close to us.



Martin Carus-Wilson (Grandfather or Granddaddy) c.1964 on Maid of Loch, Loch Lomond. He was a keen photographer.



Enid Madeleine Revell learning piano c.1905.



Martin Carus-Wilson (Grandfather) India c.1928



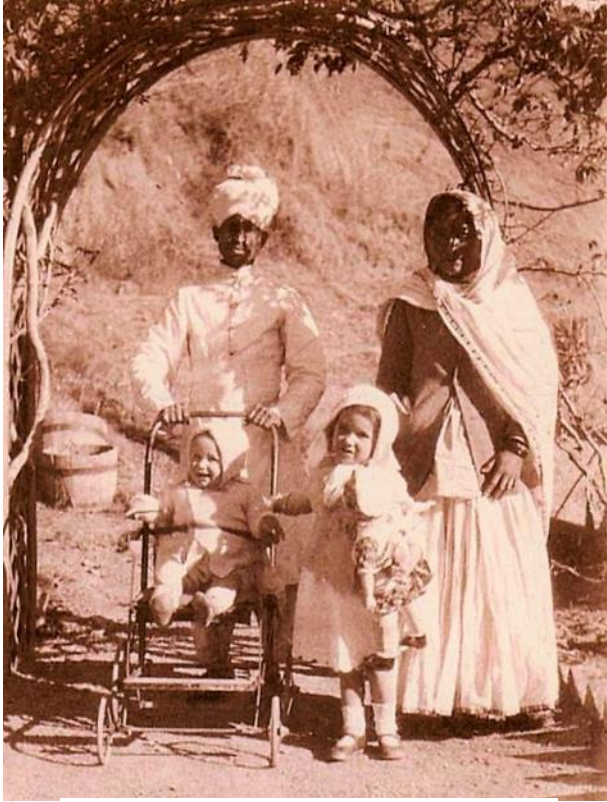
Enid (Grannie) & Brutus, 1920s (in England)



*Enid Carus-Wilson (nee Revell) – Grannie –
“concert pianist”*



*Christine, Enid, baby Louis (my father)
& Martin 1928 India*



Louis & Christine with Allahdin & Ayah 1928



Louis with Ayah & Christine 1928



Martin, Christine, baby Louis & Enid Dalhousie, India c.1928



Christine & Louis in India wearing topis c.1930.



Christine's school, Convent of Sacred Heart, Dalhousie (hill resort in India) 1930 (Christine in second row from back 3rd from left)



Alan, Christine, Louis back in England c.1933



My father Louis, sister Christine & brother Alan Carus-Wilson - "the trio" c.1933



Louis in Baltimore 1950



Louis & violin 1950s

Louis & Other Family

Christine had been born in England in 1925, but both Louis and younger brother Alan were born in India, while their father was on an army posting. Louis was born on 22 October 1927, and Alan in June 1929. Later, like so many children of the colonies, they came back to England when they were quite young, and they went to boarding school. They did not see much of their father when they were growing up, but they were each close to him as adults, though not so close to each other. They played together as young children, but I believe the boys were sent to different schools, maybe because they did not get on particularly well or perhaps for other reasons.



My favourite picture of my father c.1970

Dad won a music scholarship to Rugby after going to prep school at Betteshanger. I am not sure what schools my uncle went to (but in one photo of him it looks like he is wearing an Eton outfit). By all accounts, he was a bit of a rebel and was expelled from one school for starting a fire! I don't know the details of what happened to him afterwards, but, apparently, he had to see a psychologist or psychiatrist for a while, which in some ways seems surprisingly advanced treatment, for the 1930s-40s. Alan was an engaging person when he grew up, with a reputation as a bit of a rogue, which I think he rather enjoyed fostering, although I think he was actually quite kind-hearted. He always had a very mischievous twinkle in his eye!

Like his brother Louis Alan became a successful classical musician, though he liked to maintain a more unconventional façade, sometimes playing lighter music and being less keen to get involved in administration and the politics of committee work which Dad became immersed in. But they were both wonderful teachers of music, who inspired respect and devotion in their students, and skilled chamber musicians. Alan was also an enthusiastic golf player – his equivalent of Dad's gardening I imagine and was a great family man with 3 children. But we were told that he and his wife had an “open marriage” which seemed quite shocking then but is perhaps more common than one thinks. Or is it more common to have secrets?

Though Alan may have been sent to a psychiatrist for being a naughty schoolboy, it was Louis' and Alan's sister, my Aunt Christine, who actually needed psychiatric help, and she did see a psychiatrist for a while following a breakdown during her early days at university. I don't think she returned to university, and she ended up doing a variety of secretarial work, changing her job quite frequently. Either she thought there might be something better round the corner or else her behaviour irritated her employer, and she was encouraged to move on. Her father suggested in some of his letters that she should try to stick at a job and not keep changing. She remained a very nervy and needy person all her life. But despite her neuroses and idiosyncrasies, which could be irritating, I think my father was genuinely fond of her, perhaps partly because of her devotion and loyalty to him, and maybe even because of her vulnerabilities. There are many letters between them dating back to his schooldays as well as later, which reveal him showing a genuine concern for her welfare, and her taking a great interest in his progress through life.

Despite her nervous disposition, for a while Christine served as a Wren in the war, and I learnt to my surprise that she may even have been involved in some of the Enigma code work based at Bletchley, until she found it too much of a strain. I only found this out when I listened to some tapes which my cousin Anna recorded in 1999, of Christine talking about her early life. Presumably by then Christine did not feel bound by the Official Secrets Act – understandably as this was over 50 years since the war had ended. But anyway, she did not discuss her work in any detail, and it may have been simply low-level transcription – or perhaps not!

Christine's secretarial training proved useful when she made a trip over to the USA, a short while after Nancy had come over to the UK to marry Louis. Nancy's mother had known a young American man called Harry who was in London, and she put him in touch with Christine - possibly matchmaking – and indeed he ended up asking Christine to marry him! There are different versions of this story.

According to my mother, Christine got engaged to Harry and she went over to work in the USA to see if she would like life there, but then she got interested in a different man, so broke it off with Harry, and went after the other chap who scarpered home to his mother.

But when Christine was talking on tape to my cousin Anna, she claimed that she had never really been engaged to Harry, but had gone over to work in Baltimore, and see if she liked living in the USA, and had then decided against marrying Harry and said she decided to try a different job in Washington. She made no mention of another man! The work in Washington became quite stressful because her boss was one of the victims of the McCarthy purge and Christine ended up returning to the UK to work in Oxford for a while before returning to London.

I think Oxford was where Christine struck up her last rather ill-fated relationship, with an Oxford don. An English academic might have made a more suitable life-partner for her, but unfortunately, he too was tied to his mother – for a long time Christine said that if only he didn't have to look after his mother, they would be together – but as soon as mother died, he moved in with his sister! One felt a bit sorry for Christine, but there was also a suspicion that perhaps she sub-consciously went after men who were unobtainable, and that she might not really have enjoyed being married – she was quite stubborn and set in her own ways and was also uncomfortable about sex and could probably only cope with a chaste relationship. She had obviously felt distressed in her early years, but it is hard to know if it was mainly her mother who was to blame or whether there were other deep-seated traumas – or if she was just a troubled personality.

In the conversations that my cousin recorded, Christine referred to the relationship with her mother being difficult (nowadays we would probably say toxic – Christine was mistress of euphemisms and skating over unpleasant topics). As a teenager during the war Christine was sent to boarding school, and on the tape, she said her mother moved out to a house in the country, but she was quite stressed from having been in London during the Blitz. Christine commented that when she was with Enid “*that was a difficult time*” and “*I must admit I was glad to get back to school*”.

Christine also claimed that it was her mother who had a bit of a nervous breakdown, but I never heard anything about that from my parents, whereas they both referred

to Christine's mental health problems, and there were letters from her psychiatrist to her father and Aunt Nora. Whatever the truth of it, Christine appeared to all our family to be someone who suffered from a fragile mental state for much of her life. By contrast Grannie seemed extremely robust. But while I can believe that Grannie was someone with whom it would be difficult to have a warm relationship; I am sure that my Grandfather would have been caring and supportive through the vicissitudes of Christine's life.

After retiring Christine ended up living in a flat in the house where Leslie and I lived with our children (the family house Hanover Lodge, which Leslie and I bought bit by bit from my parents). Christine took a great interest in our family, partly because she had never married, so Leslie and I and our children, along with my parents, were her principal family, although she still maintained some contact with other brother Alan and his family. Aunt Christine could be tiresome, but she was also kind in helping us with babysitting, and in attempting to give our children various treats. Trips to Christmas shows were appreciated; a weekly offering of a two-piece Bounty bar which had to be cut in 3 was less popular (and puzzling)!

Living through the war left Christine with a predisposition to economise and to hoard food, and our kids did not enjoy the stale biscuits and dried-up raisins that she would offer them. Leslie and I could not persuade her that using central heating would be more economical than the variety of elderly electrical heaters she employed – she also tried using paraffin heaters; but fearing a fire risk we managed to extract these from her and dispose of them. However, her electric fires were hardly much more secure. One of her tricks would be to bring down some ancient piece of electrical apparatus that was not working and try to persuade Leslie to mend it. We would end up having to buy a new piece of equipment to save Leslie wasting fruitless hours trying to salvage the item or the house being set on fire.

Many of Christine's anxious traits probably had their origin in the bad relationship she had with her mother; but her father Martin was always very loving and interested in her, just as he was with his sons and his grandchildren. Although my father was close to her, and he acknowledged that Grannie had been quite harsh with her, he also said that Christine herself had a difficult personality from an early age, and it was perhaps one of those toxic vicious circles whereby Christine's behaviour reinforced Grannie's impatience and sharp criticism. Years later, when I saw letters to Christine from both her parents, I was surprised that the tone of Grannie's letters sometimes appeared unexpectedly affectionate, but maybe Grannie was someone who found it easier to express affection in writing rather than face to face. But my Grandfather Martin was someone who was affectionate both in person and in his letters – a lovely warm person, and extremely kind to Christine.

It was a strange irony that we ended up seeing so much of Christine when in many ways we found the company of Dad's brother Alan, his wife Eithne and their three children more enjoyable. We did see them periodically, but unfortunately bad feeling grew up between Louis and Alan regarding testamentary dispositions of both their parents and Aunt Nora. Arguments and resentments built up over several years which was sad. Yet it was probably Aunt Christine who suffered most from this, having been left virtually nothing; however, both Louis and Alan settled funds

on her which enabled her to buy her own home, and she gained a measure of security and contentment as a result, although remaining an anxious person.

Christine was of a nervous disposition most of her life, but physically reasonably healthy, and survived a bout of pneumonia in her late 70s and a couple of TIAs, but she succumbed to a massive stroke in 2004 when she was 79. This was when she lived in the flat at the top of our house, having moved there after retiring from her secretarial work around 1986. I discovered her body (having noticed that her post and milk had not been collected from the day before) – though I had to call Leslie to confirm she was dead as I had never encountered a dead body before, and thought I'd better make sure! Leslie confirmed my suspicions. I think we both feared it was slightly like Spike Milligan's tombstone inscription "*I told you I was ill*".

Christine complained of a variety of ailments while living at Hanover Lodge, both physical and psychological, and this could get quite wearing sometimes. She spoke in a quavery voice, and she would enlist our help to carry light shopping or a small case when going on holiday – one couldn't help suspecting this was as much a plea for attention as needing assistance. Especially as she would regularly go on "walking holidays" (organised by a rambling association) and coped with the two flights of stairs up to her top floor flat, so one felt she couldn't be that infirm. But when departing after visiting with us downstairs her catchphrase was "*Well I think I'll creep upstairs now*" – probably a fairly accurate description of how she moved.

We did our best to keep in touch with Christine and include her in various family events and celebrations, but after she died, I felt a bit guilty that perhaps we should have done more - while recognizing that might have driven us a little mad. Since she died on her own at home there had to be a post-mortem, and it was a relief to discover that she died virtually instantaneously, so there was nothing we could have done even if I had called by the previous day. I have a slightly gruesome memory of her body being brought downstairs in a black body bag – presumably by ambulance crew since she had to be taken to hospital for the post-mortem.

When Louis and his family were back in England, I think they saw quite a bit of my grandfather Martin's sister, Eleanora, Aunt Nora. Martin and Nora were close, and Nora showed a fondness for Martin's children, perhaps because she did not have children of her own. Great Aunt Nora was a formidable figure, but also had an affectionate twinkle. She must have been a real "*blue stocking*" as she got a university degree in History and became one of the first female professors at LSE, teaching Mediaeval Economic History. She also worked for the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Farming (MAFF) during the Second World War. She never married but had several close female friends and went on walking holidays in the Swiss Alps with some of them. Although I did not think of it at the time, in her way she was quite a feminist. Perhaps she was even more interested in women than I realized – though it is equally possible that she was one of the poor women who lost a male sweetheart in the Great War. But had she followed the conventional course of marriage and children she might not have achieved such academic distinction.

Nora's mother (my Great Grandmother Mary Louisa Georgina Petrie, who married Ashley Carus-Wilson) had been involved in the founding of Westfield College, part of London University and one of the first colleges providing university education

for women (although it later admitted men) and she probably encouraged Nora to pursue higher education. I can imagine that both Mary and Nora would have been supporters of women's suffrage, though I never discussed this with Aunt Nora.

Nora was not particularly domesticated and had a housekeeper most of her life. In addition to her academic career, she was also enterprising in her holidays, and would frequently go on trips to places like the Swiss Alps, where she would go hiking in the mountains, usually with a female companion. Although I did not think of her as being maternal, she took a great interest in all her nephews and nieces, and she was particularly kind to Christine, even though (like the rest of us) she could find her exasperating. It was Aunt Nora rather than Grannie who helped Granddaddy in organizing and overseeing Christine's consultations with a psychiatrist. She was very fond of my father and proud of his musical achievements, and they enjoyed various activities together, including trips to Glyndebourne Opera, and she also made visits to Alan and his family in Birmingham.

When Aunt Nora entertained my boyfriend (subsequently husband) Leslie, and me in her drawing room at Hanover Lodge in Holland Park sitting on the sofa, she used to say proudly "*Westfield College was conceived on this sofa!*" This was when we were both university students at Westfield, a college of London University. Nora was pleased that I had decided to study History & History of Art at Westfield College; she and my father encouraged me to go there. If I could have studied English Literature with History of Art, I would have chosen that combination rather than History, but I could not find that option in those days. I figured I would just keep reading books for pleasure and in years to come I ended up helping my kids with quite a few essays on English literature.

The only other course I considered doing was Fine Art at Edinburgh – which would no doubt have been enjoyable, and I was quite torn. But I decided there would be a greater range of galleries and exhibitions in London to enhance my studies, and so "*the die was cast*" – that phrase is in for daughter Catriona as she reckons it is one of my favourite mantras - only outdone by "*we'll cross that bridge when we come to it*", so both are a source of amusement (or irritation?) to her when I trot them out. Is it only parenthood that consigns one to such predictability, and becoming a source of mockery? Yet maybe there is a comfort in such familiar behaviour and sayings, even if they can trigger exasperation – but I suspect that Leslie is more often the butt of family jokes than I am (males being generally a more amusing species than females, and Leslie being quite an eccentric example).

Because Aunt Nora encouraged me to go to Westfield, where I met the man who was to become my husband, she indirectly mapped out the rest of my life in terms of who and when I would marry, and therefore who my children would be, and also where I would live and work... Thus, although I did not think of Aunt Nora playing such a key role in my life as Granddaddy or Granmargie, she turned out to be instrumental in shaping my future. Having looked through some of the letters between her and my parents and my Aunt Christine, I can see that she also played important roles in their lives and was generous and caring to them.

Like me, I think my mother sometimes found Aunt Nora a bit daunting, but she appreciated her kindness. There are letters thanking her for a whole host of gifts at

Christmas and birthdays, letters both from my parents, but also from myself and my brothers when we were growing up. She also assisted my father financially when he was buying a property. But Mother also recalled Nora expressing surprise at some of Mother's American customs, such as eating with just a fork instead of a knife and fork and suggesting she might like to adopt the English custom, and sometimes being critical in other ways. Mother was not one to be easily cowed however – which Nora probably admired! By contrast, Granddaddy and Granmargie were each more significant to our family in terms of our emotional relationships, because they were such warm, loving people, both to my parents and to me and my brothers, but there was also a strong bond with Nora.



*Great Aunt Nora walking in the Alps,
Zermatt 1950s*



*Great Aunt Nora c.1960
Professor Carus-Wilson*



*Aunt Christine 1991 outside Hanover Lodge, with our 3
children: James, Catriona & Gordon*

6. Dad's Hidden Life

Although our family was fortunate in many ways, all was not sweetness and light. My brother found out about Dad's affairs relatively early on, soon after I was married, and it gave him a rather jaded view of Dad – however there were other causes of acrimony between them over the years. I only discovered about Dad's philandering at a late stage, when I already had 3 children, and his latest liaison had resulted in a pregnancy (and subsequently the birth of my half-sister Deni.) In his ridiculously naïve way, this came as a huge shock to Dad. From the circumstances I suspect that Deni's mother had been keen to have a child come what may, and saw Dad as her best opportunity, as she was around 40 at the time of the affair – however I think he may also have misled her into thinking he might leave Mother.

This caused a big upset in our family and I was desperately sorry for Mother and could not help but lose some respect for Dad. But I was still deeply fond of him, and I felt some understanding of how a musician's life threw up temptations and opportunities for extramarital liaisons, and how Mother's own personality and behaviour could have precipitated him into escaping into affairs. In a minor way I had experienced some temptations myself in past years, which I had managed to resist, but it perhaps gave me some sympathy to Dad's weakness. I suspect with Dad that much of the attraction was about the romantic dream, an escape from the harsh realities of life; perhaps tied up with the pain of his son's autism and becoming ever aware that he could never be "cured". Dad's affairs were not one-night stands but usually involved romantic correspondence and imaginings about an idealised relationship. Although he and Mother eventually saw a counsellor who said Dad was addicted to sex, I think it was more to do with the romance and excitement of a secret affair – and once it was discovered it lost its attraction.

However, I was disappointed that Dad had succumbed not just once, but several times to such temptation. I would have hoped that seeing how shattering and painful it was to his wife that he might have learned the reality of having affairs was not as romantic as the prospect. Dad's attitude to his latest lady friend expecting a baby was almost as ridiculous as the circumstances of his first straying which Mother described to me. Some 12 or so years into their marriage Dad was apparently consoling a female musician friend whose husband was having an affair – and allegedly she was so upset that she said if Dad did not sleep with her to console her, she would kill herself! My cynical side took a jaded view of this threat as did Mother! She was devastated, but although she was deeply hurt by repeat offences, she commented that maybe Dad felt nothing could remove the fact that he was an adulterer – shades of explaining a serial killer! Mother had nobly shielded me from the knowledge of this, and subsequent affairs, saying she did not want to spoil the close relationship that I enjoyed with Dad, which I appreciated, but I felt sad and guilty that she had been harbouring all this misery for so long. Deep down I had been aware of tensions between them without being sure of the exact cause (which resulted in my trying to behave well and not cause problems myself). But I did not realise the extent of Dad's discontent or desire for extra-marital thrills.

Although I knew about my half-sister, I would never have attempted to meet her or her mother while my own mother was alive, or to talk to my children about it. But

when Nancy died, I suddenly wondered if Deni's mother Li Lin might turn up at the funeral. So, I decided I had better tell my children about what Granddaddy had been up to. I think Catriona was less upset than the boys, as to her it was like some real-life soap opera, which with her taste for drama she rather enjoyed, and she was intrigued to know what her schoolgirl aunt was like. James and Gordon had both been extremely fond of their Granma, and they felt upset on her account. However, we were all prepared to be welcoming to Deni when we finally met her. Neither Deni nor her mother made an appearance at Nancy's funeral – and when I broached the subject with Dad about whether he might want to marry Deni's mother now he looked a bit disconcerted and said no that was all in the past!

But I knew he was still in contact with them, and in due course we met on several occasions, and even had them to Christmas with us once up in Scotland, after Dad had moved back up there and we had our house in Skelmorlie. Deni has turned out to be the child who followed in his classical musician footsteps, and she is now a professional cellist. One could not wish her existence away, even if it feels odd to have a half-sister who is younger than my daughter (probably even odder for her!).

The fact that Dad recoiled from the idea of marriage with Li Lin confirmed my view that his affairs were primarily escapist. With his final relationship after Mother's death, I suspect he would have been liked to marry her, but she was perhaps wise enough to restrict their friendship to companionship. Muriel was a delightful Scottish violinist who had been one of Dad's first students in his early days at the Academy (although I don't think there was anything untoward in their relationship then). Meeting her again inspired Dad to want to move back to Glasgow, especially as her son happened to be selling his flat in the centre of the city! Although I had initial misgivings about this, the move worked out well for many reasons. Dad was able to attend a host of concerts and recitals, and go out for meals, and the flat was much easier to look after than the Powick house. Muriel was a different person to either Mother or Li Lin – quiet and reserved - but she was also kind-hearted. She was a loyal companion to Dad in his last years, attending concerts, going on holidays with him, joining us for meals out and playing chamber music with him – and visiting him regularly when he was in a Care Home.

Dad had several loyal friends who visited him in the Care Home, mostly musicians who had been his pupils back in the 1960's, and he was able to play chamber music with them up to his final months. Dad had an artless, almost child-like charm which meant that even those who knew about his infidelities or other peccadilloes forgave him and still kept in touch. One might have thought that Li Lin would be disillusioned by his disinclination to marry her either while Mother was alive and Deni was a small child, or after Mother died. But she remained amazingly fond of Dad and when we shared Christmas at Ravensburn it was a good-humoured visit. Deni and her mum also came up to visit Dad when he was ill in hospital and we knew he might be dying. Deni brought her cello as she or her mother insisted that she practise every day! My memory is hazy, but I think Gordon drove us to the hospital, and Leslie and I offered to take them in to find the ward as it was a large hospital and Dad had been moved around. However, Deni said it would not be safe to leave her valuable cello in the car, so we had the rather comical scenario of us running around hospital corridors clutching a cello trying to locate where Dad was!

As with much of Dad's life confusion and an element of surprise reigned over funeral arrangements, I had to have protracted negotiations with my brother about the funeral, including where, when and how.... which nearly drove me to distraction, and meant some people were so confused about when it was happening that they missed it altogether. However, it was eventually held in St Mary's (Episcopal) Cathedral, Glasgow, which we had attended when I was a child, and where Leslie and I had also gone to several services with Dad after he moved back to Glasgow, so it seemed eminently suitable. Gordon read a lesson, Dad's priest friend Anthony Harvey gave an inspiring eulogy, Colin gave a talk about some episodes in Dad's life, and I sang Fauré's Pie Jesu. Additional music included Muriel playing a plaintive folk tune on the violin, and Dad's other musician friends Andrea, Bob and Kathleen played Elgar's Chanson de Matin, a piece I associated closely with Dad. We also had Deni playing a piece on her cello accompanied by her mum Li Lin. This may have been a slight puzzle to some of Dad's friends, as I think most were unaware of his affairs and did not know he had another daughter.

The service was due to be followed by the committal at the crematorium, to be attended by myself, Colin and Muriel, while Leslie and our children entertained the guests at the cathedral. But I felt I should invite Deni to come with us if she wanted to. She said she didn't – however Li Lin said she'd like to come! So, an even stranger sight for the mourners was Dad's coffin being accompanied out of the church by a son and daughter and two virtually unknown ladies – though to some who knew Dad well perhaps this was not a total surprise!

By now of course Aunt Christine had been dead for over 6 years. But back in 1991 when she learnt about Dad's affair with Li Lin, she was possibly the most upset of anyone about Dad's infidelity, as she always had such a high opinion of him and was so fond of him. However, the person who was probably most delighted was Uncle Alan – having been regarded as the black sheep of the family I think he was highly gratified to discover that his brother Louis had feet of clay too!



Uncle Alan, Aunt Christine & their brother Louis c.2002 - at Moonrakers, Powick, my parents' last home together.



My half-sister Deni playing the cello 2017

7. Hanover Lodge



Hanover Lodge mid-19th century. We have the original painting – but it is an idealised view as the house was never detached. The area was known as Kensington Park and portrayed as a rural idyll by developers keen to rent or sell property. It shows the house before the large bay window and side extension was added on (at the turn of the century) and the picture may have been painted around 1840 at the time when my great-great -great grandmother Louisa Macdowall (née Dunbar) moved in.



Hanover Lodge (14 Lansdowne Road, Holland Park, W11)

Hanover Lodge is a handsome Victorian house in yellow brick and white stucco, situated at 14 Lansdowne Road, W11, 100 yards from Holland Park tube station. For various reasons it became the house where my husband and I lived for 37 years (soon after marrying), so all three of our children grew up there. We used to say we lived in Holland Park, but following the success of the film Notting Hill, it was easier to indicate our location to people (and perhaps had more cachet!) by saying we lived in Notting Hill. This was a turnaround from the perception of my husband's mother, when we first moved in, that Notting Hill was a dangerous place full of riots and Rachmanism! Although big, it was not actually detached, having always been attached to the house round the corner, 14 Lansdowne Walk. It had been used by my ancestors as a family house since the 1840s, and it passed to my father Louis when my grandfather and his sister Nora had both died. Louis felt strongly attached to the house, yet he himself never lived in it, only spending odd nights there when visiting either Aunt Nora or, later on, me and my family.

Although Leslie and I acquired ownership of Hanover Lodge by gradually buying different parts of the house from my parents over a period of about 25 years, our residence there followed a tradition established throughout the history of the house, since it always seemed to pass through the female line, going back to the 1840s when it was owned by my great-great-great grandmother Louisa Dunbar. She had married a Major General William Macdowall, but he died in 1837, before Louisa moved down to London from Scotland (from either Edinburgh or somewhere in Midlothian I believe). There seems quite a neat symmetry in the fact that I as the last of our family owners had also moved down from Scotland and moved into Hanover Lodge soon after marrying – and then years later also bought a house in Scotland, where we now spend a lot of time, alongside time in our current house in Hammersmith. Meanwhile our middle son has reversed the tradition once more by marrying a Glasgow girl and moving north to Scotland with her!

Hanover Lodge passed from Louisa (who was an heiress) to her daughter Eleanora Grant Macdowall (after whom my Great Aunt Nora was named). She married another soldier, Captain Martin Petrie, who was later promoted to Colonel. He was the chief character in another drama, where he became known as the "*Hero of the Vesta*". In 1855 he set out on a small steamer called the Vesta which was carrying about 24 passengers from Newfoundland. Seven of them, including Martin, were officers on their way to join regiments in the Crimean War. The vessel was damaged by icefloes and a terrific storm, which flooded the engine-room. Martin's mechanical skill and courage enabled him to save the ship, thereby saving his fellow passengers. But his hands were so frost-bitten and damaged that he was invalided for some time and could not go on to the Crimea – which may have prolonged his life since he avoided the carnage there.

Martin and Eleanora Petrie had three daughters, Mary, Irene and Evie (Evelyn Martina de Mytton). Poor Evie died when she was only 12 in 1873. There is a memorial tablet to her and her parents in St Mary Abbot's Church, Kensington. Eleanora died in 1886 and Martin in 1892. Irene died a single woman of only 32 in 1897, when she was working in Kashmir as a missionary, and she was buried in Tibet where she died of fever. She had been working out in India for only 3 years, (having only felt free to go there after her parents died) but her sister Mary believed

she had done valuable work, which she wrote about in a biography of Irene, as well as writing theological books and magazines. So once more the house Hanover Lodge passed to the remaining daughter, my great-grandmother Mary Louisa Georgina Petrie.

Mary (known as May) married Charles Ashley Carus-Wilson (known as Ashley), my great-grandfather in 1892. Although he was English, in the early years of their marriage Ashley held a post as a Professor in Engineering at McGill University in Montreal, and my grandfather Martin Macdowall, his younger brother Louis Charles and their younger sister Eleanora Mary (Nora) were born in Canada. (in 1894, 1896 and 1897). But Ashley and May came back to live in London when the children were young, toward the end of Queen Victoria's reign. Recently I found Aunt Nora's Baby Book, which describes her first outing in Montreal on 1 March 1898, when she was only 2 months old. *"A drive all over the mountain, with her mother, brothers and nurse. After this Nora took daily exercise in her carriage"*

Nora's Baby Book goes on to record that *"On April 21st 1898 Nora left Montreal, travelled to New York by train, thence to Liverpool in the 'Campania' (Cunard Line) and on to London, reaching her Grandmother's house, The Rise, Hampstead, on April 30th, in no respect the worse for the journey."* I presume this would have been the home of Mary Jervis Maud who was married to the Revd Charles Carus-Wilson. (The majority of my ancestors seem to have either followed a military career or a religious path! But sometimes also artistic to leaven the military or religious zeal.) However, it was not long before Ashley's family moved back into his wife's family home, Hanover Lodge, where they brought up Martin, Louis and Nora. I believe they were also responsible for some of the additions to the house, such as the tall, curved bay window in the living room, and the expansion of the top floor which formed a nursery for the children. Ashley being an engineer may well have taken an active part in designing the extensions to the house. When young the children all attended Norland Place School, which was close by on Holland Park Avenue. Following middle-class tradition, the boys were sent off to boarding school in due course; Martin attending Sherborne in Dorset.

Like several of their forebears, both Martin and Louis went into the army and fought in the First World War. Louis was a Royal Engineer and had a successful army career, winning the military cross. It sounds like he was one of those golden boys, with a bright future before him, but although he survived the war, sadly he died soon after in 1922 (of Nile fever according to the death certificate). Although I have seen photos of him in his army uniform, my abiding memory of him is as an adorable young child with golden curls, depicted in a beautiful oil painting that I inherited. Martin served mainly in Afghanistan but was then posted to India. He had better health, as well as good fortune in surviving the war.

Hanover Lodge was left jointly to Martin and his sister Nora (following the deaths of their parents, Mary in 1935 and Ashley in 1942), but ironically, I don't think Martin lived there for any significant time after he married, though no doubt he stayed there when making occasional visits to London. So once again it was a female member of the family, Nora, who became the principal resident. The house was later left to my father, who never resided there himself, but Leslie and I ended

up living there for 37 years, gradually purchasing the house back from my parents and others to bring it back into one ownership and bringing up our family there.

Martin served in India for several years after the war before returning to England and continuing working for the Army Education Corps. Although he may still have regarded Hanover Lodge as his family home, presumably because he was in the army he moved around a lot, initially having his wife and children with him after he married, while they lived in other places later on. As mentioned above, his wife Enid enjoyed buying and living in different houses around England and Wales. Thus, it was his Martin's sister Nora (my Great Aunt) who remained living at Hanover Lodge for most of her life. Nora lived with her parents, and after her mother Mary died, she and her father Ashley remained at Hanover Lodge; after Ashley's demise it was just Aunt Nora and her housekeeper.

At some point, perhaps between the wars, the house was split up in a partial fashion to create two flats on the upper two floors that were let out to tenants, as well as having a housekeeper living in part of the basement. But Aunt Nora retained one guest bedroom on the first floor (outside the flat), which was a charming room (sadly but logically it was incorporated into the flat for letting when my father had the house split up into fully self-contained units). Both my father and I had enjoyed staying in this bedchamber on visits to London, and it was perhaps this room that gave me the ambition of having a guest room in my own home – although I only finally achieved this after we moved from Hanover Lodge!

During the years when my family and I lived in Hanover Lodge our part of the house became very messy and chaotic and the division of the apartments was not wholly satisfactory; but when Nora and her brothers were growing up in the Edwardian era, living in the whole of the house, it must have been an elegant residence, with the family following gentlemanly and ladylike pursuits, although the females were also quite advanced in their educational studies. Great-grandmother May produced a journal called *The Children's Friend*, and wrote several books, though they are a bit too earnestly religious to make them easy reading for a modern audience. May and her sister Irene both enjoyed drawing and painting (as of course did many Victorian young ladies). Irene did many beautiful landscapes when she was out in India in the 1890s. Several of the door panels at Hanover Lodge were beautifully painted with flowers and trees. When we moved to Hammersmith, we brought the panels with us (though in our usual dilatory and disorganised fashion we are still searching to find the right place to display them).

When we finally left Hanover Lodge the garden had deteriorated into quite a wilderness. Our lives were so busy, and neither Leslie nor I had ever been very skilled at gardening, despite our parents being passionate gardeners. Some might say we were also inept at keeping house as the house too became very cluttered and dilapidated. An ascerbic observer might also point out we were too busy pursuing myriad other activities such as amateur dramatics, genealogy, local history, singing, open water swimming, charity work (not to mention earning our living and bringing up children!) But in the end, we did not have either the time or the money to restore the house to being as beautiful as we would have wished, or it deserved.

However, the new owners have done a radical makeover of both house and garden so today it looks suitably smart and elegant to be a W11 show home – although I suspect we would find it quite soulless inside now. We have been told it has been gutted, rearranged and “upgraded” with such “facilities” as a lift, which seems a pointless intrusion that must detract from the elegant space and its original attractions as a family home. But at least we, our children and our ancestors were lucky enough to enjoy a combined total of almost 175 years of happy (if sometimes untidy) family life in that home.



Fireplace in living room at Hanover Lodge Christmas 2002



Hanover Lodge garden gone wild 2014.



My grandfather Martin Carus-Wilson 1894



Eleanora, Martin & Louis Carus-Wilson c.1902



Martin with his parents May & Ashley Carus-Wilson, 1920s – at Harrow Villa, Stanwell.



*My grandfather c.1921 –
Martin Macdowall Carus-Wilson*



*Great Uncle Louis 1915
Louis Charles Carus-Wilson*



*Great Aunt Nora c.1937
Eleanora Mary Carus-Wilson*

8. My Early Life

Reeling back to my childhood, I was born on 29 May 1955 in Glasgow at a Salvation Army Nursing Home called Homeland, on the Great Western Road, and christened Alison Noell Carus-Wilson (though we dropped the Wilson during my primary school days). It is an amusing coincidence that I was born on the Great Western Road since I now live close to the Great West Road in London, following our move from Notting Hill to Hammersmith. I'm not sure why my brothers and I were all born in Salvation Army homes, as I don't think my parents were particularly poor, although they certainly weren't rich. But I assume in those days they ran mother and baby homes for the general public - perhaps a Sally Army version of *Call the Midwife*. I suppose the nursing staff were pious Christians; my mother recounted that one of the nurses was shocked at her swearing "Oh God" when she was in labour, and unimpressed by Mother's rejoinder "Well it hurts!".



Me - Alison Noell (Ally) c.1956

I was christened at St Bride's Episcopal church just round the corner from where my son Gordon now lives with his family in Hyndland! My christening, or at any rate my designated name, may have been the subject of an early row between my parents. Nancy and Louis had agreed their daughter would be called Alison, and Nancy had said she would like my middle name to be Coulter, which was her mother's maiden name. But when Dad went to the registry office to register my name, he decided it would be better to call me Noell as my Grandmother was Mrs Noell, and my mother Nancy's maiden name was Noell, so that way I would be called after both! In fact, as was sometimes the case with Dad and his impetuous ideas, this volte face turned out well. Although my grandmother was divorced, she kept the name Noell all her life and was always known as either Mrs Noell or Margie Noell. My mother Nancy had been Nancy Noell all her life and she continued to use Noell for her painting signature. So to me Noell had far more significance than Coulter, and I also thought it was a prettier name. But I can imagine that if I had been Nancy, I would have been quite annoyed with Louis for unilaterally changing the name. But my family mostly called me Ally (or Dad occasionally addressed me as "Soonie").

In my youngest years I called my parents Mummy and Daddy, but at some time in my early teens my mother suggested it might be more appropriate to call her Mother, which I was happy to do. Perhaps surprisingly I went on calling my father "Daddy" for years even after I was grown up, and it was a long time before I made the transition to saying "Dad" (and then wondered why I had not done it sooner!). Colin as a boy perhaps felt more uncomfortable using childhood pet names, and for quite some time he adopted Mere and Pere and later on tended to call them Ma and

Pa - probably conventions picked up from boarding school – but when writing more serious letters to Dad (usually relating to pecuniary requests) he would address him as Father. Somehow the other nicknames never appealed to me – or perhaps I suspected that Mother at any rate was not so keen on the Ma name!

Oddly, though my husband Leslie's relationship with his father was more distant and Tony was quite an authoritarian figure, yet he was always known as Daddy (a class thing maybe?) Our boys have called me and Leslie Mum and Dad since they were teenagers, which is fine, but it is endearing that our daughter still mostly refers to us as Mummy and Daddy, though she has passed the milestone of 30. And it also seems sweet that her boyfriend still calls his parents Mummy and Daddy. But of course, it is not what you are called by your children or what you call your parents that matters; it is the quality of the relationship. I have had fortunate experiences both as a parent and as a child. I hope that our children feel that we their parents produced a reasonably positive family life for them; if so, I suspect some of that is due at least partly to the influence of our own parents from our early days.

When I was a baby and toddler, we lived in Hyndland, in the West End of Glasgow. My parents began their married life at 14 Hillhead Street, but by the time I arrived they had moved, to Novar Drive and then Kersland Street, where my parents had a flat in one of those rather elegant Victorian sandstone blocks, with a turret on the corner. A strange but happy coincidence is that our son Gordon and his family have now moved into a house in Hyndland near all these streets. This is an achievement in more than one way, because over the years I've had some narrow escapes (being a rather haphazard being like my father) and a few of these mishaps might have prevented me from ever growing up, let alone having children. I had various scrapes myself, but not all the mishaps in my life were of my making.

The first escapade was a fire in my parents' Hyndland flat. There was an open fire in the living room and although there was a fireguard, a hot coal must have tumbled out, as when Mother came into the room from the kitchen the sofa was on fire! Fortunately, she quickly called the fire brigade who dealt with the conflagration quite speedily. I also incurred the wrath of exasperated neighbours because of being a noise nuisance. Mother said I was a good-natured baby but active and wakeful. The neighbours in the flat below complained about the noise I made jumping around in my cot – Mother took them in to my room to show them she had the cot on a rug and tied to other furniture, but I still managed to move it around! Perhaps it was my early version of dancing – I've always loved bouncing around on the dance floor. Even when not jumping I would still be awake. She would pop her head into my bedroom and see my bright eyes looking at her from my cot, but at least I was not crying. Fortunately, the neighbours were charmed by my blue eyes, golden hair and smiling demeanour, and refrained from battering me or my parents. I don't know what they thought about Dad's violin playing...

For many years, it took me ages to go to sleep, and my head would be buzzing with thoughts or stories. Once asleep though, I would be in a deep torpor. My father-in-law used to describe me as a dead doughnut. When first visiting my future in-laws' home I initially slept on the living-room sofa but none of the morning noises in the small cottage woke me. In the past I have slept through small earthquakes, storms and hurricanes, and my parents shaking me.

In fact, I was a little concerned that when I had my own children I wouldn't wake up when they cried in the night – but I need not have worried... nor need husband Leslie, who is a much lighter sleeper than I am, but was in no rush to pick up the wailing infant. As I breast-fed all the children that gave him a good excuse not to get involved! Evidently there is a special maternal instinct that overrides other behaviour, so for about 7 years, while my children woke in the night (each taking nearly 2 years to sleep through), my sleep pattern changed completely, and I would wake up quickly – and frequently - which kept me in a state of exhaustion – but for the most part now I have returned to being a dead doughnut – until I need to wake up for a pee which unfortunately happens more often as the years go by... bit like being pregnant again...

A few other adventures in my early life might have prevented me reaching an age when I would wake up to go to the loo. When I was a toddler my father took me with him to a local shop in Hyndland. A little later Mother heard him practising his violin and went in to ask where was Alison? Panic ensued because in his absent-minded artiste fashion he had completely forgotten about me. Mother rushed back to the shop and luckily found me still there, being fed Smarties by the shopkeeper, announcing solemnly "*Daddy's gone*".

Dad was very forgetful, not just about his family. He was always leaving music, clothes or even his violin either behind at home, or on a train or elsewhere or forgetting other belongings, and my mother (and latterly my brother Colin and myself) would all have to chase around helping him retrieve things. I don't think he actually had a death-wish for his daughter, but he did also leave me sitting in the car when he went to another shop, this time in Bearsden, so I was probably about 4 or 5 - he neglected to secure the handbrake, and the car began rolling down the hill – fortunately a quick-thinking passer-by managed to open the driver's door and secure the brake. What with Dad's carelessness and my own accident-prone clumsiness it is somewhat amazing that I reached adulthood without any serious injury, especially as I even once fell off a cliff ... (of which more later).

I fear I have inherited some of my father's forgetful nature and tendency for being accident prone. Thinking back to the time when Dad left me in a shop reminds me I did something almost as bad with my daughter Catriona when she was a toddler and I put her in the crèche at primary school while speaking to the boys' teachers on a parents' evening and then walked all the way home before I remembered that I had left her at the school. Another time I lost control of the buggy when negotiating our flight of front steps with 3-year-old Gordon which sent him tumbling over and injuring his nose – one of several trips to A&E at the local hospital. I shudder to think about it now. Maybe I managed to be more careful with son James as it was just him for the first 3 years, so it was easier to focus on his needs!

We decided Gordon must have a rock head as there were a few occasions when he had falls and landed on his head, but he seemed to survive without serious damage. Looking back, it is perhaps surprising that we didn't get quizzed by Social Services about deficiencies in the care of our children. But Gordon went on to get a First-Class degree in Economics at Glasgow University along with a rowing blue and a beautiful wife, so any childhood head injuries cannot have been too severe. Like Dad I am also notorious for leaving things behind on trips. Leslie tries assiduously

to check and sweep up after me, but I often manage (inadvertently) to find a new hiding place for something that has to be retrieved later or remain lost.

Despite my Dad's absent-mindedness he was a devoted father and I loved him dearly. But he was frequently away from home and preoccupied with his music, and it was my mother Nancy who provided the constant, reliable presence in our childhood (despite being somewhat volatile in her temper!). I remember her as being a warm and affectionate mother, a traditional housewife – feminists today might scorn this description, but she genuinely enjoyed those roles, and was certainly no doormat in her personality! Mother did most of the domestic chores, cooking (mostly) delicious meals, shopping, washing, ironing, sewing, cleaning and making the house look pretty. But she also did creative things, using her artistic skills, drawing and painting her own pictures, and colouring in illustrations on some of our storybooks, and sewing. She made me a super large rag doll (from a kit – she was a great one for mail order shopping well before the days of internet shopping).

Mother was also happy to sit and watch old Hollywood movies with my brother Colin and me, like Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers musicals, or Marx Brothers screwball comedies; or she would read while we played – detective novels and science fiction. Although a hard worker when doing housework or freelance typing, she did have some couch potato tendencies, and in later life would be less keen to go on the expeditions that Dad would suggest and require a lot of persuasion to take part. She found it particularly excruciating if Dad wanted to detour up a private country track, ignoring any *No Trespassers* notice and blithely suggesting taking cuttings of plants for the garden. “*Oh Louis No!*” Mother would cry.

Despite his impetuous and slapdash nature, Dad also had many lucky escapes over the years, to some degree leading a charmed life. Having already avoided drowning as a toddler and ill-effects from contracting meningitis, he had another fortunate escape after his return to the UK. During the year that he was waiting for Nancy to join him in Scotland, and was working as first violinist in the SNO, he was involved in a bad car crash with 3 other orchestra members, in November 1950. This was not Dad's fault, as another violinist was driving. The car plunged over the parapet of a bridge, landing upside-down on the banks of the Forth, near to Aberfoyle. Only one of them ended up in hospital, but Louis was lucky to escape serious injury as he was trapped under the car. A newspaper cutting at the time reported that a railwayman Robert King joined other motorists to lift the car allowing Dad to crawl out, and Dad described this escapade in one of his letters to Mother, still in the US.

Over 50 years later Dad would have another lucky escape from a car crash when driving north, preparing to move back to Glasgow, writing off his car on the motorway. It was perhaps even more amazing that he escaped that crash unscathed, and although he had been a good driver for most of his life, he did not do much driving following that accident (to the relief of his family). In 1950 Dad had many years of driving ahead of him, and he also encouraged Mother to learn to drive when we children were still quite young. I have vague memories of acrimonious “driving lessons”, and Mother progressed better when she had an outside instructor, and she also became a good driver – and slightly less hair-raising than Dad, who was often too impatient to overtake – his approach to many of his activities.

Another accident of Dad's that I recall from my childhood is when he fell through the garage roof (recounted below), but again he miraculously escaped without serious injury. The amount of electrical wiring and other hasty DIY he would undertake, also in a somewhat slapdash manner, made it somewhat amazing that he did not injure or kill himself. Accidents and mishaps would occur to him and other members of the family through the years, and some would have more serious ramifications, but back in the 1950s the outlook seemed mainly bright.

In the same year that I was born (1955) Dad took the post of Head of Strings at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama [*now the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland*], combining teaching with solo recitals and developing chamber music, which became his real passion. He performed all over Scotland in venues large and small, including some of the remote Hebridean Islands, stately homes like Haddo, and cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh. The original Glasgow Trio was formed of himself as violinist, Joan Dickson as cellist and Wight ("Jackie") Henderson, pianist. As their reputation grew, they changed their name to the Scottish Piano Trio and with the addition of viola player Jimmy Durrant became the Scottish Piano Quartet. Joan Dickson and Jack Henderson were older than Dad, so he was nicknamed "*the boy*". They all taught at the Academy in Glasgow, and Dad proved to be a brilliant teacher.

The Scottish Trio/Quartet partnership lasted for many years despite their different personalities. Joan was quite serious and very well-respected. I now realise she was probably lesbian – she certainly had a special female friend for many years. Jack was a good pianist, and a great personality, but with lax morals in his personal life. I fear his predilection for having affairs had a bad influence on Dad and probably encouraged him on the road to adultery himself. Being unfaithful seems to be a hazard for both actors and musicians, partly because of the nature of their work, and the fact that they are so often travelling and spending time away from their families; perhaps also the bohemian aspects of the creative and artistic lifestyle and working so intimately with other individuals. I suspect there were other factors that played their part in my father's case, but in the end these paths taken in life come down to personal choices as much as to circumstances. But it would be many years before I discovered my father's feet of clay and while growing up, I felt myself most fortunate in my family, and adored both my parents.

The tragedy that probably had the most profound effect on my parents was their son Kenneth being severely autistic (possibly due to the anaesthetic Mother was given for an operation in early pregnancy, though this was not proven). Kenny was born in 1953, my parents' first child. As a baby, Kenny looked and acted quite normal, and it was only when he was approaching his second birthday that my parents began to have concerns about his development. Following delays in learning to speak and other signs of disengagement from people, along with obsessive behaviour, he was eventually diagnosed as autistic (a condition which was only beginning to be recognized or understood). Meanwhile I had arrived. Having discovered Kenny's disability Mother and Dad did not plan to have another child, or at least not right away (although at that time there were not thought to be any genetic links related to autism, unlike current thinking), but rather unexpectedly my younger brother Colin was born only 15 months after me.

My mother was always fairly open with me when discussing things like sex education and I remember her saying to me “*well I figured something had gone wrong when the cap dropped right out*”. But although his birth was not planned, during the years when we were growing up, both my parents and I were delighted that Colin had arrived. He and I were close playmates and friends throughout our childhood and teenage years, and as our parents were soon advised to place Kenny in an institution, that meant thereafter he was only at home for short visits, and most of the time it was just myself and Colin at home with our parents. Colin gave my parents and me some heartache after growing up, and he was prone to having tantrums as a small child, but, in our early years I feel we were a happy family, despite the tragedy of Kenny’s disability, and my parents were glad to have two relatively “normal” children to focus on.

It transpired that Kenny was severely autistic, but we were fortunate that the Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries provided care for both adults and children with learning disabilities, also that this was funded by the National Health Service. Kenny had moved to the children’s wing of the Crichton, Ladyfield West, by the time he was 5 and, although he came home for visits, he never lived permanently with us again. This is not how his condition would be handled nowadays, but in the late 50s and early 60s my parents were firmly advised that this was the best way to provide treatment for Kenny.

I suspect that had Kenny not moved to the Crichton, my parents’ marriage might well not have survived, and our family life would have been even more disrupted, but it was a tragic situation for my parents, whatever course of action was followed. Kenny was unable to appreciate stories, films or toys, or indeed most of the activities that my younger brother Colin and I enjoyed, although he did enjoy walks as a child, and playing with water, and he liked listening to music - but only pop music, not classical, which my father found frustrating and puzzling. It was probably the beat of the rock style music that he enjoyed as he would sit listening while rocking obsessively. Still today he wants to listen to similar music, now played on Radio 2 or the local Galloway radio West Sound.

Mother was devoted to Kenny, visiting him weekly during his childhood and arranging holidays at home. Dad tried to be supportive, but he found it harder to come to terms with Kenny’s mental handicap. I think he coped by blocking the situation out most of the time, and keeping his life in compartments, whereas Mother kept on grieving with her whole heart. I believe Dad took the view that there was no point in letting the tragedy of Kenny’s condition ruin their lives; whereas Mother felt her primary concern was to provide maternal care for all her children, and her life was deeply and permanently affected by Kenny’s situation. In retrospect I can sympathise with both points of view, but their differences over this may have been at the root of much of the friction that developed between them.

Kenny’s condition had an intense effect on them both, but it is to their credit that they did not let it cast a shadow on me and Colin, nor make us feel neglected because of the demands made by Kenny. As the youngest, Colin maybe sometimes felt a little more resentful or even frightened when Kenny made visits home, whereas I as a rather maternal sister perhaps found it easier to understand that Kenny was ill and needed special attention from Mother. Kenny had (and has) only

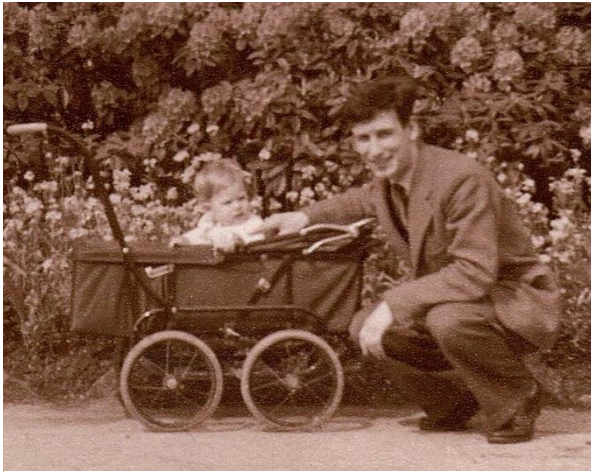
limited social interaction, communicating at a basic and repetitive level with one person, normally one of my parents. Kenny usually ignored us on his visits home, and Colin & I carried on playing together as usual, but Kenny's visits became more upsetting in his adolescence, when his behaviour and mood swings became more extreme and aggressive. But in general, I had a happy childhood and youth and felt cherished by both my parents, and Kenny's predicament did not impinge hugely on me in most of my childhood years.



Louis outside 14 Hillhead Drive, Glasgow c.1951 61 Kersland Street, Glasgow c.1954-55, my first home



Kenny, Colin & Ally with Mother (Nancy) 1956



Louis with Kenny, Glasgow Botanic Gardens, c.1953



Colin 1957



Me with the fond but forgetful father 1956



Ally with smarties c.1956-57



Me aged 4 1959- I loved my pram and dolls.



Ally (me) 1959 with doll Elizabeth

9. Bearsden Days

When I was about 4 years old, we moved west outside Glasgow to the sought-after suburban town of Bearsden, into a newly built house at 13 Sinclair Avenue. With 3 children Louis and Nancy thought it was high time they moved from a flat to a house, and they were keen to have a garden. Bearsden was considered a desirable area, though I did not appreciate that when I was little. I



13 Sinclair Ave, Bearsden, our new house being built, 1957

just regarded it as home and thought it was a nice place to live, with pleasant outdoor space. We lived there for the next 10 or 11 years. I can still picture every room in that house, and I recall our phone number – Bearsden 4126. Very occasionally I dream I am back there, or else in our next house in Bridge of Weir; sometimes experiencing that phenomena where I am in houses which are partly familiar, but where I will discover extra rooms and be thinking “*Oh isn’t this great! I wish I’d known before that we had this extra space!*”

I am not a huge fan of modern houses, but our Bearsden house was a charmingly designed villa, with 3 bedrooms and bathroom upstairs, living room, dining room, study, kitchen and cloakroom downstairs, and a pleasing exterior reminiscent of the Arts & Crafts style. In our first years at Sinclair Avenue my parents combined the use of one room beside the living room as a dining room and study cum music room for Dad so that the third downstairs reception room could be our playroom. The lower half of one wall in the playroom was painted with blackboard paint where we had great fun drawing chalk pictures. There was a garage where Dad kept his Morris Traveller car (later upgraded to a Rover 100)– but also a handy layby between us and the school, Bearsden Academy, right beside our house.

In our early primary school years Mother visited Kenny in Dumfries once a week on a Thursday (by train). When we were little, Colin and I were looked after on these Thursdays first by a lady called Miss Keene, later by a Mrs McCulloch. Mother would usually make a shepherd’s pie to be heated up for our lunch. Mrs McCulloch had one blue eye and one brown eye. Not being satisfied with the blackboard wall in the playroom, I once told Mrs McCulloch that we were allowed to draw on the wall in the living room and she let me do this; much to Mother’s irritation - Mother thought she was rather gullible to believe that! She said that Miss Keene would never have been taken in, but I think she got too old to work.

Mrs McCulloch lived in a basement flat below the shoe shop in Bearsden. The shoe shop had a full-size rocking horse which we played on when being fitted for our Clarks or Start-rite shoes. It was near Station Road where Dad caught the blue train into town to his work at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama, where he had become Head of Strings, having moved from the SNO to focus on teaching the violin as well as freelance playing, both chamber and soloist work. I too took the

blue train from Bearsden into town when I started my secondary education at Jordanhill College School.

Those were the days when there were more individual independent shops, and supermarket chains like Safeway or Sainsburys were quite a rarity. At Bearsden Cross we had the British Linen bank, Templetons (a grocery store that was a small supermarket), a tobacconist and confectionery shop where Colin and I used to spend our weekly pocket-money on delightful penny sweets such as lollipops and sherbet dip; an independent chemist with its delightful scent, and a McColls where we bought comics; a butcher, baker and a fish shop.

When we first lived in Bearsden the living room had an open fire and a coal lorry came with coalmen delivering bags of coal – subconsciously I may have found them rather sinister as I once had a nightmare involving the coalmen. Initially we had no central heating and I remember the pretty Jack Frost ice patterns which formed on our bedroom windowpanes in winter. But my parents were both quite keen on creature comforts and after a few years they had central heating installed plus a gas fire in the living room which provided instant heat at any time of the day, particularly appreciated by my American mother, if less aesthetically pleasing than an open fire. However, we did eventually recover the joys of an open fire when my parents acquired a cottage down in the Galloway countryside.

I remember the thrill of looking at the different comics at McColls like Judy, Bunty, Diana and later Jackie. Colin got the Beano and Dandy and particularly loved the evil Beryl the Peril – he used to spend hours looking at a Beryl the Peril annual and Mother said it was the book that made him learn to read! I loved books from an early age, but I also enjoyed magazines. Mother agreed I could get Diana delivered – followed by Jackie once I was heading into my teens. I still recollect some of the free gifts that came with the magazines, especially the glass ring (that looked like a diamond ring) from Diana. By chance my copy had two rings in the cellophane packet and Mother thought they were so pretty that she adopted one and probably wore it more often than I did! We both loved clothes and jewellery.

Mother encouraged me to draw, paint and write stories and taught me how to cook. She did not always bake completely from scratch but made tasty cakes from “Betty Crocker” packs. She also made chocolate fudge and tablet (though we reckoned our neighbour Barbara made the best tablet). I remember learning how to make boiled icing – quite a palaver as it involved beating egg-whites and icing sugar in a pan over hot water for about 6 or 7 minutes to create the snowy peaked frosting.

For a while I was probably the one who did more home baking of cakes and buns, and I also learnt how to make simple dishes like spaghetti bolognese and boiled eggs. Mother usually made delicious meals. However, she did sometimes tease us - if food had been a little overdone, or indeed burnt, she would claim it was Southern style cooking, how they might have served it in North Carolina – and Colin and I were not quite sure whether to believe her. Although we enjoyed some of her American dishes such as home-made hamburgers, and pumpkin pie, we were rather less keen on hominy grits or the rather unusual salad combination of lettuce with cottage cheese, lime jelly and mayonnaise!

As well as teaching me cooking, Mother also let me indulge my taste for make-believe and drama, especially in my primary years. Sometimes I pretended I was a friend of hers called Mary Worker and came on “visits” talking about my husband Ed, and child Karen, and another child who had tragically drowned! I am not sure why I invented such a sad scenario as I preferred stories to have happy endings; however, I revelled in a bit of trial and tribulation in the interim, as long as the misery would be resolved happily in the end. At night I would lie awake imagining stories about a poor orphan boy or girl who was beaten and badly treated, but always knowing things would turn out all right in the end.

However, the stories I read were usually happier epistles, often about family life, or boarding school adventures ranging from the rather “penny dreadful” Enid Blyton to a variety of classic series. I liked family sagas such as Louisa Alcott’s *Little Women*; Susan Coolidge’s *What Katy Did*; L M Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*; Noel Streatfield’s books like *Ballet Shoes* and *White Boots*; Laura Ingalls Wilder *Little House in the Big Woods*; Elizabeth Enright. Many were set in America - I don’t know if that is because my mother was American or whether there just happened to be a lot of enjoyable family tales written by Americans.

But I also enjoyed stories such as *The Secret Garden* and *The Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett or Noel Streatfield stories like *Ballet Shoes*, which were quintessentially English. Although knowing little about sailing, I also loved the Arthur Ransome *Swallows and Amazons* series featuring the adventures of some down-to-earth children camping in the Lake District. I devoured them all, and many others. As I liked stories about real situations rather than fantasies, I was less keen on books like the Narnia chronicles or science fiction. Although I read voraciously from an early age, I also enjoyed hearing stories read aloud by Mother; while she was not interested in acting, she was good at reading stories aloud - my brother Colin and I both have fond memories of her reading the enchanting AA Milne stories about Winnie-the-Pooh and Christopher Robin and how we relished Eeyore’s world-weary wit, and the charming E.H. Shepard illustrations.

Mother was also creative at handicrafts, though knitting was not really her forte. In theory, she knew how to knit, but she remained stuck in the middle of knitting a pale aquamarine cardigan throughout my childhood, partly because it was on very narrow needles with fine wool, so progress was slow. Granmargie had a more cunning approach, using big chunky needles and thick wool so her outfits grew quickly. Mother was more skilled at sewing however, both for herself and me, and she helped me to sew quite a few outfits. In later years she went on to do needlework, including an exquisite Christmas stocking for my daughter Catriona. I presume she had learnt from her mother Granmargie, who also made some pretty outfits for me when I was little, including several smocked dresses. I recall two seersucker dresses, one bright blue, the other red and a lovely black and white lacy frock trimmed in red velvet.

My love of fashion was instilled early on, and although I sometimes liked being a tomboy, dressing in jeans and occasionally sporting a short haircut, on the whole I was a very “girly” girl, with my hair arranged in braids, bunches, ponytail or with a big bow. On one of our rare family visits to a hotel (Heaves Hotel in the Lake District), when I was about 12, I remember wearing 2 silky shift dresses (rather

Mary Quant-like) one in a turquoise and white print, and the other plain mid-blue and brother Colin saying with a note of surprise that I looked quite pretty – probably the first time my looks had been complimented on by anyone other than a fond parent or grandparent!

Although Mother did most of the catering for us, Dad would occasionally rustle up a Waldorf salad for a dinner party – and when we were away on holiday I can recollect him making one or two dishes like cherry pies (albeit using ready-made pastry and canned cherry mixture!). Dad also loved picnics and eating “*en plein air*”. He introduced me to the joys of custard tarts – but I was less enamoured with the pork pies that he sometimes bought. Colin was less keen on the picnic experience, finding it infuriating when we were visited by flies and wasps. It also took him a while to appreciate the pleasures of the seaside – to begin with he refused to take off his sweater or to go paddling, whereas there are pictures of me from a young age cavorting in the sea with no clothes on (early signs of an exhibitionist nature appearing under my shy exterior – or maybe I was just always a bit of a hippy. Mother said I was a free spirit which is a more attractive epithet!)

If the sun was shining at home Dad would call out “*Breakfast in the garden Nancy!*” or “*Al fresco lunch!*” and Mother would have to trot outside with the dishes and food – or Dad might bring the food out, but then Mother would be left to clear up. Dad did wash up occasionally, but he was so slapdash that there were quite a few rejects that Mother felt obliged to redo. However, when I was a child most meals at home were eaten in the kitchen, although we ate Sunday lunch in the dining room, often delicious roast lamb or chicken with mashed potatoes and greens or hot slaw, and adult dinners would be held in there, with candles and Mother’s fancy American silver cutlery. Sometimes we had tapioca cream for dessert, which was perhaps surprisingly delectable, not at all like school frogspawn!

My parents occasionally had dinner parties – serving dishes like tuna tetrazzini, or avocados with tuna mayonnaise; pavlova cake with canned guavas and fresh fruit salad with grapes that had been laboriously halved and de-seeded – no seedless grapes in those days, and oranges peeled and sliced – I remember sucking off the juicy bits left on the orange peel. I even recall Mother peeling mushrooms; an activity I would regard as superfluous now, yet there was a strangely satisfying sensation about peeling the brown skin off the inner white flesh. But although Mother was a good hostess, she found hosting parties quite stressful and preferred entertaining just family or close friends.

Mother had a strong personality and could never have been described as a doormat, but I believe she truly enjoyed keeping house and being a homemaker, and she certainly created a very comfortable and well-kept home, being more punctilious at cleaning and tidying than I am, as well as producing regular meals. I have always had a keen interest in eating, which may be why many of my memories relate to food. Since Mother was American, she introduced us to various American traditions and food. We usually had turkey for Christmas (or occasionally goose), but I don’t think we often had turkey for thanksgiving (I suspect Mother couldn’t face doing it twice in the space of a few weeks as like me she found turkey roasting quite stressful!) But she did occasionally make pumpkin pie, and we had cranberry sauce with our Christmas turkey. She made other American dishes such as home-

made meatloaf and hamburgers [with fried onions – as her Chinese American friend Mary would say “*It’s not a hamburger without onions!*”].

Other dishes which might have disconcerted her British friends included kedgeree made with tuna, hard-boiled eggs, rice and raisins; devilled eggs; hot canned tomatoes; corn on the cob; ice cream sodas (Coca Cola with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and a straw). When Kenny visited us, we always had spaghetti bolognese & ice cream – and for supper we would have tomato sandwiches and cocoa with marshmallows on top – and an even more sugary fizzy drink that Kenny liked called Creamola Foam. Not an entirely healthy diet but we seem to have survived, though Kenny’s teeth now display some of the consequences of excess sugar. But Mother did also make lots of salads. I think I was less keen on some of our “nursery suppers” such as scrambled eggs with baked beans – especially if I would wake up and go down to my parents and observe they were having lamb chops which looked more appetising than what we had had. But overall, we were very well-fed.

When not in use as the dining room, the room doubled up as music-room and study, where Dad practised his violin and wrote letters at his desk. One of my earliest memories is hearing Dad play his fiddle, and me going in to kiss him goodnight. He would take me on his lap and rock me back and forward singing “*Row, row, row the boat, gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily life is but a dream*”. Years later I would appreciate there was a bit more truth in that song than I knew, as I discovered Dad was quite a dreamer, in both good and bad ways.

As we grew old enough not to need a separate playroom downstairs, this gave Dad the opportunity for more radical home modifications at Sinclair Avenue. He knocked down a couple of walls to make an open plan dining room and living room which made an airy reception space – though the rooms could still be divided in two by means of a folding white partition - this was rather hideous in a plastic/vinyl material, but no doubt the latest fashion in the mid-1960s, and Dad also rearranged the entrance to the cloakroom and kitchen.

The former dining room now became exclusively Dad’s domain for music, letter-writing and other business – even early on Dad was busy on committees and accumulating paperwork. I think they also put a single divan couch in there which could double up as a spare bed. I’m not sure whether the open plan living area was a total improvement, but no doubt Kirsty Allsop would have approved! Dad could never bear to leave a house or garden untouched – he made alterations to all 4 of the houses he and my mother lived in, as well as the holiday cottage they owned in Dumfriesshire (extra windows were knocked in the walls there which I suppose brought in more light, but probably also made the house colder!)

At Christmas time it was Dad who bought most of the presents and filled our stockings with intriguing little gifts – I can remember Parma violet sweets, miniature toiletries, and small books. When I became a mum, I was the one who prepared the stockings for our kids, and I foolishly took on one of Leslie’s family traditions, wrapping the gifts that went in each stocking (amazingly time-consuming – I soon realised why my Dad left our Santa offerings unwrapped!) When I was a child, stockings were always left at the end of our beds (oh that exciting weight on your feet when waking up!). We had beautiful felt stockings, decorated with

appliqué embroidery and sequins, that I believe had come from the U.S.A., presumably from Granmargie. Mine was green with white trim, Colin's red with white trim and Kenny's white with red trim. I don't know what happened to them, and I had to acquire new stockings for our children.

Part of Christmas was attending a church service, and we went to church quite often at other times, though my parents appeared to be onlookers rather than active participants in church life. Perhaps for Mother this was because the tragedy of Kenny's autism took up so much of her time and energy and may have made her faith less strong. But she took us to Sunday School, although Colin was not keen – I recall him having such a tantrum about going once that she shut him in the cloakroom and left him while she and I went to church (not home alone as Dad was there practising his fiddle). But due to my shyness I declared early on that I would rather stay in for the service than go to Sunday School, so I often sat with Mother.

In early years we attended the sweet little episcopal church in Bearsden, but later my parents switched to going to St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in town – no doubt because the music was better, and the services were more to their taste. I am glad that years later when Dad moved back to Glasgow from England, he attended St Mary's Cathedral again, and his funeral was held there, with beautiful music.

At St Mary's I continued to eschew Sunday School, but I did agree reluctantly to go to confirmation class. However, I was not the most pliable of candidates, despite my shyness. The churchmanship was high, and the priest taking the class told us about confession and asked us to make a confession to the priest as part of our preparation. I refused, saying I preferred to confess directly to God. Despite my intransigence, my confirmation went ahead, and I remember Mother making me a pretty white cotton sleeveless dress – which I must have thought was quite stylish as I subsequently wore it with a red belt to a teenage party!

There was an upright piano at Sinclair Avenue, which I learnt to play rather badly, and Mother was also a player of moderate ability. I have happy memories of hearing her play from Bach's *Notebook for Anna Magdalena* and Beethoven's *Für Elise* or *Moonlight Sonata* when I was in bed. This was perhaps when Dad was out or away on one of his chamber music tours, as if he was at home, he would probably have been practising his violin or might not have wanted to hear the piano even in the distance.

Mother had a bit of an inferiority complex about her musical talent, as she felt Dad and his professional musician friends looked down on her amateur abilities. She was a bit more confident about her art, as she had been sketching and painting since she was a small child, and she was more skilled than Dad at this. I recollect him doing a bit of landscape watercolours on our early holidays, but this hobby did not persist past my childhood. Later I think he channelled his artistic abilities into photography, taking lots of landscape and architectural photos on holidays, some of which he had framed and enlarged. And he always enjoyed buying paintings and going to art exhibitions in studios, galleries and museums.

Mother practised art all her life. She travelled with a sketchbook to make pen or pencil sketches and this is where she often displayed the best of her talent. When we were children, she went to some evening art classes at Bearsden Academy, the

school next to our house, mainly portrait painting, in oils and pastel, though later she ventured into landscapes. I remember her producing some good portraits, usually of models in the classes, but she also did one of David Macallum, an actor she liked in *The Man from Uncle*, who played Ilya Kuryakin! However, she may have felt a trifle inferior even in this discipline as she had no formal training, and Dad collected pictures by “real” artists. The walls were covered with his purchases, but very few of her works were displayed, until the last years of her life, when I think both Dad and other friends became more encouraging about her talent.

Like my mother I was keen on art, drawing and painting from my early years. Mother and Dad both encouraged me in artistic endeavours, which I enjoyed, although I don’t think I was as dedicated to art as Mother. I went to an art class after school in my last year at primary school, and I found an outlet for my artistic leanings in activities like designing paper doll outfits, doing illustrations for the occasional magazine that Colin and I compiled, and creating Christmas cards. In my last year at school, I took an Art O level along with English and History A levels (squeezed into one year spent at an English boarding school) but - perhaps like Mother - did not feel confident enough to pursue art seriously at a practical level, expressing my love of art in studying History of Art at university, rather than attempting to do Fine Art.

Dad fostered this with a couple of trips to Europe visiting various galleries and museums before I started my degree course. However, again rather like Mother, I have enjoyed pursuing art as a hobby, doing various amateur artwork over the years, but in my case mainly with our drama group, helping create some of our theatre sets and costumes for our amateur dramatic group, as well as designing posters and programmes for many productions. As drama has been my principal hobby for most of my adult life, it is probably not surprising that I have channelled most of my artistic impulses into our drama productions.

Perhaps Mother gained more confidence about her art after retirement through belonging to an art club (in Malvern) that had exhibitions, where she managed to sell a few of her paintings. She was a strange mixture of being a very forceful person who could get into quite alarming rages, but who had also suffered some severe knocks to her self-esteem which left her rather defeatist and insecure. Yet she could also be delightful company, full of fun, and a warm and friendly hostess. My father was always inviting friends to visit or wanting to have parties, and though Mother was less keen on entertaining large groups she usually managed to appear very welcoming to guests, and if it was someone she liked she would take a genuine interest in them and be sympathetic if they had a tale of woe to tell her.

Mother could be very hot-tempered (mainly with my Dad or my brother Colin, as I was rather boringly well-behaved, minus the odd aberration). Once she found Colin had drawn a small picture on the wall which said: “*Mummy is a mean old witch*”. She was probably extra cross because he had done a drawing on the wall of one of what he called “Ching Chong” characters (a cartoon style a bit like the Moomins in Tove Jansson books, but with slit eyes) doing a poo! Like many boys Colin enjoyed lavatorial humour. She sent him to his room. When Dad came home, he went up to persuade Colin to apologise (Dad was usually the soft-hearted peacemaker who rarely got angry with us). When Colin came down and stammered

“*sorry Mummy*” Mother still looked stony-faced, so he burst out “*But you are a mean old witch!*” Luckily Mother saw the funny side and they made up.

Despite such clashes Colin was just as devoted to Mother as I was, and if anything found her death more traumatic than I did. When I think about my parents now, I can still feel a tearful pang and a hollow longing for their presence; yet I also believe that they led long and full lives, and their time to depart had come. There is a pragmatic side to my nature which means I accept death in old age as part of the natural cycle of life, however fond I might be of an individual person. It is when someone dies at an unnaturally young age that I find it more heart-breaking, particularly if due to an accident or some violent event rather than illness. However, I am now at an age where friends in my peer group have passed away of illness and that can be painful when it seems like they could have lived another 20 years – and unnerving to realise the grim reaper is that close to home!

But to turn hastily back to my childhood days, more peaceful times were spent rambling in the nearby woods and hillsides and walking around Kilmardinny Loch in Bearsden – it was a charming place to live. It is probably still desirable, but it has become far more intensively populated, and I am not sure if there is much countryside left in the immediate vicinity. I recollect my mother taking us for walks round the Loch and feeding the ducks and swans. When wandering in the fields that still surrounded Bearsden then, we sometimes picked rosehips to take to school (supposedly to send off to make Delrosa syrup and boost the nation’s supply of Vitamin C), or blackberries from the bramble bushes, to make jam and pies.

There were big fallen tree trunks we could sit on, or we would play make-believe among the trees, sometimes imagining the roots were houses for dolls-house size people. We also went on Nature Walks from school. I remember rustling piles of autumn leaves as we walked through them in the fall. I can also recall thick snow in the occasional years when we had a snowy winter (especially the big freeze of 1962/63) and we made snowmen and a few times we were able to go sledging which was great fun. One of our snowmen was a snow Dalek in honour of *Doctor Who*, a television programme we watched regularly.

We spent many happy hours playing in our garden as well as in the surrounding streets. Sinclair Avenue was a quiet cul-de-sac so we could play on the road – games like French cricket. We could also play in the playground of Bearsden Academy which was next door to our house, and we used to go roller skating and cycling there when school was out; it had a large, tarmacked space with useful slopes (surprisingly I don’t think they locked the gates – maybe because it was technically a right of way?). In our back garden Dad had installed a sandpit, swing, rockery and a pond with goldfish. Dad was always keen on water features (he ended up living in a house with a lake in the garden – and still created an additional waterfall feature). Our front garden in Bearsden looked a classic “cottage garden”, full of pretty flowers, bushes, shrubs, trees, a winding path and a wooden picket fence – rather brutally manicured by the next occupants.

As we grew older Colin and I ventured further afield from Sinclair Avenue, bicycling in the neighbouring streets and roads. My first bike was second hand and Dad painted it blue and white. Colin had a red one, but it took him a long time to

learn to ride without stabilisers. But eventually we both became proficient cyclists. However, there was one terrible day when we went further afield than usual; Colin was cycling fast down a hill and I tried to catch him up and tumbled off my bike (probably straight over the handlebars) and mashed up my face. A fireman driving by in a car (presumably off-duty as I don't remember a uniform) stopped and brought me home – a horrible shock for Mother to see me with blood pouring down my face and a wobbly tooth. I kept saying “*I'm sorry Mummy*” because I knew she would be upset, and that was the thing that concerned me most (along with my wobbly tooth – later the nerve died and had to be removed and the tooth went dark, which was a blow to my vanity – happily it was eventually replaced by a nice white crown, along with another tooth which I managed to smash on a different bicycle!).

I was an accident-prone child – one time I fell on my face shortly before I was due to play the Virgin Mary in the school Nativity. The teacher decided I didn't look sufficiently appealing to play the part. A great blow as I wanted to wear the pretty blue dress. But at least on another occasion, I was allotted the role of an angel in a long white gown and a sparkly silver tinsel halo, which also appealed. But I was often the child who would scrape my knees or knock something over. Colin was always the tidy looking boy with his socks neatly pulled up, while I would have socks draped round my ankles and grazes on my legs and hands.

When I was about 5 and we were visiting my Great Aunt Nora's elegant house (Hanover Lodge) I managed to bang into a side table and break it – luckily, I think it was possible to mend it. My mother and brother described me as “*an accident waiting to happen*”, but both my parents were quite tolerant of my clumsiness and surprisingly I never broke any bones, even though I gradually acquired a variety of small scars. Just stumbled about like Mr Magoo, mostly narrowly avoiding disaster! Colin was generally more careful, though he did have one quite dramatic accident as a small boy, when we were visiting friends with children the same age. Colin was clambering on an armchair and managed to tumble off, hitting his head on a metal toy car – lots of blood ensued. This required a visit to hospital with stitches and I suspect Colin rather enjoyed the attention. I don't think I ended up in hospital until I was 10, but then in quite a dramatic fashion, when I fell off a cliff in Wales (see Ch. 12 “Holidays”).



Nancy with Colin 1958 at 13 Sinclair Ave



Colin, Kenny, Ally & Nancy with our Morris Traveller Sinclair Avenue (beside Bearsden Academy, 1962)



*Colin at 13 Sinclair Ave, Bearsden Academy
behind fence c.1960*



My mother Nancy with me, Ally 1962



Ally, Colin & Kenny, Christmas at Sinclair Avenue, 1962



*Dad in kitchen by back door 13 Sinclair Ave
beside washing machine with mangle, 1962.*



My first class at school, P.1, Bearsden Primary 1961. I am in second row, 2nd from left, near teacher Mrs Hay, with ridiculously large white bow!



Me, Ally, in Primary 6, Mr Malcolm's class 1966. I am near middle of second row, between 2 blonde friends Margaret and Billie. My first crush Gordon is in back row 2nd right boy from the teacher.

10. Primary Schooldays

To begin with my brother Colin and I went to Bearsden Primary School, which was a short walk from our home. I don't think there was a nursery, and Mother was at home full-time with us, so I was 5 when I started school, but I progressed quite quickly. I enjoyed the academic work, and the art, and I liked most of the teachers, but because I was very shy, I found some of the social interaction agonising, and there were also various embarrassing moments to endure, such as occasionally wetting my pants. This was possibly exacerbated by the school toilets being a bit primitive, situated outdoors; and my memory is there was only a partial roof, which meant they were cold as well as quite smelly, and I dare say I was not the only child who was reluctant to use them.

However wet pants were probably less of an embarrassment than no pants. One day early in my school career I realized with horror, I had forgotten to wear any knickers (or panties as my American mother called them), but I think I managed to keep this mortifying secret to myself. Even aged 5 I had learnt that it was often a wise idea to keep quiet, and not announce mishaps to the world – plus my thick serge school tunic would have covered a multitude of sins – not being as short as the uniform I adopted at secondary school in the mini-skirt era. I was quite forgetful as a child (and have not improved much – even though I was an efficient administrator in my employment). I imagine I inherited this trait from my father who was very absent-minded. Dad would leave coats, hats, music, even his violin in concert venues, restaurants or on trains, often embroiling others in retrieving his belongings, down to small children (as above).

Teachers would describe me as “dreamy”. I would forget to hand over notes addressed to my parents which annoyed my mother – not because she was cross with me but because she thought teachers were silly to give me a note if they knew I was “dreamy”! Luckily, I was a well-behaved child who generally performed well at school, so there was not a great need for notes going home. Indeed, I would often get ahead of the reading programme, devouring the whole book I'd been sent home with instead of just reading the prescribed chapter. I also showed a facility for maths and mental arithmetic (skills that helped with my future career in administration, secretarial and book-keeping work, not to mention shopping!).

I wrote quickly which meant that when we were set compositions, I would churn out stories covering 6 or 7 pages when most of the class were doing about 2. My fast writing was also useful in tests and exams. However, my handwriting was very messy, which meant that I did not always score top marks. Fortunately for me my academic rival at primary, a girl called Theresa (who had neat handwriting) moved away just before our final year, so I won the Dux medal for being top of the school. This meant my name was inscribed on a board in the school hall and some nice photos were taken of me wearing the medal. This is the only award I can recall until middle age when I gained a medal for swimming a mile breaststroke on the River Nene; but as there were only 2 contestants in that category, me and one more ancient female, this cannot be termed a spectacular achievement! Subsequently I secured a few medals for swimming the Henley mile, and other Thames swims, but these swims have been completed at lamentably slow speed (ie everyone who

completes the course gets a medal). Leslie's open water swims are far more impressive than mine and even he is not that speedy – but he has great endurance!

Back in my primary school, presumably my shyness must have been an issue in the playground sometimes, but I applied the chameleon principle of blending into the background, and perhaps I seemed too boring to be worth teasing. I often just stood against the wall reading a book or a comic magazine such as Judy, Bunty or Diana, hoping no one would notice me. Although I think I suffered a bit of casual bullying, it was not as bad as it could have been, even though I could have been a classic target, academically bright but no good at sport and no witty repartée. But maybe my tactic of keeping quiet and shrinking into the surroundings worked, and perhaps my dreaminess meant I either shut out or didn't notice all of the teasing (or maybe they were just nice children – this was Bearsden after all!).

Because I was so shy, I did not have many real friends at primary school. Early on I had one playmate who was a boy in my class when I was about 6, called Malcolm (I think his last name was Duell or Jewell?). I assume our mothers were friends, as I would have been too shy to make friends with him on my own – and strangely I don't remember him playing with Colin. We sometimes had tea at each other's house. But I don't know what happened to him – I presume his family moved away, as I don't recollect anything about him later on.

I had a better time when Margaret arrived in Primary 4 and we became friends. A lot of skipping went on in the girls' playground, both with ropes and "Chinese skipping" using loops of coloured elastic bands strung together. I sometimes took part, once I'd made friends with Margaret. She and I also played jacks using a bag of 10 metal pointy stars and a small ball. We played "Chinese skipping" at her house, when we used chair legs to hold the elastic bands while one of us stood at the other end, and we took it in turns to do elaborate skipping manoeuvres; or if the weather was less good we would play card games like Snap or Rummy (good practice for playing card games with Kenny many years later).

Margaret lived two streets away from me in Bearsden on North Grange Road, and for a few years we spent a lot of time visiting each other. The very first time she asked me to go home with her for tea, I went there without telling my mother, which gave Mother a very anxious time as I had never done something like that before. I understood a bit how she felt soon after, when Colin pulled a similar stunt, and we were getting concerned about where he was. I remember hiding in the walk-in cupboard in our bedroom crying, because I was worried something bad had happened to him (not much help, but I suppose I was trying to keep out of Mother's way!). Luckily, he too returned safely from a friend's house.

Margaret came and stayed at my parents' cottage in Dumfriesshire on a few occasions. But we rather lost touch when we went to different secondary schools. There was one rather awkward incident when she asked me round to her house, and I thought the two of us would just be hanging out, but it turned out Margaret was there with a boyfriend plus another boy waiting to meet me. Unfortunately, I did not fancy him so while Margaret and her paramour were canoodling, I found myself fighting off his attentions, feeling too embarrassed to leave right away. I suspect that marked the end of our friendship.

At Bearsden Primary the girls' and boys' playgrounds were separate, so I did not usually see my brother Colin at school, and we didn't interact much, apart from walking to and from school. When Colin was with one of his friends, he either ignored me or they sometimes teased me a bit, even though at home Colin and I played together so much. But I think Colin got bullied more than I did either in or near school. A boy called Graham used to give him some trouble. Colin had a stammer for a while (perhaps due to being bullied or even Mother's shouting – she could come out with such dire threats as "*I'll wring your neck*" which would set Colin's long eyelashes blinking rapidly!).

The school suggested he should see a speech therapist. The therapist was young and pretty, and Mother's theory was that Colin rather enjoyed the individual attention, although she did not think there was much the matter with his ability to talk. Judging by the volumes Colin speaks now, free from any stammer, I think Mother was probably right. I did have a bit of trouble from being teased by a boy in my class called Robin. In retrospect, I think perhaps he liked me, but I didn't appreciate that, and I would scuttle hastily past the road where he would sometimes appear, hurrying to get home.

Back in the sixties children were permitted to go home for lunch, and we walked home at mid-day as well as going to and from school at the beginning and end of the day, about 10-15 minutes' walk, which gave us good exercise as well as a nice lunch. But the problem with going home for lunch was that when Mother wanted us to stay for school lunch occasionally I dreaded doing it, and Colin was not keen either. In Colin's case, it was perhaps the quality of the food that displeased him; in my case, it was the agonies of my shyness. I hated the anxiety of not knowing which table-places were regularly taken, the possibility of "taking someone else's seat" and not knowing how to make conversation with other children.

In several of our years at primary Mother needed us to stay for school-lunch once a week when she was visiting our autistic brother Kenny, usually a Thursday, which I dreaded. By my last year at primary Colin had gone off to a boarding school, and I begged Mother to let me come home on my own for a sandwich lunch if she wasn't in, which she finally agreed to. I can only assume that the school had no provision for children bringing in a packed lunch, which seems strange nowadays – especially as I do remember taking in a "piece" (a snack like a biscuit or fruit) to eat at playtime – probably with the ubiquitous lukewarm school milk that was handed out in third pint bottles to all the children.

Strangely, there was less concern about walking between home and school on our own. To get to and from school Colin and I had to walk along "The Lane", a narrow road blocked off from cars, and we would sometimes be making separate ways home, especially in the older years of primary. One time when I was walking on my own a strange man approached me and asked if I had a light for his cigarette. I just shook my head and hurried off, feeling uneasy and glad to escape unscathed, though I didn't understand from what.

In fact, when I was in Primary 7, I believe there was a local girl who did get raped – I was told that she and a friend were tied to a tree and assaulted by a teenage boy. I did not really know her, but I had become friendly with another girl in our class

who knew her, so I heard about the incident. But I was so lacking in understanding of the enormity and trauma of what had happened that I mentioned it to someone else, without realising how upsetting this would be to the victim. I feel horrified now at my failure to comprehend and be sensitive about the situation. I was fortunate not to suffer anything so traumatic.

From my own perspective the most mortifying thing that happened at school (apart from school dinner agonies) was that my periods started quite early when I was about 11, so I was still at primary school. Those were the days when girls wore an awkward elasticated belt with hooks to hold a looped sanitary towel – unfortunately visible under my navy knickers – and unfortunately, we also had to strip down to our vests and knickers to do PE in the gymnasium, along with the boys. I remember being teased about this, and it now seems amazing that the teachers did not have procedures to avoid such humiliation for girls. And yet in a strange way part of me felt rather proud of having reached that milestone, despite the inconvenience, and regardless of being an innocent child who knew little about sex (even though I was beginning to have the first stirrings of crushes on boys).

Although I read so voraciously, including some of my parents' books as well as my own, I remained blissfully unaware of the fundamental facts of life until I reached secondary school. Mother was good about having frank discussions with me about matters like sex, but it took me a while to fully grasp all the implications. She said the first time she told me about sex and making babies I gazed at her wide-eyed and exclaimed "*you mean you and Daddy did that 3 times?*" However, illicitly raiding Dad's library for erotic literature helped to fill in some of the gaps in my knowledge as I blundered into adolescence. Indeed, this led to a rare misdemeanour of mine, when I took one of Dad's blue books in to show a friend at secondary school, and we were looking at it during the Religious Education class and it was confiscated! RE was one of the most boring of our classes because we had such a bad teacher who was unable to control the pupils, so that even I misbehaved. I cannot recall whether the book was ever returned to me or whether I just hoped Dad wouldn't notice its disappearance from his library – I was probably secure in such a hope as he was so absent-minded.

Although I was so shy through most of primary school, I blossomed a bit in Primary 7 and had great fun on a project we did on the Dickens book "*The Tale of Two Cities*", where we made model scenes, tumbrils, guillotines, people from wooden clothes pegs and costumes etc, and I attended an after-school class. I also got on well with the class teacher, a lively woman called Mrs Browning, who used to say to me "*Alison, you've got a voice like a foghorn!*" - so I had obviously lost some of my inhibitions by that year. And I had begun to discover the attractions of boys in Primary 7. I had a crush on a boy in my class called Gordon Ewan and wrote a long story featuring a girl and a boy called Gordon – somewhat embarrassing when the teacher asked me to read the story aloud in class! At least the girl was not called Alison. We had a leaving dance at the end of Primary 7 and I recall wearing my first pair of nylon stockings, mink coloured with a suspender belt - but I don't remember whether I danced with any of the boys I liked. I also remember developing my interest in performing drama. Some of us acted out a script about a rather rough family where the mother was harrying her boys to get out of bed and

guess what, I was cast as the harridan mother – typecast even then (see Chapter on Dramatic Activities). I was so enthusiastic in my role that I whacked one of the boys so hard that he fell over! I guess that was a surprise coming from shy Ally but marked one of my earliest “performances”.



*Alison Noell Carus - me with my Dux Medal
Final year at Bearsden Primary 1967*

11. Recreation

Setting aside the odd bump and scrape, or parental tension, our childhood was safe and content. We were fortunate in that we and those close to us remained healthy, despite the odd accident or illness here and there. Colin does not look back on our childhood in quite such sunny hues as I do, but from my perspective we were extremely happy as we grew up. With Colin being only 15 months younger than me, we were very close, playing all sorts of games together, especially “imaginative” play both outside and indoors.



Ally & Colin with some of “the animals” including Cuddly, Ponso, Alexandra, Muffy, Bernard, Doggy, 1964

Before Colin was old enough to play with me, I had already had some adventures including pedalling away down the road on my tricycle when less than 3 – luckily a kind adult brought me to a halt while Mother was trying to catch me! When we were small Colin and I shared a bedroom (joined by older brother Kenny when he made visits home), but when I was older, I moved into a separate little bedroom next door – but we still played in the larger room. This was probably about the same time Mother stopped us taking baths together – a bit disappointing for us as we used to have great games at bath-time with toy boats and all sorts of marine adventures going on round the taps and in the soap tray. But I had to vacate the small bedroom when we had a visitor to stay – mainly English Granddaddy or American Granmargie, so we did sometimes return to sharing a room, and we quite often shared a room in holidays, and so continued to enjoy our make-believe games.

When Colin and I still shared a room and we lay in our bunkbeds before going to sleep we would make up elaborate stories, usually involving the adventures of our teddy-bears, principally Alexandra and Cuddly and the menagerie of their families (other soft toys who all had names we had bestowed on them, most of which I can still recall, such as Ponso my toy spaniel dog, Grizelda the donkey, and assorted other bears - Alexsaper the tiny bear, Bernard the giant yellow and black bear, Timothy who looked like a miniature Bernard, Cutey the glove puppet, Muffy the broken bear.. etc). We preferred to anthropomorphise our animals rather than picture them in a natural habitat; probably due to the influence of reading Winnie the Pooh and Paddington Bear books, which we loved, as well as seeing cartoons like Yogi Bear. Alexandra had lost her jointed legs, but despite this she remained Colin’s favourite bear, and her lack of limbs did not feature in our imaginings.

We invented various family relationships among the animals, and assigned personalities to the soft toys, particularly Alexandra and Cuddly, who enjoyed a series of adventures in our imaginings. We decided that Alexandra was a matronly and motherly character, married to Ponso (dog); Bernard the big bear was married to my big rag doll Hilary and they acted as grandparents to Alexandra’s children

(some of the other smaller bears); whereas we imagined Cuddly was a fancy-free frivolous and fun-loving singleton always on the look-out for a boyfriend!

The bear exploits of our principal duo included becoming film-stars (despite Alexandra's domestic encumbrances) – and meeting Julie Andrews (who had become a favourite of ours since watching *The Sound of Music*) – and becoming spies or police – reflecting some of the films and TV drama we watched, and we would often dress them up in some of my dolls' clothes. I suppose this was an extension to the “Mummies and Daddies” games we played with some of our local friends (a very innocent version – restricted to activities like pretending to keep house and go to work – no sex exploration). We included news of their exploits in a magazine we concocted called *The Gonk*.

Although I was shy at school for most of my primary years, at home I had a lively time playing with Colin and our friends Patricia and Jane, who lived in 2 of the houses across the road on Sinclair Avenue, although sometimes they would complain if I went to either of their houses and I still had my nose stuck in a book reading. My parents were impressed and amused by how fast I could read. I often devoured a whole book in a few hours. I remember Dad being surprised when he discovered I re-read my favourite books. He bought me many of my most interesting children's books. Once I had my own room, I would often stay up late reading – either creeping out into the upstairs hall to read by the hall light or sneaking my lamp on and quickly switching it off if I heard Mother come upstairs. She was wily enough to put her hand near the bulb to see if it was still warm!

Despite my passion for books, I also enjoyed playing with our local friends. Along with pursuing domestic activities like pretending to cook and clean, we played adventure games based on some of our favourite television programmes such as *Doctor Who* and *The Man from Uncle*. Patricia and I were closer, being the same age, and later we shared a passion for the Beatles and the Monkees. Patricia was also devoted to Cliff Richard, but I could not join her in that mania. *Doctor Who* and *The Man from Uncle* were probably more favourites of Colin, Patricia and my mother. I preferred stories and films about families, romances or other more domestic topics – I liked *Blue Peter* and dramatisations of favourite books such as *Little Women*, *Swallows and Amazons* or *Heidi*.

I also loved playing with dolls – both traditional big child or baby dolls, and the slimline adult or teen Barbie/Sindy/Tressy type dolls and I enjoyed having lots of different clothes for all of them. For some reason, I was unimaginative in not renaming my Sindy/Patch and Tressy dolls, although I played just as much with them as with my big dolls and soft toys. Tressy was notable for having hair that “grew” out of her head using a special key to unfurl and rewind the ponytail, and she and Sindy and Patch had an intriguing variety of accessories as well as her extensive wardrobe of clothes. At the other end of the spectrum, I had a large rag doll called Hilary Felicity, like a life-size toddler, which Mother made from a kit, complete with dark red wool hair (no doubt because Mother had always wanted red hair), embroidered face including red cupid's bow lips and false eyelashes attached to her eyes! Mother made several outfits for her and she also wore some of my old clothes including a fair-isle jumper and one of my smocked dresses. She eventually fell apart (her neck was always weak) and was thrown out, to my regret now.

All my “big” dolls had names and personalities. I still remember the names and look of most of them (Ann – fair-haired, small; Sally - platinum blonde, a bit glamorous; Goldie, originally a Dutch doll with golden plaits and a Dutch outfit; Nancy -after my Mother – with long dark hair; Margie Kate – after my grandma & great grandma – with red curly hair; Karen (a baby doll whose hair was like rough straw from being frequently washed in the bath) and Ballerina – a doll with hard plastic legs and body, different to the soft rubber of my other dolls, dressed in a stiff net ballet dress and ballet shoes, which Granmargie gave me when I was 5, on a visit to the UK. And poor Rosie who came to a sad end as she lost most of her hair – perhaps because I washed it too much – and then Colin scribbled in biro on her head and I think he even stuck pins in it, so eventually Mother threw her away.

Regrettably, I lost track of most of my dolls; they may have disappeared in one of my parents’ moves. I believe they may have made it as far as Powick and gone up to the attic there for a while, but if so, I don’t think Mother brought them down to be played with when the kids and I visited, and over the years Catriona ended up acquiring her own doll collection. So, I’m not sure if Mother disposed of the dolls at some point before she died, or whether they disappeared in the upheaval when Dad moved from Powick up to Glasgow for his final years.

My beloved old toy dog Ponso (given to me when I was a baby) moved in with me after I got married and still occupies a chair with a collection of other beguiling teddy bears that we have acquired in more recent years (along with Leslie’s one ancient teddy bear). I think Colin has Alexandra Bear in safe custody at his house, but after all the hours of happy play she gave us I’m ashamed to say I don’t know what happened to Cuddly.

I also enjoyed playing with my dolls-house which Dad had made (not as elaborate as his father’s creation, but serviceable for everyday play). And I loved my paper dolls – I had dozens of these (all named) and one of my favourite hobbies was drawing and creating lots of extra clothes for them to expand their wardrobe. This was assisted by cornucopia boxes of 64 Crayola crayons, providing a wide range of colours. As well as my British paperdolls, there were several from America – including paper-dolls from McColls magazine sent over by Granmargie. Mother did bring out my paper doll collection when I visited Powick with the children, and both Catriona and James enjoyed playing with it. Most of them came back to London with us – it still gives me a strange feeling when I look at them and they evoke my youth as I recall so vividly playing with them as a child. I liked designing clothes for people as well as for paper dolls, and I did this a bit in *The Gonk* magazine that Colin and I produced.

Colin was not particularly interested in my dolls or paper dolls, but my friend Patricia would bring her Sindy dolls over to play with my Tressy (and my Sindy’s “younger sister” Patch). We also played with the paper dolls, creating a “house” by laying out a floor plan on my bed with pieces of wool. I attempted similar home creation using pebbles on the beach at the seaside or even tree roots in the woods. (A homemaker at heart - or a designer?) Colin was more intrigued by my dollhouse, and he would sometimes join me arguing over furniture disposition; and we both adored playing with the magnificent dolls house at our grandparents’ house

in London, which had been developed by our Grandfather Martin, elaborating on the simple box structure that his father (Great-Grandfather Ashley) had begun.

Dressing up was another favourite game of mine (perhaps a precursor to my passion for acting – or clothes-shopping). As well as our “official dressing up clothes”, I remember raiding my mother’s wardrobe trying on her high-heeled shoes and her jewellery – especially earrings and necklaces – and some of her fancy clothes. She had some full stiff petticoats that rustled enticingly, and I liked to put on various skirts, blouses, scarves etc to play some exotic character, perhaps my idea of a gypsy, or someone else. Although Mother could be impatient and get cross, she was remarkably tolerant about me “borrowing” her clothes and jewellery, and adopting other personae, even though I don’t think she had any desire to act herself (although she was good at reading stories aloud to Colin and me). She was happy for me to dress up in the house but was a bit disconcerted when she saw me out in our street kitted out in dressing up costumes.

Mother had a variety of costume jewellery, mostly bought by Dad and a selection of polished semi-precious stones as pendants or bracelets. Granmargie used to give her other paste jewellery. I recall clear, pale pink and green “crystal” beads and an amber necklace. Granmargie had a ring with dark blue stones which looked like sapphires and she gave it to me, but Mother was so fond of it that I gave it to her to wear. Mother did not have pierced ears, but she had a variety of pretty clip on and screw-on earrings, which in childhood I thought were very elegant, and I borrowed them for dressing up as well. I remember dressing up in other unusual clothes which had been my mother’s or been sent over by my American grandmother.

Granmargie sent other exotic gifts over from America such as giant paper kites shaped like fish – probably also Chinese. I think we tried to fly them, but they were a bit unwieldy – or else it wasn’t windy enough. She also gave us Chinese satin embroidered pyjamas, one pair in orange and another in navy blue. Having an American mother meant that Colin and I put on costumes for Halloween, but our visits were restricted to friends or neighbours we knew, and we did not play any tricks, whether or not we got treats. I recollect dressing up supposedly as a robber or burglar one year in jeans, boots, dark jumper, dark green leather gloves and some sort of eye mask or balaclava – perhaps I would have felt a little embarrassed going outside in satin pyjamas! These forays into dressing up may have provided inspiration years later when I had to create a series of hats for the children’s fancy dress hat parade at primary school, not to mention costumes for our drama group.

Just as Colin enjoyed playing with my dollhouse, I also had fun with many of “his” toys. There was a wide selection, including Meccano and Lego, and other types of building bricks. I liked using the various bricks to make houses. Colin had a large collection of cars, Corgi, Dinky and Matchbox, and we played make-believe games with some of the cars, including a ski-truck which had little men that you could put in and out of the cars. I found it fascinating when the cars had doors that opened and seats inside and figures to play with.

One time we created a ski-resort sprinkling a heap of Lux soapflakes on the floor in our bedroom and enacting some dramatic story to Mother involving Bob and other characters (probably a bit of a nightmare for Mother to clean up!). Colin also had a

trainset with a townscape of model houses and shops that he and Dad had built so that was another outlet for making up stories such as train crashes. Usually, Colin seemed to be keener on making the buildings whereas Dad was the one who liked creating the track and running the trains (although Dad as a National Trust supporter was also keen on architecture and stately homes). Dad even built a tunnel in and out of the bedroom wall into an eaves cupboard in Bearsden – the holes must have been interesting to explain when they were trying to sell the house...

Like many a boy Colin had a model of the James Bond Aston Martin car complete with ejector seat. I remember our family going to see *Thunderball* in the Rio cinema in Bearsden (long gone) and me looking away from the screen at the scary or violent bits. I got to see a few Disney cartoons – *Snow White*, *101 Dalmatians*, *Peter Pan* and *Fantasia*, and was quite frightened by the witch in *Snow White*. I was quite a wimp when watching either cinema or TV. I would frequently hide behind the sofa when we were watching *Doctor Who*. I was nervous of the daleks and There was one episode I found particularly terrifying when people were made to grow old very quickly and turned into skeletons. I obviously have a low fear threshold as I still look away from any remotely scary bits on film or TV.

Another cinema outing that I recall, was going one afternoon with friend Patricia to see *Monte Carlo or Bust* and having so much fun that we just stayed in our seats and watched the next sitting! I don't suppose you'd be allowed to do that nowadays – nor would we have time. Back at home we loved old Hollywood movies, mostly black & white but with quite sophisticated films such as Cary Grant comedies or thrillers like Hitchcock's *Rear Window*; dazzling musicals like *Singing in the Rain* or heart-warming dramas like *It's a Wonderful Life*. These were all films that Mother loved to watch with us, being a fan of many of the Hollywood screen stars like Jimmy Stewart, Gary Cooper, Grace Kelly and Katherine Hepburn.

At a higher-brow level we went to see *Dr Zhivago* – some of which was beyond my naïve years to understand, but it was probably the first epic film which made quite an impression on me. However, I think my favourite cinema film at this time was *The Sound of Music* which I saw several times. I memorised all the songs, so my poor parents had to listen to me singing them in succession on long car journeys. Meanwhile Colin would be carousing the *Z Cars* theme tune so it must have been quite a cacophony. I suppose it was better than having me throw up. I still felt car sick but by the time I was secondary school age I usually managed not to vomit (apart from one unfortunate experience with shellfish in Belgium). Unfortunately, I still feel queasy in cars and buses nowadays. My children thought it was highly amusing when we went on a helicopter simulator ride and I staggered off the ride feeling distinctly green at the gills, while they were cheerfully unaffected. Yet when I was pregnant, I did not experience any really unpleasant nausea.

Back in my childhood our family also played games – old fashioned board and cards as of course there were no computer games when we were young. I was not madly keen on lengthy games that depended mainly on luck like Monopoly, but I enjoyed games that required some skill and used English or mathematical ability, such as Scrabble and card games like rummy and cribbage – and that did not last interminably. Such games were particularly popular when we were on holiday with no distractions from TV or telephone. Dad and Colin liked more combative games

like Battleships, but I was never a great one for competitive sports or games – especially ones that aimed for annihilation or world domination.

So modern computer and video games are of no interest to me, and I mostly have to be dragged to the games table no matter what is being played. However, I did quite enjoy Cluedo – probably linked to my love of detective novels. I think I had devoured all of Agatha Christie’s novels before leaving school and then forged my way through Dorothy Sayers, Ngaio Marsh and Josephine Tey. Later on, Leslie and I developed a fondness for Mah Jong after learning how to play it from one of Leslie’s friends. We sometimes played it with my parents (though this was not relaxing as Mother would get very cross when she lost). At some point we introduced the game to the children, and James was particularly intrigued by it. I can remember creating a “travel” set out of a cereal packet which I cut up into small rectangles, drawing the various symbols of bamboos, circles, characters, dragons and winds on to them, which we used a few times while on holiday in Scotland.

As Colin and I grew up, our friendship circle gradually expanded. When we were very young, Colin and I were best buddies, only playing occasionally with the children of a couple of Mother’s friends. As we moved through primary, we gradually acquired other friends. For most of our primary years our main friends were our neighbours Patricia and Jane, who lived in houses across the street from us on Sinclair Avenue, later joined by one or two other children in the street like Rona and Ross. We played with them either after school or at weekends. Patricia went to a different school, but she and I spent a lot of time together until secondary years.

Patricia’s mother Barbara became one of Mother’s best friends, and Colin and I were also very fond of her. She was a great character full of intelligence and humour and a host of amusing expressions. She came from Montrose, so her East coast accent seemed quite refined compared to some Glaswegians we knew. She was house-proud but didn’t always manage to do as much housework as she intended (possibly because she had spent several hours chatting on the telephone). She would announce regretfully “*Och I’ve done nothing; I’ve been round the house and stirred it up with a spoon!*” But the house usually looked pretty tidy to us.

She was also a good cook and made delicious meals, home-baking and melt-in-the-mouth tablet. However, she was always self-deprecatory, and when complimented would say “*Och it’s not as good as it should be*”. But we enjoyed all her cooking. When we were small Colin and I were a little nervous of her husband Iain, who seemed quite gruff and formidable, but looking back I am sure he was actually a kind man. He was a scoutmaster who had been in the RAF and he also loved sailing and swimming, so he was quite sporty, perhaps unlike Barbara (although Barbara and Mother did play badminton in a community hall in Bearsden - as well as spending a lot of time talking!) Barbara had been in the WAAF when she and Iain met so she must have been more active and disciplined in her early life than she appeared to us in later years.

Most of my father’s friends were musicians or artists, and Colin and I met quite a few of them. I suspect we mixed with more adult company than some of our peer group. Although shy, I sometimes found it easier to relate to adults, especially on my home ground. Some of Dad’s music students would occasionally baby-sit for us

and Colin and I were quite lively, indeed naughty, with them, doing our best to stay up and play rather than going to bed. One of them, a singing student called Sasha helped to look after us when we were little, and she lived with us for a while in return for “mother’s help” assistance. Mother was not keen on employing help, but it must have been quite hard for her looking after three small children, one of whom had special needs. For a short while they tried having an au pair, a German girl called Karina, but unfortunately Mother discovered she was stealing money and jewellery so that arrangement came to an abrupt end. However, Mother was very fond of Sasha, who was a friendly and helpful Scottish girl. My parents remained friends with her and her pianist husband all their lives.

When Kenny was not at home my parents felt more able to entertain and had periodic dinner parties for friends ... Colin and I quite enjoyed these, sometimes trotting down in our pyjamas to meet guests, and hoping that there would be tasty leftovers the next day, especially if pavlova cake was on the menu. However, on one occasion Colin protested about the noise, leaning out of our bedroom window when people were talking in the garden, and asking “*could you quieten down as I want to go to sleep!*” Ironic considering how late he stays up nowadays talking nineteen to the dozen while the rest of us drop with exhaustion!

Some other friends of my parents were quite an unusual couple called Mary and Peter. Peter was German and a professor at one of the universities in Glasgow and he and Mary were also interested in music. The reason we met was when we passed Mary and her children in the street Colin asked Mother in his shrill voice “*Mummy is that lady Japanese?*” whereupon Mary announced briskly in a strident American accent “*Chinese-American dear*”. The fact that she and Mother were both American acted as a catalyst and it turned out the children Hilary and Alfred were a similar age to me and Colin. Hilary and I did not particularly click (I think she was a bit older and not really interested in me), but Colin and Alfred got on quite well, even though (or perhaps because!) Alfred was what nowadays might be termed “*a bit nerdy*”. Colin and I found Mary a bit intimidating, but she and Mother got on well and we visited their house quite frequently for several years.

They had an unusual house on Station Road, some way past Bearsden Station, that looked more rural than our little housing estate around Sinclair Avenue. It had been designed by an architect, set in woodland on stilts, with garage and storerooms down at ground level and then you went upstairs to the residential area. It felt a bit like a cruise ship with an outside balcony going round it, and with the reception rooms going round the edge of the building while the bathrooms and kitchen were in the centre – and possibly some of the bedrooms, although my memory is hazy on that. A corridor went around in a circuit between the exterior and interior rooms. It was very different from most of the suburban houses and villas in Bearsden, and my first experience of contemporary individual architecture. Although I am by nature quite conservative in my tastes and prefer living in traditional period houses, this made me appreciate that houses and furnishings could be different and attractive even if modern, and it helped widen my perspectives on buildings.

They used to hold a bonfire and firework party around 5 November, which we attended several times, as well as making some informal visits for tea. Mary and the children also used to come over to our house on Sinclair Avenue. One time,

Colin and Alfred had been mucking about in the garden when the rest of us were indoors, and Mother and Mary noticed what they were doing. Mary liked to use big words, and this resulted in one of Mary's more memorable interrogations of her son when he came in as she asked sharply "*Alfred, have you been urinating in the garden?*" Alfred probably felt highly embarrassed as he was quite a shy boy, while the rest of us tried to keep a straight face. If Colin was holding forth on a subject Mary might also interrogate him "*Whaddya base your information on Colin?*"

I had my own rather mortifying experience with Mary. My parents had been invited to dinner. They did not have a babysitter, so Mary suggested they brought Colin and me and let us sleep while dinner was going on. Because I was nervous of Mary, I had made Mother promise she would wake me up and take me home when dinner was over. When the time came Mother managed to wake up Colin, but, because I was such a deep sleeper, she could not get me to wake up, and I was too big to be easily carried down to the car. Mary helpfully said that it would be fine for me to stay the night and be collected in the morning, and Mother felt it would be rude to tell Mary that I had insisted on being woken up because I was scared of her. I was not a happy bunny in the morning when I woke to find I was in Mary's house – and on my own! I suspect I resisted other such excursions.

My first official trip away from home on my own was to stay with my godfather Colin Harvey, and his wife Rosemary, which was a more enjoyable experience. They were both Scottish but living in Manchester, before returning to Scotland to live in Milngavie. I took several exciting new clothes with me, and I particularly remember a short lemon-yellow cotton dress with a pleated "twist" skirt. We went to see a stage production of *Pygmalion*. This may have been the moment when I my love of the theatre was born, and I began harbouring a secret desire to be an actress, even though I was never brave – or foolhardy – enough to attempt to pursue this ambition professionally.

Back home I recorded the play *Pygmalion* on a tape recorder in my room reading all the parts aloud in different voices and colouring in the illustrations in my script. Appropriately, many years later this was the first play I dared to direct for our amateur dramatic group, after spending a long time acting in the group without believing that I could direct and produce as well as act. AmDram would prove to be the route that could satisfy many of my thespian ambitions and would also be a hobby I could share with husband and even sometimes our children!

My godfather Colin had been a schoolfriend of my Dad at Rugby. He was a kind and gentle man who was a social worker, but he had a slightly disconcerting manner, and I found it easier to relate to his warm and vivacious wife Rosemary, who was great fun. I took my toy dog Ponso, and Rosemary let me take it out for "walks" dragging it along by a long ribbon. I had to admire Colin's social conscience, especially as he had health problems due to having suffered polio as a child, which left him with a limp. Perhaps his own misfortune gave him more sympathy for others in difficult circumstances. They were an interesting couple – after having children of their own they moved up to Scotland and Colin set up a Museum of Social Work in their Milngavie house. This became something of an obsession with Colin and he even turned their living room into a Victorian prison display complete with cells and a "secret" tunnel – which our kids found fascinating

many years later when we spent a night at Rosemary's house. My own view was that Rosemary must be an extremely accommodating woman to accept the loss of her living room with such equanimity!

Sometime after my trip to Manchester I made another solo visit, before starting secondary school, going to stay with my former piano teacher Mary-Grace –after she had moved down to Cheshire (Stockport). She had a baby and I recall being allowed to feed it with a bottle of milk and to push the baby's pram – but I am not sure if it was a boy or girl. Aged 11 I finally learnt to swim in the swimming pool near Stockport without using a rubber ring or armbands. Over previous years, our annual fortnight's holiday in Wales had not afforded me sufficient practice to shed inflatable assistance. There were no swimming lessons at our primary school, though tantalisingly there was an outdoor pool in the garden of the house beside the school. We could see it from the upstairs classrooms. I am not sure how often it was used (being near Glasgow) – my main memory is of seeing autumn leaves swirling on the surface and it being rather desolate, a bit like the pools in those films set in France, *A Good Year* and *Swimming Pool*.

It was lucky I learnt to swim, as soon afterwards Colin went off to boarding school where he learnt to swim properly, and a year later we were on holiday abroad, swimming in a lake with boys, where it would have been deeply embarrassing if I had not been able to swim without flotation devices. Since then, I have always loved swimming, despite being slow, and only able to do breaststroke. I manage to accompany (or rather follow) Leslie on some of his shorter open water swims, most recently in the river near our home as well as in lakes, lochs and sea. Bearing in mind my slow swimming it perhaps comes as no surprise that at school I was rather a duffer at sports, although I quite enjoyed netball. But I liked outdoor activities, (usually non-competitive, individual sports) particularly as I grew older, enjoying walking and cycling, with a fair degree of endurance, though still eschewing anything involving competitive speed, although I am a fast walker, as long as the ground is level. On trips to the Lake District Leslie and I have managed to scale quite a few of the big hills over past years. But I fear such excursions might be beyond me now, following a combination of twisted ankles and bouts of sciatica which have turned me into a slight crock when the going heads uphill.

Turning from sport to handicraft, I was again a lamentably slow learner. One skill I was initially poor at was knitting. Aged seven I could not grasp the concept of the purl stitch, though I had mastered plain knit. I was trying to knit a green scarf at school, but I was making slow progress until I confessed to my mother that I had been going backwards and forwards over the same row in the class because I was too embarrassed to ask the teacher to explain the purl stitch again. Mother either sent in a note to the teacher or came in to see her and luckily the teacher made sure I received some more tuition - more embarrassment ensuing - but the knitting – or rather purling - message finally clicked for me.

Having mastered the technique, as a teenager I went on to knit vast numbers of jumpers, cardigans, tank tops, hats etc for myself, friends and relations, especially my parents –and later on extended the bounty to boyfriend Leslie and his family. I even managed to complete a complicated Fair Isle sleeveless pullover for Leslie during my first pregnancy (mostly on my way to and from the USA in the days

when knitting needles were allowed on an airplane). For a while I could even knit in the dark in the cinema, or while watching TV, and managed to knit quite a lot of garments for my babies 1 and 2, but after baby number 3 arrived I never seemed to find the time for any more handicraft. Maybe I will take it up again one day now the kids are grown up... (if I curtail theatrical activities?)

My artistic and creative impulses in my youth were expressed mainly in painting and drawing as well as knitting and sewing. I also loved writing stories, but probably did more of this in primary school, whereas once I entered secondary school my writing was mainly concentrated in diaries and letters. There seemed to be too many serious academic subjects to allow for spending time on composing stories. Dad encouraged my study of fine art, and was an avid collector of paintings, but my mother was probably more influential in encouraging my own drawing and painting, since she did a lot of this herself.

I shared several creative interests with Mother, particularly art, sewing and clothes. We sometimes sent off for mail order fashion, or outfits that had to be made up. I remember a turquoise long-sleeved dress with a zip at the front – very sixties and very short, which I wore to one of my first parties in secondary school. There was also a green and blue striped wool dress which I had persuaded my mother to take up to make it a mini skirt – I complained to my friends that it was still too long but looking back I realise it was ridiculously short! Mother tried to buy me fashionable clothes, but our tastes grew increasingly different. Shopping trips together became rather agonising as Mother kept suggesting clothes that I did not like, and I felt bad saying no to everything.

One Christmas Mother gave me a red tunic in a plastic fabric, which I guess was meant to look like leather, and might have been desirable to some teenagers, but I thought it was hideous, and I fear she suspected I was less than enthusiastic about it. It was a relief when she offered to give me money instead of clothes, and I was able to do my own shopping trips, although she remained helpful when I was sewing clothes. I think we must have continued doing shopping trips for other items in the centre of Glasgow. Mother treated me on various occasions to delicious lunches at what was then the Ceylon Tea Centre (I guess it would be Sri Lanka Centre nowadays) in town – they had a delicious array of salads plus yummy meringues and other cream cakes, and it was fun having “Mother and Daughter” outings (basically any trip involving eating out was good news as far as I was concerned).

For sewing we often used those patterns of tissue pieces in packets produced by publishers like McColls, Simplicity and Flair. I still vividly recall some of the dresses and smocks that I made, both on my own and with Mother’s help, including a pair of dark green corduroy hotpants! When I started university, I took several of my creations with me and I must have looked a bohemian hippy with flared jeans embroidered with flowers and butterflies, topped by flowing flowery smock dresses and my long hair with a crown of tiny braids holding it back – all I needed was flowers in my hair! Leslie did not seem to mind, but his parents must have thought my dress sense was very peculiar when they first met me.

I had some very short mini dresses including a turquoise and brown one (with a pattern of horses or unicorns camouflaged in the design) and a similar pale pink

flowery number. I wore these over a long-sleeved black jumper teamed with black tights. I have a hazy memory that it was one of these slightly bizarre outfits that I chose to wear when on my first visit to Leslie's parents, when we were students, attending his sister Louise's confirmation. His parents must have thought my costume was peculiar – but they were polite and did not comment on my dress sense. They remained polite and welcoming even when the next year Leslie revealed that he wanted to marry me – although with him having turned just 21 and me only 19 both they and my parents thought we were too young to be contemplating such a serious step. Especially Leslie's father who did not get married till he was 41, although Leslie's mother was only 23!

When not wearing mini-skirts or jeans I began to favour long cotton dresses by Laura Ashley and others that were popular in the seventies. The first dress that I bought with my waitress earnings cost £8 and was long black cotton with a pattern of cream daisies on it, a square neck with smocking and slightly puffed short sleeves (a cheap version of a Laura Ashley design I guess). There is a black and white photo that Leslie took of me wearing it on an early trip to visit his parents. It is perhaps lucky the picture is black and white as I was wearing the dress over a bright pink long-sleeved blouse in seersucker cotton, and the colour combination would probably look a mishmash now (or maybe it would be back in fashion?) Another party frock was a long black velvet dress with a smocked bust and elbow length sleeves – Juliet or even Jane Austen hippy style. I bought it for about £10 in a budget boutique somewhere on Cricklewood High Street, near Leslie's digs – what became a regular journey for me from my university hall of residence. Although despite regular trips there, my bad sense of direction meant I managed to get lost on one visit where I was approaching from a slightly different point – I think I walked about half a mile along the main road before thinking “*Hmm, this isn't right!*” – a situation that has afflicted me periodically over the years. Leslie finds this hard to comprehend as he has an excellent sense of direction; but maybe I am a bit better at singing. As a student back home one Christmas Leslie found himself leading a group of carol singers and he got them singing *Once in Royal David's City* to the tune of *Hark the Herald* – which was fine until they ran out of words and Leslie was left humming on his own! We all have different talents.

However, returning to university outfits, my fanciest costume for dressing up was a striking Laura Ashley dress – full length in layers of white cotton with a navy flowered pattern and a low neckline – the neckline was possibly a bit too low as on one occasion at a university disco it was pointed out that I was revealing a bit more than I was intending (what would nowadays be termed a “wardrobe malfunction”). However, Leslie's own fashion sense was a bit dodgy; his main wardrobe consisted of ancient t-shirts, flared jeans, navy guernsey sweater with holes in the sleeves, an ancient tweed jacket with patched elbows, and an old brown donkey jacket; footwear selection consisted of ankle boots, shabby tennis shoes and clogs – going for the penurious artist look I guess (though maybe that look is now in fashion?). But love as they say is blind, and it was his personality that intrigued me more than his motley clothes. But these exploits were some years in the future from my first attempts at sewing and following fashion.



Ally c.1957 on my trike – I got into cycling from an early age!



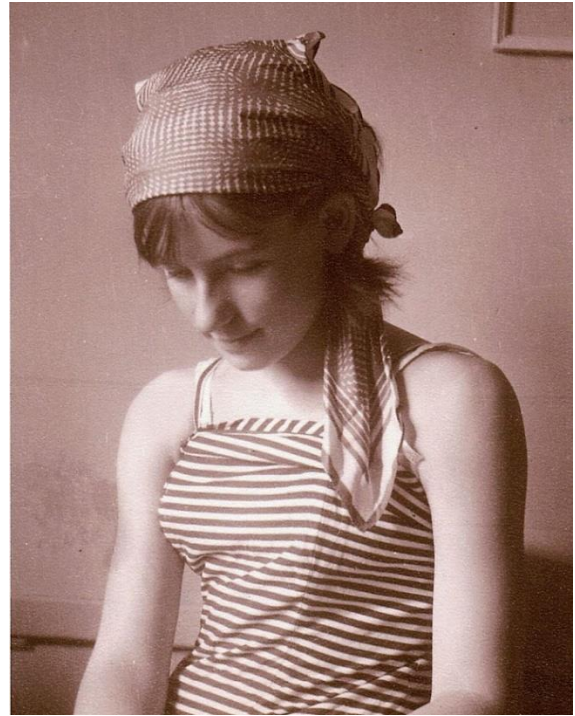
Ally 1962, with dollhouse made by Grandfather, Martin Carus-Wilson – on a visit to 109 Holden Road, Woodside Park. I loved playing with this and with my own more modest dollhouse.



Enjoying eating from early on... Mother, Colin & me in kitchen at Sinclair Avenue. Looks like we need some new chairs...



Ally with rag doll Hilary Felicity 1964 (made by Mother). I loved playing with my dolls and paper dolls.



Me, Ally c. 1966 dressing up in some of my mother's clothes (NB Mother's stripey dress had a wire bustier – I didn't really have a bust like that!)



Colin with the Dollhouse c.1966



Me, Ally aged 12 c.1967

All these photographs were taken by my grandfather – Martin Carus-Wilson

12. Holidays and a Cliff-Fall

Most of my holidays were spent with my family, particularly in primary school years, but also at secondary level, and formed an important part of developing our relationships as a family – partly because my Dad was busy or away so much in his musical life, but he was usually with us on our holiday trips. I began to appreciate scenery and views even as a child; but when I was very young, I was mainly concerned that we were by the sea, somewhere we could swim, paddle and build sandcastles. My parents managed to make our holidays enjoyable despite complications along the way, the main one of which was my autistic brother Kenny.

I am not sure whether my parents really were happier in the early years of their marriage and family life or whether it just seems that way as I look back to my childhood. With the benefit of hindsight, I know that the early years of their life together were before Dad succumbed to his first affair, so perhaps those years were happier, although they must also have been overshadowed by the growing dismay about Kenny as it became clear how severe his autism was, and as they recognized he would never lead a “normal” life. From my perspective, some of the most fun times we had as a family were our early holidays. Yet looking back now, I realise these holidays must have been a strain for Mother because in the early years Kenny was usually with us, and she had to juggle his demands with looking after us in a strange environment, normally for at least 2 weeks. However, this worked all right until the day I had an accident, which could have been fatal.

We usually went to the seaside for holidays, sometimes Cornwall or Kent, but most often to North Wales, near Abersoch and Pwllheli. We would set off from Glasgow about 4 or 5 am, heading to Carlisle where we would stop for a picnic breakfast of hard-boiled eggs, bread and thermos flasks of drinks. We squashed into the Morris Traveller (later it was a more capacious Rover; latterly French cars like Renault 16 or a Peugeot or Citroen – but by then we were not doing British seaside holidays). I am not sure how all 5 of us plus luggage fitted into the Traveller but somehow, we did! A roof rack assisted in transporting everything.

One amusing coincidence is that Leslie’s parents also had a Morris Traveller when he was young – though this was soon upgraded to a VW camper van. They would drive up to Scotland to spend camping holidays at Loch Tay in Perthshire, possibly at the same time as my family were heading down to Wales and they might have been in Carlisle at the same time as us having their breakfast. Like my Dad, Leslie’s father would set off at the crack of dawn if not earlier. Leslie recalls the hushed tones as the announcement was made by Tony “*We’re joining THE MOTORWAY now!*” (in the days when there was only one, the M1). The Du Cane vehicle would have been even more crowded than the Carus one; in addition to 2 parents and 3 children they had Peter Wool the elk hound (a wedding present to Leslie’s parents)– later joined by a sheepdog collie called Diamond. Years later Leslie and I would also head off to Loch Tay for our first holiday together.

Possibly one reason we often went to Wales for holidays was because Dad had happy memories of spending school holidays in Wales when he was at Rugby School, and his mother moved to Abergavenny. Or perhaps he just liked the Welsh

scenery, which rivalled the West Coast of Scotland and the Lake District, but the sea was a bit warmer than Scotland. We would stay in a self-catering cottage. For a few years we stayed on a farm and once poor Colin fell in a large cowpat in the farmyard. But he also had fun sitting up in the farmer's big tractor.

We had a splendid time playing at nearby beaches, paddling and swimming in the sea (with the aid of rubber rings and water-wings), building sandcastles, collecting shells. Dad was great at making sandcastles – sometimes he would create a sand motorboat or car in which Colin & I could sit (complete with sculpted steering wheel), as well as more customary castles with towers and moats. We had picnics either on the beach or out in the countryside (despite Colin's complaints – he was not a fan of al fresco eating). Occasionally Dad would sketch in the mountains near Snowdon. He had a little folding camping stool and paintbox and produced some pretty watercolours. Mother was also a prolific artist, but I suspect she was too preoccupied with childcare at this stage to pursue her art much. But in later years she often had a sketch book with her on holidays.

Sometimes we went on trips on the little narrow-gauge steam railway at Ffestiniog, and we even made the occasional daytrip to Butlins in Pwllhelli so we could use the swimming pool, which was very exciting! I rather wished we could stay in one of the chalets in the holiday camp and use all the facilities, although in later years I would look back and realise that would have been unappealing – certainly to my parents, and I don't think I would have relished the "*Hi-de-hi*" experience either.

It was in 1965 when I was 10 and we were on our annual holidays in North Wales (near Abersoch) that the cliff incident happened. When we were on the beach (Port Ceiriad I think), Colin and I decided we would scramble up one of the cliffs. Earlier I had been trying to swim in the sea, and I still had a rubber ring round me, which probably did not assist my climbing progress; however, I suspect it probably saved my life when I slipped from near the top and plunged some 20 or more feet onto a rock, as it must have cushioned my fall.

My memory is hazy about what happened next as I suffered concussion, but someone found Mother, who had been busy looking after Kenny, while Dad was away on a jaunt somewhere (typical!). A man who had been birdwatching, looking up at the cliff through his binoculars when the accident happened, and according to a local newspaper article he raised the alarm, and an ambulance was called. I recall waking up in it asking Mother what had happened as we headed to Bangor Hospital. I had hit my head and twisted my neck, but amazingly I suffered no serious injuries (my father's lucky genes?). I had previously fantasised about going to hospital (thinking it might be fun, having read too many children's books about nursing and medical adventures). However, faced with the reality I felt differently, and I could not wait to get out and be back home with my family.

I was allowed out after a couple of days and returned home to Scotland with Mother. Sadly, this meant I missed out on a long-anticipated trip. Colin and I had been due to go to Cornwall with Dad, who was playing in the St Endellion music festival (leading the orchestra), and we were going to stay with family friends. I had been corresponding with the mother, Bidy, about how much I was looking forward to the visit. But Mother was anxious about possible ill effects of the

accident, and did not want to cause Bidy trouble, so I was not allowed to go, and Colin went without me. I think Colin rather enjoyed the extra attention he got from both Bidy and her two teenage daughters, who helped look after him while Dad was busy with his music, and he remained very fond of Bidy all her life.

I believe there were other repercussions too. Although I did not think about it at the time, looking back I realize that this was the last full-scale family holiday we had with Kenny. I suspect Mother decided that it was just too risky or too stressful to be coping with him as well as Colin and myself, especially when on a holiday in a strange and possibly dangerous environment. It did not occur to me that I could have been killed or sustained life-changing injuries, but it must have been a terrifying experience for my parents, and particularly my mother, who tended to fear the worst anyway.



*Family picnic in North Wales near "Whistling Sands" Ally, Nancy, Colin, Louis
c.1961 taken by Martin Carus-Wilson (Grandfather)*



Nancy, Kenny & Ally at Studland Bay, Dorset c. 1957



Ally & Daddy, Kent c.1960



Ally – a free spirit from early days, Kent 1960



Colin & Ally at Hellsmouth Beach, Wales, 1962



Mother at Porth Ceriad beach, North Wales – near where I fell off the cliff in 1965.

13. The Kenny Conundrum

It may have been a coincidence, but the time of my cliff accident was when my parents bought a cottage near Moniaive, a pretty village in the Scottish Borders, less than 20 miles from Dumfries, where Kenny lived in the children's wing of Crichton Royal Hospital. That was the place where we subsequently brought Kenny for short visits. I do not remember that Kenny ever came to our Glasgow home again (and I don't think we took any more holidays in Wales).



Kenny c. 1966 – probably his last visit to Bearsden

We spent Christmases at the cottage with Kenny as well as short breaks at other times, and luckily Kenny enjoyed these trips – in fact, I imagine he preferred going somewhere that became familiar and home-like, as he was (and still is) never a fan of different places or new experiences. If Dad tried to take a different route when driving to the cottage from Dumfries Kenny would cry out in anxious tones “*It's the wrong way!*” The cottage was also somewhere my parents went with myself and Colin for weekend visits even when we were not seeing Kenny, and for many years it was an enjoyable country retreat for us all, giving us the chance to explore Galloway and the Scottish Borders. Leslie and I even had our honeymoon there!

When my parents made the purchase, it was called Glencrosh Cottage, but Dad decided to change the name to Cairndale Cottage (partly because the cottage over the road was also called Glencrosh). The Cottage was near a stream - or burn as they say in Scotland - called Castlefairn Water (so the cottage should have been dubbed Castlefairn) interspersed with small waterfalls and pools and set in a valley of rolling hills and woods, a rural idyll – with not a cliff in sight! I spent many happy days exploring the banks of the burn and nearby hillsides, as well as enjoying open fires, playing card games and reading books including lots of Agatha Christies. There was no TV or telephone, which provided a welcome respite from communications technology – of course this was decades before mobile phones or laptops. It had quite primitive facilities – no central heating, and a basic cooker. The house would get very damp in the winter and when we arrived and made up the beds the blankets and sheets would be clammy. We would huddle round the motley selection of electric fires and blower heaters until Dad could get a roaring fire going in the living room. The deep free-standing bath had a tall pipe that moved up and down with a gurgling sound instead of a plug and the water was peaty brown.

Kenny enjoyed walking in the countryside with us, and he was intrigued that the garden grew some fruit and veg – especially rhubarb, which he liked eating. Even now over 40 years later he will talk about “*the rhubarb's sleeping*” which is what Mother would say when the rhubarb season had finished. While I have vague recollections of Kenny visiting us in Bearsden, I have clearer memories of him coming to the Cottage. We had the same regular menu of spaghetti and ice-cream which Kenny would always want Mother to produce, sometimes alternated with macaroni cheese or rhubarb crumble. These are still the dishes he requests when we have visits and I give him lunch, although the Creamola Foam he liked to drink has long been replaced by Coca Cola (must be the red original version with no ice).

And when I take him to lunch in the pub he'll sometimes break out into chicken curry – and has reached the sophisticated heights of drinking cappuccino!

Food would be followed by Kenny's favourite Quality Street and Rose's Chocolates – favourite partly because of his sweet tooth, but also because of the red and purple cellophane wrappings, which he loves looking through. But Roses has recently stopped doing the cellophane wrapper and I dread the day when Quality Street follows suit. If so, Kenny will have to resort to one of the mantras that he trots out when faced with disappointment – *"it's a shame"*. The only problem being that the mantra gets repeated on an endless loop such as *"Roses not make red paper any more it's a shame Roses not make..."* Especially when followed by *"Alison will keep looking... Alison will keep looking..."* But at least Kenny can be distracted by food to eat as he has always had a good appetite.

Anyway, the Cottage provided a happy haven for Kenny, though unfortunately some of the visits were clouded by increasing aggression and disturbing behaviour from him, as he went through the traumas of adolescence, and visits sometimes had to be cut short. One of my most upsetting childhood memories is when Kenny went through a phase of scratching Mother on her hands and arms and she had to put on white cotton gloves to protect herself. Of course, it was most upsetting for Mother, faced with telling Kenny that if he couldn't stop scratching her, we would have to take him back to the Crichton. Kenny would cry as he always did at the end of his childhood visits - although not physically demonstrative he would sob tearfully *"Kenny not want to go"* and *"You'll be coming back again"*, which must have been heartrending for Mother. But sometimes in his teens he was unable to stop his aggressive behaviour, even when it meant going back early.

I think by now Kenny had been moved from the children's units at Ladyfield West and East to the adult unit at the main Crichton Royal Hospital, and it was no doubt particularly heart-breaking for my parents to see him in an adult mental hospital, realising he would probably be there for the rest of his life. However, that proved to be not quite the case. With the onset of the sometimes controversial *"care in the community"* policy, Kenny was moved into a small care home in Dumfries sharing with a few other adult patients. My parents had some misgivings about this, and they wondered whether to find a different care home for him when they moved down south to Birmingham, and subsequently to Worcestershire. But they did not want to risk further disruption, which they knew Kenny disliked, and they felt that overall, the facilities in Scotland were good, so in the end they decided to leave him living in Scotland, even though this meant they could not visit him so often.

Later, Kenny was moved out to a Leonard Cheshire residential care home just outside Dumfries, in the village of Glencaple, sharing with just 3 other inmates, and with a full-time rota of carers, and thankfully he settled very well there. This place has proved to be a real haven for Kenny where he is contented, well-looked after, and taken out to various activities as well as occasional trips. After moving south Mother and Dad eventually decided to sell the Moniaive cottage, as it became too difficult to maintain it at a distance. But Mother (accompanied by either Dad or sometimes Colin to share the driving, since it was a long trip from the Midlands) continued visiting Kenny, usually arranging to stay in a hotel in Dumfries and doing a day visit to Kenny, often taking him to walk in nearby Mabie Forest.

Since Mother died, I have become Kenny's primary visitor over the last 16 years, and it is such a relief that Kenny enjoys living in Glencaple and seems to have found contentment despite the limitations of his condition. We are so lucky that Leonard Cheshire provides the home with such caring staff. I don't drive, but I can travel by train to Dumfries and go by taxi out to Kenny's home, then take him out to lunch – fortunately Glencaple has a pub, the Nith Hotel which serves tasty food, and even plays background pop music which Kenny likes. His conversation is still limited, mainly comprising requests of what he wants me to bring next time or to do now (put tape on his binoculars or mend some old clothes). He tends to request duplicate items (e.g. another radio or more binoculars). But he does not complain when my visits come to an end and will often say "*Kenny happy – it's nice to be happy*". He wants to know when the next visit will take place, but otherwise is content to return to doing activities with the staff. They have sometimes commented that he is lucky to have such a stress-free existence with no worries about bills or employment etc! We are just fortunate we live in a welfare state that has provided so amply for Kenny, so I never begrudge my taxes.

Another happy custom which the staff at Kenny's Care Home have been willing to facilitate is short visits to our homes, both in London and our Skelmorlie house up near Wemyss Bay. This began when my parents were still alive, when some staff brought Kenny on a short trip to London in 2003, to celebrate his 50th birthday, and my family and I were able to give him a celebration meal at our house, along with my brother Colin. My parents were particularly pleased about this, seeing that a link was being established with the next generation. They must have worried whether anyone would take an interest in Kenny after they were both gone, although I tried to reassure Mother about this before she died.

Kenny has been brought on some other trips to London, but he also gets taken up for visits to our Skelmorlie house which he enjoys. In his limited way he regards it as his family home and will often bring some item to leave as a "*hostage*" – including dressing gown and slippers, as well as various pictures, scrapbooks, decks of cards and dominos! I once sent Kenny a postcard of nearby Wemyss Bay while we were staying in Skelmorlie, so in Kenny's mind our house is situated at Wemyss Bay and as he arranges his social calendar, he will say something like "*Stewart will bring you to Weemsbay in August ok?*" Kenny's conversation is limited and usually takes the form of one fast unpunctuated sentence, but is mostly to the point, although he tends to fixate on a particular topic, and ends up repeating on a loop.

But it is a blessing that Kenny can comprehend simple conversation and is able to make himself understood, as well as playing simple games like cards and dominos, and that he can get pleasure from some activities. Most of his fellow residents at Glencaple have only been able to communicate by grunts. So as my brother Colin once put it "*Kenny is the Einstein of the group*". Physically he is also in reasonable shape and he can manage simple personal hygiene matters like going to the loo, washing and dressing, although he would be incapable of doing a job. His mental handicap is tragic, and yet it could have been even worse. I guess that was little consolation to my parents as Kenny grew up; but I hope that having Colin and me as two healthy and (more or less) compos mentis children, was some comfort.



Kenny with Granmarginie and me c.1956



Kenny with Mother at Ladyfield West, c.1968



Colin, Uncle Ted (on a visit from USA) Kenny, Ally 1962 in living room, 13 Sinclair Avenue, Bearsden



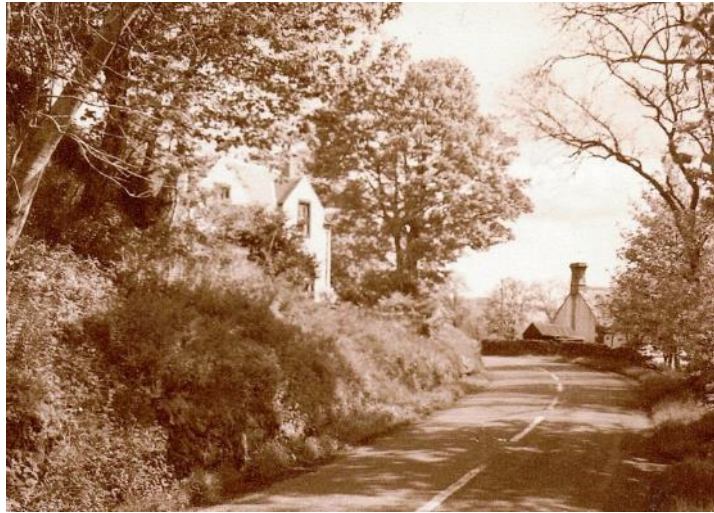
Catriona, Kenny & me c. 2006 at Nith Hotel, Glencaple where we have our lunches out.



My brother Kenny's 50th birthday party at Hanover Lodge with me Ally, nephews James & Gordon, his brother Colin and Soo (Colin's girlfriend at the time) February 2003



Cairndale Cottage (formerly Glencrosh), near Moniaive. c.1967



Approaching Cairndale Cottage and Glencrosh Cottage c.1967



View from Cairndale Cottage, near Moniaive c. 1967



Dad practising violin at Cairndale Cottage c. 1967

14. Secondary School & Friendships

Although I went to day school until the last year of my schooling, my brother Colin was sent to a Quaker boarding school in York called Bootham when he was 11. I was offered the chance to go to the sister boarding school but decided I would rather stay at Jordanhill College School where I had just settled in very happily. Colin was initially quite homesick, writing home *"I'll even go to Bearsden Academy if you let me come home"*! Funnily enough it hadn't even occurred to me that Bearsden Academy would not be the best place for me to go to for secondary schooling, especially as it was so convenient (next door to our house).



*Ally Jordanhill School
photo c.1971*

However, it was explained to me that because I had been a high achiever at primary I ought to try to get admitted to a more academic school. I duly sat an entrance test for Jordanhill College School and was accepted, gaining a small bursary. This proved to be a very satisfactory outcome as Jordanhill was an excellent school, I was extremely happy there, and I made two wonderful forever friends. It was attached to a teacher training college and was highly regarded, being a bit like an English grammar school. Even now that it has become a comprehensive school it still has a good reputation, and I think I gained a brilliant all-round education there.

As a boy, Colin was not regarded as being especially academic, but he did not need to sit a test to get into Bootham School. However, I believe it was a good school. Being Quaker, it did not have corporal punishment. But one slightly odd custom was that the boys wore no swimming costumes in the pool unless there were visitors, and one can't help wondering if this encouraged some abuse, although Colin did not encounter any. It certainly fostered teasing among the boys if someone was either over or under-developed! But I believe Colin settled in after initially being rather miserable, and he seemed to have an enjoyable time in the end. Colin was actually quite bright, but he was hampered by being a slow reader and a slow writer which made it difficult for him to excel in exams – and he was also a little lazy! But he could talk the hind leg off a donkey and gradually made several close friends as well as getting involved in miscellaneous activities at school including pop/rock music (being especially keen on the Beatles), and forming a band with some friends. They went on to attempt turning this into a commercial venture after they left school, unfortunately with rather limited success.

Colin kept a succession of pet mice and hamsters at home, including a white mouse called Bernard, and a golden hamster called Barnaby. Quite a ménage. He was allowed to take his mouse or hamster to his boarding school in York - which was lucky, as neither Mother nor I were keen to feed it and clean out the cage nor did rodents appeal to us as pets. However, Colin's letters home suggest that at one point he had more than one hamster and may have left one at home for a while. But this probably did not last long - and once we acquired our cat Jasper and dog Gelert any rodent life span might have been rather short.

At secondary school, I enjoyed most of my classes, especially English and Art and even Maths. I was not so keen on Latin and Science, though I did quite fancy the

Physics teacher Mr Brice (my friend Elizabeth & I sent him a Valentine card one year!) Some of my shyness wore off when I went off to secondary school and made some new friends, and even found that some boys liked me, which was a big confidence booster. Jordanhill was in the West End centre of Glasgow, and I had to travel there by train. This meant having school dinners regularly, but unlike at Bearsden Primary I no longer minded this, probably because I was doing it every day so I knew where I could sit, as well as having made some new friends who would sit with me - and the dinner hall was quite a good place to ogle boys!

It was surprising and thrilling to discover that some boys were attracted to me (at least to begin with, no doubt due to my novelty value – most other pupils had been together at the primary school attached to Jordanhill). I discovered the painful delight of getting full-blown crushes on boys. Despite my shyness, I wanted to be fashionable and attractive to boys. I would roll up the waistband of my school-skirt to make it shorter, since we were in the era of mini-skirts – and was told off on more than one occasion by a rather fierce teacher Miss McCarthur, who was nicknamed Medusa, *“I bet you didn’t leave your house this morning with your skirt that length!”* I managed to persuade my mother to take up some of my non-uniform dresses but looking back I can see why she thought they were ridiculously short and was less accommodating with my school uniform!

At Jordanhill, I was lucky enough to develop two close friendships with two girls called Kay and Elizabeth, who remained two of my dearest friends (though sadly Elizabeth passed away this year). However, one interesting feature about my friendships with Kay and Elizabeth was that they developed independently with almost no interaction between them. They were very different personalities, but I got on well with them both (was this exploring different sides of my Gemini star sign?). As far as I know, I don’t think they actively disliked each other, they were just rather indifferent, and not kindred spirits.

Anyway, it seemed to work best seeing them separately on a one-to-one basis, which I enjoyed, as I’ve never been into big group friendships, and three can be a difficult number. I can remember going to either Kay or Elizabeth’s house or one of them coming to me, enjoying sleepovers; talking about the boys we fancied; going to a few innocent parties with them, meeting boys (kissing and fumbling around, no sex – or if it was happening with others, I was too naïve and dreamy to realize). There were similar tentative couplings at discos (including some held at a scout hut and badminton hall as well as the school hall), and even if you didn’t “get off” with a boy, the dancing was fun as well as the anticipation of wondering if there would be any liaisons!

Elizabeth and Kay were both good at hockey (and played in matches on Saturday mornings) but I was not very sporty, particularly at competitive team games. Thus, I was pleased when drama was introduced as an alternative to PE for the sport dunces at school. I recall being willing to stand up in front of the class and act something out, even though I was still essentially very shy. For me it seemed to provide a shield or alternative ego, so that when I was performing, I was not being myself, and could somehow step out of my own skin – while other more extrovert friends would say they felt embarrassed to stand up and perform in public and would find it surprising that I could do it.

I loved doing a school show like the G&S *Mikado* which we did in fifth year, and a production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that some of us were involved in. This was performed mainly by students at the teacher training college attached to our school. Although Elizabeth and I were just part of the chorus of nymphs and reapers I loved it and was happy to sit watching the actors at rehearsals, whereas Elizabeth found it less enthralling. This further awoke my fascination with acting, first ignited when I saw *Pygmalion*, and which went on to develop in a long association with amateur dramatics (bordering on obsession my family might say, but I like to think of it as healthy enthusiasm or commitment to the cause).

In my secondary years, I had fun seeing friends at weekends, mainly either Kay or Elizabeth, though I still saw a little bit of Patricia (now known as Tricia). But she was at a different school, and once we moved from Bearsden our interaction became more occasional. I was extremely fond of Kay, and hero-worshipped her slightly, but we did not see each other quite so often as I saw Elizabeth, because after my first year at Jordanhill we were set in different classes – Kay was in the middle set, while I was in the top set with Elizabeth. Also, Kay had several other friends, and a pony and she sometimes helped her parents by working at the hotel they ran just outside Glasgow, so she was a busy girl. But I loved it when I did have the opportunity of staying with her, or she was able to visit me. Kay's house was quite big, a traditional Victorian villa on Southbrae Drive, and we usually had a choice of rooms where we could stay, either twin beds in Kay's room, or snuggling up in a double bed in the spare guest room, which facilitated late night chatting.

The topic of boys and relationships would be discussed separately with both Kay and Elizabeth. Elizabeth and I were perhaps at a more similar level, as Kay had a series of long-term boyfriends throughout secondary, whereas neither Elizabeth nor I were as successful in the romance stakes – although Elizabeth had several admirers. It was no surprise that Kay had many boyfriends as she was (and is still) extremely attractive, with a warm, friendly personality. She has never been a flirt, but is one of those glowing individuals, like a shining star, who has the knack of drawing people to her, making them feel she is genuinely interested in them (which I think she is – and that of course is part of the attraction).

Elizabeth had her own charms too, reminding me a bit of Liza Minnelli, and with her short black hair and gamin face she also attracted boys, but they were not always the ones that she liked. We both tended to harbour long-term crushes over unattainable boys. For several years Elizabeth had a huge crush on a boy in an older class called John. I retained a crush on a boy called Lee with whom I had enjoyed a brief romance in my first year at Jordanhill, and I also harboured a bit of a pash on a boy called David I had met from my brother's boarding school. But despite our unrequited loves we still enjoyed discussing the prospect and merits of other boys if a party was in the offing, and I might stay with Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's house was much smaller than Kay's because it was a modern council house in Knightswood, and her parents had solid working-class roots, and had left school at an early age. Elizabeth and her sister Anne were the first in their family to go into higher education. But her father Colin had worked hard, ending up running his own garage business, and he was a delightful man. I remember enjoying having chips for tea at Elizabeth's house (a treat as my Mother didn't make chips) – either

Elizabeth's mum would fry them in the early evening "for tea" or her lovely Dad would go out later in the evening, about 9 pm, and buy chips or even a fish supper. Both Kay and Elizabeth's families followed the northern tradition of having a cooked tea around 5-5.30 pm and they initially found it rather strange when they came to my house where we followed southern customs, having English afternoon tea mid-afternoon, and then having dinner later on around 7.30 pm.

Elizabeth and I tended to see each other quite regularly, and had fun doing things like ice skating at Paisley Ice Rink; trawling clothes shops and "boutiques" in town, trying on lots of outfits (though not often buying, as our funds were limited) – going for meals at each other's homes and staying over. We would talk about boys (again); what makeup and clothes to wear – lots of fashion discussions and relationship stuff – especially if there was a disco or party coming up. It was also enjoyable hanging out together at break-time in school – huddling near the radiators in winter; in nicer weather walking to the shops to buy titbits to supplement lunch – or knitting wool (for one of my regular knitting projects).

Elizabeth had some other friends, including Grace. They had been friends since early primary school and Grace initially resented me becoming friendly with Elizabeth, which caused some friction. However, she got used to me and sometimes the 3 of us would make trips down the road to the shops at lunchtime. Grace and I even corresponded a bit after I left Jordanhill, though not as much as I did with Elizabeth and Kay. Grace ended up coming to my wedding along with Elizabeth and Kay. There was another nice girl at school called Frances with whom I got on well, but we did not manage to stay in touch. My days at Jordanhill were very happy, but they came to an end when my father decided that even a short spell at boarding school might be beneficial before I branched out to university.



Elizabeth – 1972 in Freeland House garden



Ally & Kay c.1968 in garden at Sinclair Ave



Kay & Ally c. 2004



Leslie & me with Elizabeth August 2020 – her last visit to our house at Skelmorlie, 2 months before she died.

15. Moving

Because I led such a sheltered life, and was reasonably content at school, most of my anxieties in primary and early teenage years centred around my own family, and were nebulous, as on the surface I had little to worry about. Yet as I grew older, I became aware that not everything in the garden was rosy. Colin had gone to boarding school, aged 11, while I completed my last year at Bearsden Primary and then moved to Jordanhill – still a day school, so I was perhaps more aware of some of the frictions between my parents, although later Colin would become more closely acquainted with the issues dividing them.

One of my most unsettling childhood memories is when my parents were trying to sell our Bearsden house, after I had started attending secondary school. The house had been on the market for a while and Dad suddenly decided it would help speed up the sale if he painted it, which led to a dreadful day when he fell off the ladder through the corrugated roof of the garage – luckily the roof broke his fall, but I remember him sprawled on the ground with white paint all over his face looking like a bewildered clown – but amazingly no broken bones, and particularly fortunate that he did not injure his hands which could have been disastrous for his violin-playing. It was a typical example of Dad doing something impulsive that could have ended in catastrophe, but somehow emerging virtually unscathed.

The upset over the accident was probably intensified by my awareness that my parents did not seem to be getting on so well and there was tension between them about the idea of moving – Mother being less keen than Dad. I felt the stress between them was due to other reasons, but it would be a long time before I discovered the real underlying issues, which I suspect related to Dad's first affair. Meanwhile I did my best to remain quiet and acquiescent, not wanting to exacerbate any family friction, which may partly account for why I never became a bolshie adolescent, and I tended to repress any emotional turmoil I might be experiencing myself. It sometimes felt as though I was tiptoeing across fragile china, and I needed to tread very carefully to avoid precipitating any cracks or breakages.

Thus, a couple of years after I had started secondary school at Jordanhill, my parents moved from Bearsden. Our next house in Bridge of Weir was grander than our suburban dwelling in Bearsden but Dad was earning more, and he was probably assisted by some inherited funds. Dad had told Mother he was feeling stifled by suburbia and she reluctantly agreed to the move, hoping it would improve his frame of mind. Unfortunately, Dad's discontent had deeper roots than just suburban malaise, which would become more apparent later. But I think we had our horizons broadened by the move, even though Mother missed her friends in Bearsden.



Me c.1969, outside 13 Sinclair Avenue, shortly before our move to Freeland House

However, we were only the other side of Glasgow, so we were still able to see most of our friends, even if not quite so regularly, and despite the travel complications.

Freeland House was a large stone-built Victorian house with gables (it might have been a manse) with a long tree-lined drive that ran above and alongside the railway, and it even had its own private footbridge over the railway to get down to the road! It was a small branch railway with an hourly service going in and out of Glasgow (no longer – boo hoo). The house also had a beautiful, extensive and secluded garden, which was the main reason Dad wanted to buy it. There were about a dozen different varieties of narcissus and daffodils, two lawns divided by a rose arbour; multiple shrubs and trees, many growing on steep banks that rose up to a gate onto a road high above our house. People sometimes say “*never go back*” and that is true with Freeland House. Years later Leslie & I did a cycle ride to Bridge of Weir (along the now disused railway line) and walked up the road to look at the house – only to find it had become a mini housing-estate with another house built over half the garden and had dark gloomy paintwork. It had lost the elegant and rural atmosphere of a country house that had made it such a charming residence.

However, we enjoyed several happy years there when it still felt like a pastoral idyll – though it meant my journey to school was more challenging. Jordanhill had been quite a short train-ride from Bearsden (on the old blue train, now orange). At Bridge of Weir, I had to get up before 7 am to catch a train into Glasgow Central, then trot over to Glasgow Queen Street to get another train out to Anniesland or Jordanhill, and then walk to my school. Mother would nobly get up before 7 am to make sure I had breakfast before leaving the house and would be there to greet me with tea when I got home after 5 pm. Meantime she would have been into town to do her part-time secretarial work at Yorkhill hospital.

In Freeland House, Dad set about rearranging the rooms yet again, regardless of his imminent plans to go away on sabbatical in Sheffield. He changed one bedroom into a bathroom, and he put a shower in the master bedroom – and turned the old bathroom into a model railway room! But he was perhaps restrained from doing further works because there was such a big garden and he loved gardening, so he spent a lot of time out there, and of course his multiple musical activities continued, not to mention his committee work (ESTA, ISM etc). Mother liked having a shower, but I’m not sure how keen she was on the other domestic rearrangements.

Meanwhile Mother helped me redecorate my room with wallpaper patterned in blue and green (my favourite colour combination)– she was a dab hand at decorating without Dad to distract her. In Bearsden I had been in the smallest room, but in Bridge of Weir I had a large bedroom and Colin a tiny one – but of course he was only there in the holidays. There was another bigger bedroom which he could have had, but I suppose my parents enjoyed having a proper separate guest room at last, and they did have visitors periodically. After I was married it became one of my ambitions to have a guest room – finally achieved years later when we moved to River House in Hammersmith!

Luckily Dad left the living room in Freeland House mostly untouched apart from changing the colour scheme from Wedgewood blue to white and gold, which brightened it up. He bought some rather modern furniture for it, whereas it would

probably have looked better with more antique pieces. But I am quite a traditionalist in my tastes. It was a beautiful room opening into a large bow window with an arc of window seats round it, looking out to the garden, and an elegant fireplace; the nicest room in the house, and big enough for Dad to acquire a Steinway boudoir grand piano, so he could hold the odd musical evening with chamber groups and also practise music for his Associated Board examining which was another growing commitment. To me Freeland House was like a story book house, with a gracious staircase that swept up from the hall and divided half-way up, and a variety of “ancillary” rooms such as a butler’s pantry, a sewing room and a glass covered porch by the back door. I was sorry that we only spent 5 years there, but when I was away at university Dad applied for and got the job of Principal of the Birmingham School of Music (now known as the Birmingham Conservatoire) which meant a much bigger upheaval than the move from Bearsden.

But first our move to the larger and more rural location in Bridge of Weir also resulted in us acquiring pets. Colin and I used to be frightened of dogs - both my Grannie’s pets and other more local canines. Two neighbours across the street in Bearsden had black cocker spaniels which barked a lot, and we were nervous of them. But as we grew up, we became fond of dogs, especially Labradors, and we were delighted to get our own black Labrador (crossed with a sheepdog) which I called Gelert, along with a black and white cat that Mother named Jasper. In fact, most of the family thought it would be nice to have a golden Labrador, but Dad persuaded us that black would be better so that dog hairs wouldn’t show up on his suits! Unfortunately, they showed up all too clearly on the gold carpet in the living room, condemning Mother and me to an inordinate amount of vacuum cleaning.

But Gelert was a beautiful and adorable dog. I loved having him and for the first few years I was the chief person who gave him regular walks up to the park and round the golf course at the top of the village, until I went off to university. When my sweetheart Leslie made his first visit to my family in Bridge of Weir and met Gelert he loved him too, and he taught Gelert to swim at the beach in Largs. Little did we know that many years later we ourselves would buy a house only a few miles from Largs and make trips there. After Leslie and I were married, Gelert would sometimes come to spend “holidays” with us in London when my parents were away on trips, and he lived long enough to meet our first baby, James. He was very good-natured – although I have to admit that my son James’ Hungarian Vizsla dog Micah is even more affectionate – completely sappy!

But this is straying far into the future. When Mother & Dad moved out from Bearsden, living further away gave more opportunities for sleepover visits, even though it restricted more casual visits with friends. Travelling took much longer. Kay lived right opposite our school, so we did not usually travel together, but Elizabeth and I often shared part of our journey home, keeping up with gossip not covered in our lunch-hour. Although Jordanhill Station was closer to the school, I would often choose to walk to Anniesland so that Elizabeth and I could walk together for longer, chatting about the day’s events, future plans, clothes, boys...

There were several boys at Glasgow Academy and Kelvinside Academy whom I often saw on the trains to and from school, and I thought some of them were quite fit, but my wretched shyness meant nothing much happened, or I would tie myself

in knots stuck in an embarrassing corner. There was one excruciating time in Bridge of Weir when one boy tried to ask me out at the weekend. I quite liked him, but because I just felt too shy to say yes (or was worried that my mum wouldn't let me go) I said no, we would be away at my parents' cottage - but then the weekend arrived, and I was out taking dog Gelert for a walk and who should I see in the park but the boy who'd asked me out! I was too embarrassed to attempt an explanation. I seem to recall we subsequently met at another social event like a disco and he walked me home with a bit of amorous fumbling en route, but I was awkward and inexperienced at this sort of thing. Oh the agonies of youth.

Strange how paralysed one can be as a teenager – but perhaps even stranger or more excruciating when such angst continues into adult life! One of my least favourite activities is a drinks party, particularly when I don't know anybody. I don't drink alcohol and am not keen on canapés, don't like having to make small talk, or to stand rather than sit, so the whole experience is one I would rather avoid (basically if there is no decent food on offer then my view is what's the point?)

Back in my late teens I went to one dance which was rather fun at Glasgow Academy, with a friend of my brother's, called Robert. This was just a platonic affair (though I did think he was very good-looking). He was sporty, good at rugby, quite clever and a nice guy as well as being handsome, but I never heard of him having any girlfriends. With hindsight I now wonder whether he could possibly have been gay - but perhaps he was just shy like me. Little did I know that one day I would have a grandson attending his splendid school!

Although I had acquired two close friends at secondary school, I was still quite shy. Perhaps because of my shyness and the fact that most of the time I behaved well, I was always close to my parents. This wasn't just because I "toed the line" however – there was a genuine bond of affection between us. I was not especially shy at home and could be quite extrovert indeed with my family, expressing myself in a lively and imaginative way in conversation and play. As I grew older, I became aware that my parents had flaws, and there were some upsetting times to weather, but they always gave me love and support, even if there were instances when they did not understand me. Overall, we enjoyed a warm and affectionate relationship.

My parents' view of me, I think, was that I was clever, hard-working, good-natured and well-behaved – plus sometimes clumsy, dreamy and forgetful, but also creative in art and story-writing; sometimes surprisingly good at making things. In later life they appreciated my dramatic endeavours when they came to see me act in our drama productions. I suppose their assessment was largely true. I only remember being scolded by Mother a couple of times during my childhood, and never by Dad, and can recall no real rows with them ever. This may seem strange, but being quiet and reserved in some ways, there were things going on in my head which they did not know about, and I wanted to avoid conflict if at all possible.

It was usually my brother who was more overtly naughty and had tantrums and arguments, particularly with Mother, who found it hard to be patient and would express her temper with both him and my father quite strongly. In some respects – especially when I reached my teens - I repressed some thoughts and feelings, because I was aware of tensions between my parents as well as with Colin, not to

mention the situation with Kenny. Colin and I sometimes bickered, but in our childhood it was not usually serious, and if friends remonstrated with us we would respond “*we’ll argue if we want to*”. In our teenage years we were very close, despite Colin being at boarding school, and we wrote regularly to one another, and enjoyed each other’s company in the holidays. It would only be many years later that we would have some serious fallings out.

Of course, I did not agree with my parents about everything, and they were not authoritarian by any means. Although we were genuinely close, and I was mostly contented, this level of concord was perhaps unnatural as there was an element of keeping things bottled up. Now when I have (occasional!) arguments with my husband and children I tell them they should take it as a compliment – a testament to the fact I can be honest and relax with them enough to express all my feelings, both positive and negative.

Having a husband and children can strip away the veneers of polite behaviour - sometimes even reducing one to a gibbering wreck – and unleash emotional turmoil both good and bad. But if the relationship is basically positive and strong, such expressions should be cathartic rather than negative. I know for some people it is their partner who represses them, or there may be a gulf between them and their children. I feel incredibly lucky that I have ended up in a family where we can talk about almost anything and feel close even when we have different opinions. However, I must have been reasonably content as a schoolgirl too, as I remember feeling distinctly fortunate even when I was away at boarding school or tied up in shy knots, and aware that not everyone felt so happy as I did.

Obviously, I was by no means perfect as a child any more than as an adult, and there were mishaps and irritations. A few silly incidents when I behaved badly stick in my mind, and no doubt there were more serious lapses that I have airbrushed away or buried in my sub-conscious. When quite small I had a tantrum wanting to sit in the chair where my baby brother was, and to eat his cereal – presumably a bit of sibling jealousy! I think it was the only time my mother sent me to my room. In my primary school years, I stole a ring with a pink plastic rose on it from my friend Jane across the road – my mother discovered and made me take it back with an apology. But I also took a little Disney book about Cinderella, and I must have kept that secret as I still have the book! It was one of my favourite fairy-tales, and I was fascinated by the Disney film which we never managed to see in the cinema – just tantalising extracts shown on Bank Holiday Disneytime TV.

Another deceitful incident that makes me squirm happened at primary school, when our class was split into teams, and some of us kept scores in a class quiz. I have an uneasy recollection that I increased the scores for my team, but I can’t recall if the teacher discovered my dishonesty, or whether it passed unnoticed because it was an aberration for me. So, I was not always the model child, and I wince at the memory of these petty misdemeanours – I have probably erased other unedifying incidents.

Because my parents were supportive and appreciative of me, this helped give me a strong sense of self-esteem, despite my superficially shy exterior. I am grateful that fundamentally they always made me feel worthwhile and deeply loved, giving

me a feeling of security and self-assurance, which has carried me through my life, no matter how lacking in confidence I was, or what minor humiliations and disappointments I may have experienced. This inner core of self-worth and contentment probably helped me to combat the trough of depression that assailed me many years later, so that while there were terrible days when I wished I would never wake up, I never contemplated positive self-harm or suicide.

And throughout my childhood and the first decades of my marriage and life with my own children I had a sense of contentment and fulfilment. There would be the odd times when I might hanker after something more, but in general I would remind myself of how fortunate I was. Indeed, sometimes I worried that a catastrophe might be waiting round the corner to balance out all the happiness that I had enjoyed, and I have continued to have that fear lurking in the background. My daughter Catriona has experienced the same phenomenon. I suppose it is part of the human condition to expect some sort of equality, and to think that joy and sorrow should be parcelled out in roughly equal proportions. Anyway, I felt blessed, despite the shadow of having a mentally handicapped brother and parents who were sometimes at odds – somehow those things never fully impinged on me; perhaps a tribute to how well or selflessly my parents, and particularly my mother, managed the stormy waters.



13 Sinclair Avenue, Bearsden - after we had moved, and the new residents spruced it up – think they employed professional painters unlike Louis Carus...



Freeland House, Bridge of Weir, our home 1970-1975



Gelert, our black Labrador, Mother, Colin, me (Ally), Dad at Freeland House c.1971



Gelert, (after Leslie taught him to swim at Largs 1974)

16. Vacations Abroad and Other Exploits

As we approached teenage years, and Kenny no longer accompanied us on our main family holidays, we embarked on more adventurous journeys, although we did also continue with trips to Cornwall for Dad to play at St Endellion Festival. The first foray abroad for Colin and me was in 1966, going with Mother to the USA to visit our American grandmother Granmargie in Baltimore, and to meet some of our American relations. This meant our first trip on an aeroplane. We flew from Prestwick which was the airport in Scotland where most international flights flew from at that time, and we travelled with Aer Lingus. Those were the days of BOAC and BEA, long before they had transformed into British Airways.

While we waited on the viewing platform there was a group of men in black coats, white gaiters, tall bowler hats and dark corkscrew curls or plaits hanging by their ears. This was the first time that Colin and I had encountered Orthodox Jews, and to us they looked quite sinister. We were relieved to move away from them and get on the plane. In those days, we either couldn't get a direct flight to Baltimore or else it was more expensive. We flew to New York, spent the night in a hotel and then took the train to Baltimore. I recall little about New York – I guess we just saw brief glimpses from the taxi. As so often with me, my main memory is a food one, eating an enormous slice of watermelon and getting very sticky!

Seeing our grandmother's home on Rexmere Road in Baltimore for the first time was exciting, though it was a modest suburban home, but it was crammed with ornate furnishings, and had an intriguing basement, where we played a lot (cooler). The house was owned by Mother's brother, Uncle Ted, but he was still flying in the US Airforce and was away for part of the time, so we spent most of our visit with Granmargie. She had a fascinating array of antiques and bric-a-brac, including a large collection of vintage dolls which I loved. Her living room window was adorned with rows of blue and green glass bottles. Dried branches were festooned with painted blown eggshells. Granmargie was extremely creative, always busy with knitting, crochet and sewing, especially crewel work, using coloured wool to embroider imaginative designs that she had thought up of flowers, fruit, birds and butterflies. Like me she was not always very neat but imaginative and productive. She made most of her own clothes, including several "3 arm-holed dresses" that she called "*Let me entertain you*" dresses which amused Colin and me. The dresses wrapped round the wearer with an extra sleeve section – I suppose it was meant to look like a coat on top of a dress. The irony was that Granmargie was a very modest and proper lady who would never have dreamt of doing a real striptease!

We were allowed to go to a few local shops in Baltimore with Mother, and I bought two paper doll books called *The Heavenly Blue Wedding* and *Barbie & her Little Sister* which gave me hours of pleasure when we were not visiting friends and relations. When I brought them home to the UK, I continued to have fun designing extra clothes for the dolls. Being high summer, it was hot and muggy in the US, and I took lots of cold showers to cool down. There was some form of air conditioning at Rexmere Road, but of a rather primitive nature. We were able to swim in the pools of a couple of friends, and we made a trip to Atlantic beach. Despite the hot weather the food portions were large. I usually had quite a big appetite especially

for ice cream, but even I was unable to finish an enormous banana split that we got in a café. I also recall being given “snowballs” (the American version of “slush puppies”) – crushed ice with luridly coloured flavouring – but quite refreshing in the heat. We saw our first colour TVs in American homes (also rather luridly coloured) while back in Britain everyone still had black & white sets.

The walls of 3706 Rexmere Road were covered in paintings and drawings, mostly by Granmargie, but also some by Mother who had of course been a very prolific artist when she lived in Baltimore with Margie and Ted. Seeing Granmargie’s artwork I realized where Mother got her artistic talent from. Also, I was surprised but pleased to see so many familiar photos of our family on display, 3,000 miles from our home. Uncle Ted was not of an artistic bent, but he loved nature and would go on frequent walks on woodland trails, looking at birds, plants and above all mushrooms – he is still a keen member of a Mycological Society.

Ted was flying planes for the US Airforce when we visited (I believe he flew transporters out to Vietnam), but it was not long afterwards that he retired from the forces and devoted his energies to his nature studies and to looking after Granmargie in her twilight years. Although very fond of each other the relationship could be fractious with little tiffs over various domestic issues. But although Granmargie was the one who would emerge with hurt feelings (while Ted just got a bit irritated), she fully appreciated what a loving and caring son Ted was, and he cared for her until she was well past 90, finally moving her into a Care Home. She did not get to stay long there as she broke a limb and had to go into hospital, where she died aged 99, but still amazingly clued up. Now (in 2021) Ted has passed 93, is still living at Rexmere Road and seems to have all his marbles in place! As far as I know he continues to go walking nowadays, as well as driving a car!

The USA trip when Colin and I were children was great fun, but we were pleased to return to the UK and to spend time at home back in Scotland. Strangely, although we lived in Scotland, a country with beautiful scenery, we did not spend many holidays in the Highlands. Having the cottage meant we continued to spend time in the Scottish Borders, and we explored countryside there. We did also make day trips out to Loch Lomond, Loch Katrine and the Trossachs, and up to places like Inveraray, which were enjoyable, and there was one brief trip to stay in a caravan near Arisaig. But my first trip to a Hebridean island was not till I had left school in 1973, when Dad took me and Colin up to Skye. That was the beginning of a life-long love of both the West Coast of Scotland and the Hebrides, which was to be explored more intimately with future husband Leslie.

However, in my teens there were also some exciting trips to Europe with my parents and Colin, including France, Austria, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland. We did several road tours, taking our car over by ferry, once to Holland, another time to France. I was not madly keen on the car travel, since I still suffered from travel sickness, especially in cars and buses, and there were added stresses in car travel when Mother and Dad had arguments over how the driving should be done. (Perhaps one of several reasons why I’ve never had an urge to learn to drive...) But I loved Europe, particularly Italy and Switzerland. The mountain and lake views were spectacular and the art and architecture in Florence and the Tuscany region was beautiful, even if I didn’t fully appreciate all the

scenery at the time. It was a great education in different cultures, though in my mid-teens, I confess I was more interested in seeing boys at the swimming pool than going to art galleries or looking at the countryside. But looking back, we saw some spectacular places, and I am grateful to Dad (who was the driving force in initiating these expeditions) for broadening our horizons with these mini “Grand Tours”.

On our last full family trip abroad, to Italy, we stayed in an amazing monastery in San Gimignano, a fantastic town in Tuscany with mediaeval towers and delightful little trattoria restaurants. My memory is that part of the building was a real monastery, but other rooms were also let out to visitors, possibly as part of a music summer school that Dad was involved in. The rooms were very plainly furnished like monastic cells, and I don't know whether they had any double ones for married couples! I don't think meals were provided, as we went out to local cafes and restaurants for breakfast and dinner, and we purchased picnic supplies for lunch. We could buy ripe peaches very cheaply as the Italians liked to buy them hard (presumably because they ripened quickly in the heat).

Looking back, the holiday was vaguely reminiscent of the E.M. Forster book and film *A Room with a View* (minus the romance). But I played myself opera music as I had brought a little portable record player and had a record of Mozart's opera *Idomeneo*, which we had recently heard being performed at the St Endellion festival – I suspect this was the piece that developed my taste for opera as it's the first one I recollect loving the melodies from. I had previously enjoyed operas more as stage shows, such as performances I'd seen at the RSAMD (Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama) of Britten's *Albert Herring* and *Peter Grimes*. But now I began enjoying the music of both Mozart and Puccini, as well as the baroque music I had always loved. So Handel operas would become a favourite when I discovered them.

On this holiday we went to an open-air concert in the big piazza square. I regret to say that I don't recall what music we heard – I only remember a fleeting encounter with a teenage boy who offered me a cigarette, and feeling quite tempted... But I must confess that I didn't succumb – still disappointingly straightlaced! It seemed like it might be an intriguing thing to try (especially when offered by a handsome Italian boy), but I resisted the temptation. Possibly the knowledge that my parents were close by had something to do with self-control exerting itself.

My children (especially my daughter) may think I'm boring for having never smoked or tried drugs, and hardly ever drinking alcohol. I fear that I have not succeeded in convincing them that it is not necessary to try mind-altering drugs (either legal or illegal) or to get blind-drunk to have full and exciting life-experiences. I've also tried to persuade them that I may have some vices or escapades they don't even know about, but it seems I have such a wholesome aura that they are not convinced (yet maybe they would be surprised...?). I suspect that most people have some secrets that would surprise their friends or families – and perhaps especially if they seem squeaky clean and ordinary on the outside.

Returning to our Italian vacation, poor Mother was not so keen on our trip, as although she loved Italian food and art, she hated not being able to speak or understand the language. She got very upset when we were down in the laundry-room, and she thought one of the Italian women was shouting at her not to do

something. When someone who could translate intervened, it transpired the Signora was only trying to tell her where or how to hang up her washing, but she was speaking in such a passionate flood of Italian that it sounded like she was cross. Mother found it all rather traumatic and was relieved to return home. She was glad to leave me and Dad to go on the next European jaunt on our own.

The main places Dad and I visited then were Brussels in Belgium and Amsterdam in Holland. The rationale for this trip was to introduce me to some more art since I had been accepted on a BA course to study History of Art (plus History) at London University. We saw lots of Flemish and Dutch art including Vermeer, Rembrandt and Van Gogh, but we also had fun staying in different pensions and eating out. One evening we went round a fairground which seemed very pretty and romantic at night-time with all the coloured illuminations, but I suppose it would probably have looked a bit tawdry in the daylight. It turned out to be a very enjoyable and special holiday – probably the last major trip I would make as an unattached, innocent daughter and the longest time I spent on my own with my Dad. A few months later I went away to university, met Leslie and embarked on a new chapter in my life.

However, when I was a teenager, I was not always so sensible, if I was away from my family, and I had a few exploits which could have turned out disastrously. So, I try not to be too judgmental or shocked when I hear about either my kids or my friends' children doing ill-advised things. I had a slightly crazy time when I spent a few weeks waitressing, aged 17, in the summer holidays, at a hotel in the Lake District, near Kendal, my first job. The owners were Christian Scientists, and it was a quiet, respectable country hotel, so I expect my parents thought I would be quite safe, but there were some unexpected hazards.

I was a well-behaved waitress in the daytime, earning tips, and the only mistake I think I made was starting to throw away some after-dinner coffee – the lady who owned the hotel rushed to stop me, telling me we needed to keep it to reheat it for the next meal. Long before the days of cappuccino machines and Nespresso. One family who were very appreciative of me had a young son, about 5 years old, who developed a little crush on me, and I was presented with a daisy chain and a fond note from him as well as a tip at the end of their stay, which was quite gratifying. But extra-curricular activities were not quite so innocent.

I shared my room with a local girl called Kath who was also waitressing. In theory she was engaged to be married, but her behaviour was wild and uninhibited, and I was rather fascinated by her, so it's lucky there weren't many opportunities in Kendal for outrageous activities. Deep down I realised we were very different people, but I guess I was at the stage of looking for a thrill – especially if it involved "getting off with a boy". Kath took me off to the discotheque in Kendal, where we met two young men who asked us to go back to their hotel with them. I was such an innocent abroad that I genuinely didn't think this through. All I remember is that my guy was quite good looking with a moustache, and I don't even recall his name. I was somewhat horrified to find myself back in the guys' twin-bedded hotel room with Kath and her gentleman friend having energetic sex on their bed and me fighting off Mr Moustache. He was quite drunk, but luckily for me it was sleepy drunk rather than aggressive drunk, and he finally nodded off after accepting my limp excuses about wanting to wait for a special guy.

Unheeding of this salutary experience I returned to the disco in Kendal the following week, and this time agreed to take a ride home on the back of a motorbike with a boy I'd just met, which could have been even more perilous, ending in a) me being killed if we'd had an accident on the dual carriageway or b) me letting myself in for another potential rape experience when we fooled around on the lawn before I went back into the hotel. But yet again a guardian angel must have been watching over me, and I emerged pretty much unscathed from my foolhardy behaviour. The funny thing is that when we visited the hotel sometime later, I learned that Kath had indeed got married and was apparently still with her husband – I couldn't help wondering whether it would last and whether he knew about her escapades!

There were a few other risky moments in my teenage years, though thankfully less sordid. One exciting memory when I was still at Jordanhill (probably foolhardy in retrospect) when I was around 16 or 17 was climbing Ben Lomond overnight with my friend Kay and 2 older boys from our school, called David R & Gordon M. Kay was popular with boys. She had shiny dark brown hair, a lovely smile, slim figure, was very sporty and had a warm, outgoing personality, and to me she seemed completely gorgeous. Over the years, she had several boyfriends from older classes. But this trip was not a romantic outing – Kay was just platonic friends with the boys (though she and David R became closer friends later on).

This was just a friendly expedition, but rather thrilling, though a bit scary since I had very little experience of hill walking and none in the dark. My mother would have been horrified if she had known what I was doing, and I suppose it was potentially as dangerous as riding pillion on a motorbike. But I was staying overnight with Kay, and her parents did not seem to be too perturbed at the prospective outing when we drove out to their pub to tell them about the planned exploit. The boys had done the climb before and were quite sensible. They were old enough to drive us out there to the foot of the mountain, and I think we provided a picnic breakfast to have after the climb.

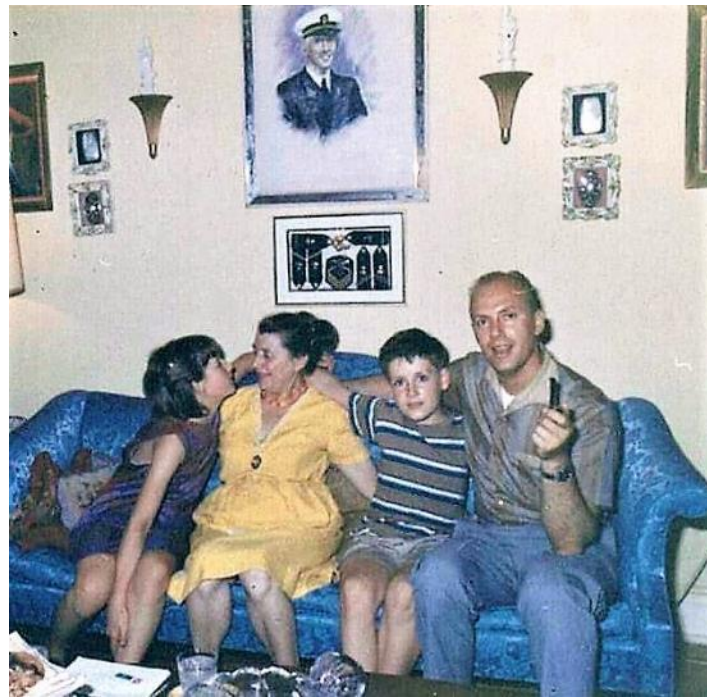
It must have been a moonlit night, but possibly with intermittent cloud since I did begin to feel a few qualms as we were stumbling along in the dark, and for some reason I began to imagine men with shotguns appearing to shoot us, though that was probably the least likely danger! Falling down a hole and breaking a leg was a much likelier hazard. Nevertheless, we reached the top safely. The dawn was a bit cold and grey, but the view was stunning, worth the effort and my slightly anxious qualms, which I did my best to keep hidden.

Other memorable experiences occurred on a youth hostelling holiday I shared with friend Elizabeth and her older sister Anne in Scotland. There was the time I peed my pants when we were on our way out from Oban Hostel. Anne said or did something amusing, and I laughed so much I wet myself. There were a few other disconcerting events on our hostelling holiday – such as the night we were locked out of Aviemore Hostel because we stayed late at a disco and so the 3 of us (Elizabeth, Anne and me) went back with 2 boys we'd met at the disco to stay in their very ramshackle cottage – not sure if they were squatting there. I think the 5 of us all slept squashed together in one double bed (as far as I was aware sleeping

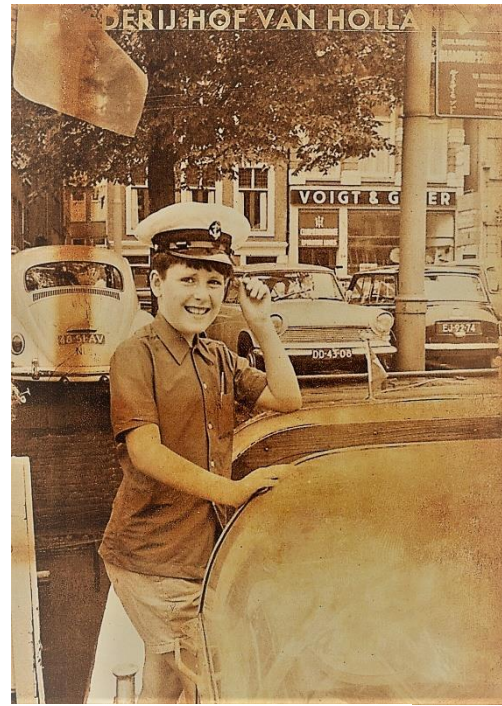
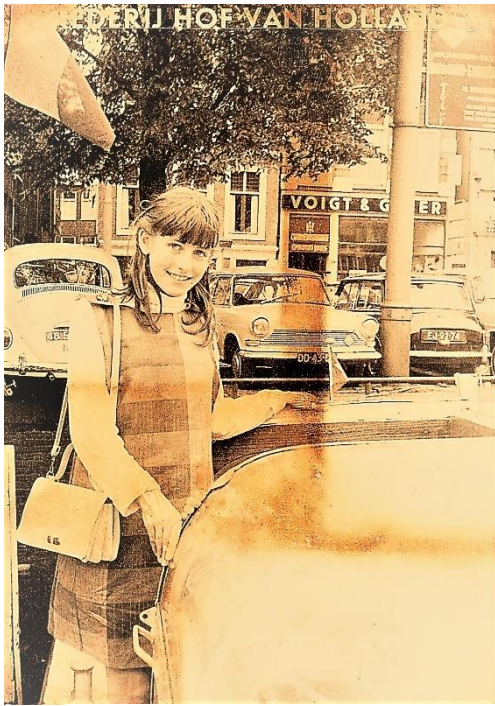
was all that went on – or not as it was not exactly comfortable!) The warden of the hostel was cross when we returned for our stuff in the morning – I am not sure if we mollified him by doing our jobs! Those were the days when you had to do tasks in the morning at a hostel before leaving such as cleaning loos or sweeping floors, and there were quite strict rules about curfews.

It was a rather strange hostelling holiday because we were in Anne & Elizabeth's car rather than bikes or train or walking. I only got into the real serious hostelling experience later, when doing cycling holidays with husband Leslie. I could not drive, and my main function seemed to be to keep the peace between Elizabeth and Anne – they were close, but like many siblings they bickered a lot. Either Elizabeth or Anne got fed up with the basic comforts provided in hostels, so we ended up spending one night in a hotel up in the far north-east of Scotland – Dornoch I think – a far cry from the fairly primitive hostels at Aviemore and Garelochhead where we'd started off!

Maybe it was a reaction to an unfortunate experience that Elizabeth had when we went on an afternoon pony-trekking – or rather Anne & I went, because Elizabeth felt so unnerved by her lively horse that she dismounted and stayed behind. But when we returned from the trek after a few hours she had suffered a horrible allergic reaction (presumably to the horsehair, even though she had not been mounted for long) and her face and eyes had swollen up, so we had to go off in search of a chemist and antihistamine. Later on, it turned out that cats brought on a similar though less drastic reaction, so when she visited me at home she would be plagued by sneezing and runny eyes because of our cat Jasper. But apart from those glitches it was a fun holiday and remarkably innocent.



*Ally, Granmargie, Colin, Uncle Ted – our first visit to the USA 1966.
At 3706 Rexmere Rd, Baltimore, USA (Ted & Margie's house) – the
pictures include Nancy's portrait of Ted c.1950.*



*Ally & Colin boarding canal boat in Amsterdam, 1967, our first trip to Europe.
Photos taken by street photographer.*



Nancy, Ally, Colin, Louis at St Endellion, Cornwall c.1968



Ally & Colin on Skye July 1973—first trip to the Hebrides. I had just left school.



My Upper Sixth class at Casterton School (1972-73) I am the one with pigtails!



Me dressed as my 3 x Great Grandfather William Carus-Wilson who founded Casterton School (originally Cowan Bridge in Charlotte Brontë 's time)- 150th Anniversary Pageant 1973

17. Boarding School

Before I reached university or acquired a proper boyfriend, or extended my holidays, my school life took a different turn for my last year of sixth form. I gained a crop of good grades in O levels and Scottish Highers at Jordanhill (mostly A's, mainly in the Humanities as science was not my strong point). I then went away in 1972 to spend one year at a boarding school called Casterton in Westmorland (now Cumbria) near Kirkby Lonsdale, doing 2 A levels in English and in History, plus an Art O level. This was Dad's idea, believing it would give me a better chance of going to an English university, which I think he thought would broaden my outlook (or maybe he just wanted to refine the edges of my Scottish accent!).



Mother & me in Kirkby Lonsdale – me in my Casterton uniform (surprised they let me have such a short skirt!) 1972

Casterton was the school in Westmorland which had been founded by my Great-great-great Grandfather the Revd William Carus-Wilson (originally at nearby Cowan Bridge) and was attended by the Brontë sisters. Revd William was the model for the notorious Mr Brocklehurst in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, which was perhaps not a good recommendation, although I guess he was forward-thinking in providing any sort of education for girls. But Charlotte had bitter memories as one of her sisters died at the school, no doubt inspiring the episode in her book when Jane's friend Helen Burns dies of consumption.

Because of our family connection with Casterton, my parents were given a discount on the fees (Dad always loved a bargain) and the school was keen to have me there that year as they were celebrating their 150th anniversary – I had the dubious honour of playing my grandfather in a pageant held to celebrate the anniversary. The name Carus-Wilson came about because William's grandfather William Carus married an heiress Elizabeth Wilson on condition that he added the name Wilson to Carus. Thus, when Dad decided to drop the "Wilson" centuries later he was reverting to the original male name. Carus was such an awkward name to get spelt right that I was quite pleased to become Du Cane instead when I married Leslie (though that name has its own challenges). We had innumerable permutations of Carus over the years – the worst probably being when Dad got a letter addressed to Mr Carcass.

Part of me was really sorry to leave Jordanhill as I had been so happy there, and I was especially sad to be going away from my best friends Kay and Elizabeth, as well as getting homesick. But I was also quite excited at the prospect of being away somewhere different, and getting a little bit of boarding school experience, which I had read about so often in stories by Enid Blyton and other authors. Of course, it was not exactly like the storybooks!

There were only 12 of us in the Upper Sixth, so although I had no special friend and most of the others had known each other longer, it was not too overwhelming, and it was fairly civilised. The girls were pleasant, and we were all quite friendly with each other. There were two other new girls, a buxom American girl called Hope, with long fair hair and little round “John Lennon” style glasses, along with a slim black girl called Sulola, known as Slo. Slo liked to shock people and would make remarks such as claiming she fantasised about being raped, which seemed either crazy or untrue – I presumed it must be a form of attention-seeking or just trying to shock us, and I found her rather disconcerting. I guess she was trying to hold her own being one of the only black pupils in the school. According to Hope’s stories she had acquired more actual sexual or physical experience with boys and some other girls claimed to have had “interactions” with boys when back home. So, although theoretically we were in a more sheltered environment than my Jordanhill friends, it seemed like a few of them had packed some wilder experiences in at home. I did not have much to contribute to these conversations...

Most of the girls were called by their last name or had a nickname, so I was known either as “Carus” or perhaps predictably “Haggis”, due to my Scottish origins. Come the Burns Supper I had to recite the Burns poem “To a haggis” much to my embarrassment – I would not have minded doing proper acting but reading out what I thought of as a rather hackneyed poem was unappealing. [*Over the years I have come to appreciate my Scottish heritage more, including the Burns Supper tradition, but I am still not a fan of the long speeches that sometimes accompany these occasions. Ceilidh dancing seems like a more fun way to party.*]

One enjoyable aspect of Casterton was that the countryside round the school was beautiful (nestling between the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales). Being in the Sixth Form we had more freedom than the younger girls and were allowed to go out for walks unsupervised – I think there had to be a minimum of two. On Saturday mornings, a group of us would walk to the nearby market town of Kirkby Lonsdale and go to a café for beans on toast – highlight of the week! Occasionally a few of us walked further to the hamlet of Barbon and into the Barbon Inn where you could get a delicious tea (a popular activity with me of course). Several of my ancestors are buried in the churchyard at Kirkby Lonsdale but I was not going to show off their tombstones to my school pals! Occasionally we made trips heading into the countryside like a swimming expedition to the Lune River where we plunged in the water in our bra and pants (unbeknownst to our teachers I suspect).

I was still not much good at sport, but I did enjoy using the school swimming pool and I also discovered the joys – and perils - of trampolining. Suffice it to say that my weak pelvic floor pre-dates pregnancy. I also indulged in the pleasures of watching cricket on tv – in the Upper Sixth we were allowed to watch tv in our common room, and one of the Deputy Head girls, Sarah B, was mad on cricket. I had learnt the basics of the sport from my brother so was able to appreciate a few of the finer points of the game during Test Match season. Tennis was also popular during Wimbledon, and I had learnt the rules of this game when Mother used to watch it – she was keen on Billie Jean King and Rod Laver, but would get infuriated or depressed if the player she was supporting was losing, so it was not always very relaxing watching games with her.

Many of the Casterton girls lived in the north of England, so it was quite easy for their parents to visit them for weekend exeats, but as mine were further away I did not have many visits and certainly appreciated them when Mother and Dad managed to come down. I recall one perhaps surprisingly altruistic gesture I made when one such trip was planned. There was a rather unusual ginger-haired girl in the form below called Ellen who came from abroad (possibly Scandinavia?), so she had even fewer family visits than I did. Although I did not know her well, I suggested to my parents that we took her out with us; perhaps one of my first experiences of being prompted by my conscience or some force outside myself to show kindness to another, as we were not really friends, and I don't think there was much other contact between us apart from this outing.

I had been keeping a diary for several years by the time I went to Casterton. The entries for when I was away show I was reasonably contented, even though I didn't like Casterton as much as Jordanhill (and the academic standard was certainly less good – I found myself top of my form whereas I had been nearer the middle of the top class at Jordanhill). A lot of my diary entries focus on food eaten, essays written, tv and films watched, relationships with other girls and letters to and from home, all mostly domestic and introspective. However, there is the occasional entry which shows I sometimes paid a nod to world affairs – for instance in January 1973 I wrote *“It's marvellous – peace in Vietnam seems imminent! I hope it goes through all right and they get all the U.S. soldiers out soon”*. Being half-American I perhaps had a more personal interest in this issue. In earlier years when I was at the height of a crush on Davy Jones (in The Monkees pop group) I can remember saying prayers that he would not be sent to war!

For me, the worst aspect of being at Casterton was that in the Upper Sixth we were all either prefects or assistant prefects and had to take turns at supervising prep for either Lower or Upper Fifth form girls. This was the hour in the week that I dreaded and hated, as I felt I had no authority and was unable to control the class when some of them were misbehaving. I was sure when some of them asked to go to the loo that they were sneaking off for a quick smoke, but I lacked any commanding presence to confront them about this. The experience gave me a hint that I would not be a good teacher – an opinion reinforced years later when I tried being a Sunday Schoolteacher at our church, and I suffered a similar lack of authority over some boisterous wee boys (who probably included one of my sons).

One of the naughty girls in the Fifth form class became ill when she was on a trip home, and to our shock she died. We were told it was some sort of bronchial or pneumonic infection. I think this was my first experience of knowing someone young who died. Also, strangely, another of the naughty girls in Upper Fifth exerted a weird fascination over me. She was not at all pretty but there was something about her that I found magnetic, and I was terrified she might realize this! In retrospect I suppose there must have been some sort of sexual element involved, but it was not a sensation that occurred again once I was back in unisex surroundings. Apart from this unsettling feeling I remained interested in boys and assorted male popstars and film actors; however, there was obviously very little opportunity for pursuing such yearnings at school, which no doubt accounted for some of us developing crushes on other girls.

The girls at Casterton seemed more obsessed with sex and boys than the pupils at Jordanhill; probably because of living in such a cloistered atmosphere as an all-girls school. We would listen avidly to any tales of romantic or erotic adventures that had occurred outside school. Some of the girls had boyfriends at home, and we once went to a dance with a nearby boys' school – I wrote in slight disappointment in my diary that I was the only girl in my class who did not get off with someone!

However, I also maintained I wouldn't have wanted to get off with most of the boys. And I did dance a lot. I think I was happy to dance in a group of girls or on my own – one of the advantages of modern "disco" dancing being that it is so informal and doesn't require a partner and I have always loved the freedom to do my own thing on the dance floor (to my children's embarrassment on the occasions we've been at parties together in more recent times!) Despite my shyness and minimal success in the popularity stakes I felt sustained by an inner core of contentment and self-worth, and in some indefinable quiet way I remained a free spirit. This was perhaps observed by my classmate Hope, as I have a memory of her saying she would like to be me, and she had perhaps the most experience of life having come from abroad to the school.



*Me, Ally, aged 18, just after leaving school, 1973 –
about the only picture of my profile that I like!*



Westfield College – Principal’s house (classical façade) and red brick entrance to quadrangle where Orchard, Lady Chapman and Maynard Halls of Residence were, where I lived 1973-76



Back of Maynard and back of Principal’s house Westfield College – photo taken before tennis court became the Principal’s garden.



The former Westfield College Chapel – now a domestic residence

18. Romance and University

The awakening of my romantic life began back in primary school. I had a big crush on a boy called Gordon Ewan in Primary 7 at Bearsden Primary, but that was just worship from afar. Gordon was vaguely reminiscent of Paul McCartney who was my pop idol. This crush gave me an abiding fondness for the name Gordon, eventually calling my second son that. My first “official” (if fairly short-lived) boyfriend was called Lee Johnson, whom I met when I reached secondary school, moving to Jordanhill when I was 12 heading for teens. It is a minor and amusing coincidence that my true sweetheart and husband was to have the first initials LJ, standing for Leslie John... (like a strange variation of Lee Johnson). I liked both Gordon and Lee mainly because they were dark and handsome, and they seemed quite nice boys, but I didn’t actually know what they were like as people.



The former Odeon Cinema in Anniesland where I had my first date.

I was only Lee’s “girlfriend” for a short while, though I nursed a crush on him for years (which didn’t stop me fancying a few other interesting prospects given the power of teenage hormones). Lee was a keen golfer and one of the few things I remember about him was that he got a “hole in one” on his local golf course which resulted in him making a brief appearance on local TV. I think he may have gone on to become a golfing professional, but we didn’t keep in touch.

This brief relationship resulted in one of the few lies I told my parents (shock horror!) - I said I was going to the cinema with just my girlfriend Kay, when we were actually going with boys, me with Lee and Kay with a boy called Niall, at the Odeon Cinema in Anniesland, long gone, sadly. I don’t even know what film we saw except for the fact there was a “B” movie as well as the main feature. We were more interested in kissing and cuddling in the back stalls, though this was quite tentative and harmless. I felt guilty about lying to my mother but I’m not sure I ever confessed! More kissing ensued at a party at Kay’s house which was fun but also quite innocent, and came shortly after I’d received several Valentines, not just from Lee but other boys in my class! This was tremendously exciting and resulted in the highest number of Valentines I have received in my entire life.

Husband Leslie is romantic, but reluctant to obey the dictates of the greetings card manufacturers (particularly regarding Fathers’ Day, which he describes as “*completely bogus*”!). But back in my schooldays I had fun sending a few Valentines as well as receiving them; funnily enough I even chose them with my mother, so it was all very innocent. For a while Lee accompanied me going home on the blue train (I fancy he lived in Milngavie, 2 stops after Bearsden) but I feared the writing was on the wall when he started staying after school to play football. I knew the end had come when he came to the station but began spending time with a pretty blonde girl from another school with a purple uniform, which I hankered after

(the uniform, not the blonde), thinking it was more attractive than our brown Jordanhill garb!

I also had rather a hopeless crush on a boy called David Shortt whom I met at parents' weekends when we were visiting my brother Colin at his boarding school Bootham in York. He was in the year above Colin, but for some reason I think perhaps his mother knew my parents, and our families went out on a couple of trips together on Exeat days. He seemed to reciprocate the feelings - oh the thrill of sharing a front seat in the car snuggled up together as Dad drove the family off to see a stately home or garden! (Health & Safety would of course preclude such pleasures nowadays.) But opportunities for seeing each other were obviously extremely limited as the boys did not get many Exeat weekends, so this romance was doomed to failure before it began. However, Colin said he enjoyed the benefit of more considerate treatment from David thereafter! I enjoyed one or two other brief skirmishes with boys at parties and discotheques, but nothing serious, partly because I was soon living far away from school and friends, and I was shy and awkward, so I found it hard to respond if advances were made to me.

So, my first true love was - and indeed is the love of my life - Leslie John Du Cane, whom I met on my first day at university, and whom I married as soon as I graduated and, perhaps amazingly, we are still together, over 40 years later. He may not be outstandingly good-looking now, but I maintain he looked like Brad Pitt when I met him - I can't think why the children laugh when I say this. Even my mother used to say he looked like Robert Redford! He was of course a lot slimmer in those days - and had more hair, brown rather than silver, and mostly on his head rather than coming out of ears, nose and eyebrows as tends to happen nowadays.

Leslie has always had a warm and engaging personality. He is easy to talk to, or perhaps I should say easy to talk - it's often hard to get a word in edgeways as he talks so much - a Scottish friend commented "*Och Leslie you're an awful bletherer*". But he can also be a good listener and he is passionate, generous, imaginative, and kind-hearted; full of philosophical and poetic ideas, romantic but also a bit of a charmer and with the much-prized GSOH that is almost a prerequisite on dating sites - so just the kind of guy to ensnare an innocent and inexperienced fresher such as myself. Later I discovered he can also (occasionally) be obsessive, moody or grumpy and eats too much junk food, but nothing that has been a real deal-breaker. Almost the best thing from my point of view is that Leslie is very good with children, even though he didn't originally think he wanted children - but I was pretty sure I knew better on this issue. [*No, I didn't think I could change him; I just saw the potential lurking under the surface which he had not realised!*]

Although some may find it hard to believe now, Leslie was very sporty and fit when I first met him. He'd won gymnastic competitions up to county level and got cups for other sports when he was at boarding school. At university, he was captain of the squash club, and a high-diving star - we sometimes went swimming at a nearby pool and I would watch him diving off a high board. His sporting prowess is not so obvious now, as we both need to shed a few pounds, and Leslie is rather too fond of products from Greggs Bakery, as well as crisps, chocolate biscuits, ice cream, alcohol etc! I am afraid several resemblances between him and Homer Simpson have developed, although Leslie is a bit more intellectual.

I cannot cast too many stones since, although I have no interest in drinking alcohol, I am all too keen on eating cakes and ice-cream. Leslie, in contrast to Homer Simpson, has many interests that stimulate his brain, including architecture, history and genealogy. When talking or writing about these interests he likes to use fancy words and Latin terms – some quite obscure, and these leanings towards pomposity (“surely everyone knows what *nem con* means?”) led to our daughter’s boyfriend giving him the nickname “*Inter Alia*”. Leslie is the guy watching University Challenge yelling out answers if he knows them (usually more often than I do even though I got the 2:1 degree and Leslie scraped a pass).

Leslie still likes cycling and open water swimming which theoretically should help improve his fitness – but like some of his correspondence, his sporting programme can be sporadic. However, at the time of trying to complete these memoirs in 2021 Leslie has undergone a new regime of health and fitness, swimming in the river almost daily and losing enough weight to leave his trousers in danger of falling down without a belt reining them in! It is fortunate that we’ve moved into a house by the River Thames, with a handy set of steps giving access into the water, which has led to us both taking a bit more aquatic exercise. Leslie has now set his sights on some longer swims which should assist the fitness programme even further.

When I first met Leslie at Westfield College (part of London University then) he was studying mathematics, but he was also interested in art & literature – especially poetry and he ended up doing a unit studying Keats. On learning I was studying art history his opening gambit was to offer to take me to see the Turners in the Tate Gallery. He showed me his “commonplace book” with quotes he had collected from various poems and books like Scott Fitzgerald, which seemed very romantic to an impressionable 18-year-old female like myself, and I immediately started making my own commonplace collection. I also approved of most of his taste in music. He had lots of LPs by bands like Pink Floyd, the Beatles and Mike Oldfield which I thought were brilliant. I was less keen on his Moody Blues and whimsical Bo Hanson discs. But overall, we found we had lots in common even though I couldn’t match his sporting skills. I was willing to have a go at cycling, swimming and walking but my speed and technique could never match his.

It is partly due to church that I met Leslie - or at least the university chaplaincy. As he was a second-year Maths student I might not otherwise have entered his orbit. I had maintained a low-level interest in religion and Christianity throughout my youth, and when I saw there were services in the College Chapel I felt drawn to go along. I suppose I thought it might provide a link to home since I had attended church with my parents quite often, and I enjoyed exploring a spiritual dimension to life. The Chapel was a sweet little building on campus, beside the garden of the Principal’s house, and there was a nice traditional chaplain in my first year called Michael, who was approaching retirement. He was followed by a younger “trendier” but also nice chaplain called Geoff. Ecumenical services were held in the Chapel, led by the chaplain, but the format was generally familiar to someone like myself, who was used to either Episcopal or Anglican worship, although I had also attended many Presbyterian Church of Scotland services at Jordanhill.

During Freshers’ Week there was an array of stalls for clubs and societies. Leslie was an active member of the Squash Society but as I was not very sporty, I headed

to enlist in the Choral Society and Folk Club, and I also noticed the “Christian Community”. This formed the ecumenical congregation at the Chapel but was separate from the more evangelical “Christian Union”, which for some mysterious reason did not attend the chapel services, although there was some interaction between the two groups. Anyway, the CC seemed to me a more liberal and tolerant organisation that was more to my taste than the muscular CU. I became a keen participant in the Choral Society and the CC but never found time to get involved in the Folk Club – a pity really since Leslie and I have become very keen on Celtic folk music over the years, and now love attending festivals like *Ceol Cholasa*, not to mention other concerts by favourite artists such as Runrig, Breabach, Capercaillie, Karine Polwart, Lau and Talisk. But even at university there is only so much time available for extracurricular activities, and CC provided a philosophical foil to the melodious focus of the Choral Society.

At the first service I attended, I met a few girls who were 2nd year students, who lived in the same hall of residence as me, and they invited me back for coffee in Ruth’s room. Leslie bounced in, Tigger fashion. He was starting a “home group” with a girl called Jane as part of the CC activities. Perhaps “room group” would be more accurate since the meetings were held in Jane’s room. So, in addition to suggesting we go look at Turner paintings he also invited me to this “home-group”. I decided to say yes as he seemed quite attractive (though I was also amused by his wide-ranging chat and described him as a “*walking encyclopaedia*” in a letter home. So “*plus ça change*” the children might say!). There was the added incentive of food – the format was an “*Agape Lunch*” where we met to eat bread and cheese plus coffee or tea, and we discussed a bible passage or book. This might not sound exciting, but discussions were wide-ranging, and the group provided a forum for different views aired in a stimulating yet comfortable atmosphere, so I enjoyed attending. All that was fine; but in terms of a relationship developing between me and Leslie, the situation was more complicated.

In between attending art lectures, seminars and tutorials I found I was seeing quite a lot of Leslie what with going to his group, looking at Turners with him, and having him call by my room on various occasions asking if he could leave his briefcase and call back later for it! He lived in digs outside college so that was his excuse for leaving the “hostage” – perhaps when he was going off to play squash or some other activity. But after a few weeks his friend Jane asked, “*Leslie have you told Alison about Jan?*” It transpired that Leslie was technically in a relationship with a girl called Jan, who had been at Westfield but gone off to do a PhD at York University, and she thought that she and Leslie were still an item. Jane had been one of Jan’s best friends and she was now doing a PhD at Westfield.

This was all news to me, but I was prepared to accept that Leslie and I should just be platonic friends. However, Leslie decided (after much agonising) that he had to break it off with Jan, and he did this when she came down for a visit. Matters should then have been simpler, but no sooner did Jan return to York than Leslie began having second thoughts, discussing his ambivalent feelings with me, and making remarks like “*I could have married that girl*”. So, by the end of term I had decided I should move on and develop other relationships. But on returning to university Leslie seemed to have undergone a bit of a Damascus Road experience,

as there was no more talk of other girlfriends, and he began pursuing me with an ardent passion which continued virtually unabated until long after we were married.

There had been a further complication in all this University Love Island carry on. Leslie shared his digs with a rugby playing student called Dave. I initially became friends with them both, but knew I found Leslie more attractive. However, Leslie took a wicked delight in telling me that Dave had a crush on me and wanted to ask me out – but being shy this would take a while! I was uncomfortable about this awkward situation, and when Dave finally asked me out to a restaurant, I thought I had better say no since I knew I did not fancy him, though it pained me to miss the chance of a meal out! He was a nice chap, and I did not want him wasting his money on a relationship going nowhere, but perhaps I had too many scruples?

So although I made other friends, my most significant relationship throughout university was with Leslie, and we had a happy, carefree time - or at least Leslie did since he did the minimum of work, ending up with a pass degree. I was more diligent and got periodically distracted by lectures, essays and exam revision. Although we liked socialising; sometimes in the bar, dancing at discos, hosting ad hoc supper parties at Leslie's digs, or going to films in the college hall (even an all-night horror session once which I would not contemplate now!), we also enjoyed attending services in the College Chapel and we got on well with the new chaplain Geoff – and Leslie was also quite taken with Geoff's attractive wife Gaye.

Geoff was handsome with an appealing personality, and we suspected that several of the female students had a bit of a crush on him. We also surmised that Geoff was quite flattered by their attentions, and that Gaye was perhaps in danger of being sidelined. Thus, when it came to Valentine's Day, we decided Leslie should play a joke, sending a card to Gaye that just said I FANCY YOU. They both may have been puzzled by this, and I'm not sure that we ever confessed who the sender was. But I hope Gaye was flattered to have an anonymous admirer!

Another enjoyable aspect of CC life was going on occasional weekend retreats – often in the country. The most memorable ones were at Micklepage, an ancient farmhouse with a delightful old kitchen complete with Aga stove and a big wooden table where we shared communal meals. Usually up to a dozen of us went. My memory is hazy about the details, but I think we had a theme and sessions looking at the bible or a book, plus country walks and a trip to the village pub.

But life did not just revolve around church activities. Soon after I met Leslie, he introduced me to some of his more hedonistic relations. He had a cousin who lived in a posh Knightsbridge flat. He had moved around quite a bit as he went through several wives and their money as well as his own, becoming bankrupt at one stage, but despite that he always seemed to avoid having to work for a living.

Anyway, he invited us over for dinner with himself and his current wife (a model and actress who had been one of the second-tier Bond girls!). Unusually for me, I don't recall the food, though it was probably tasty, but I do remember Leslie's cousin giving him lots of wine, followed by a large glass of Calvados and an even larger cigar to smoke. Although Leslie failed to finish the cigar, he was looking quite green at the gills by the time we departed in the wee small hours to stagger back to college! We walked all the way back to Hampstead which perhaps helped

to sober Leslie up a bit. This was the beginning of quite a social life for me at university – however I still managed to graduate with a 2:1 Joint Honours being a conscientious student, however besotted.

Westfield College flourished for over 100 years from 1882, but sadly the Hampstead campus was closed and sold in 1989, for the dreaded “property development” – a hazard of having buildings in too fashionable an area. The college was amalgamated with Queen Mary College in East London. A similar fate befell Queen Elizabeth College in Kensington, where I had an early secretarial job before starting a family. Both QEC and Westfield had a charming, leafy campus with fine 19th (and possibly 18th century?) buildings. The centrepiece of Westfield was the classical Greek style house that had been the heart of the college when it began, but which had been taken over by the Principal to be his home by the time Leslie and I were at Westfield. The buildings adjoining the Principal’s house formed an attractive quadrangle of residential halls where I lived for 3 years.

One feature of Westfield was the high proportion of residential accommodation, creating a lively social life round the campus. I started off in the rather uninspiring modern block New Orchard – not sure how Leslie and I squeezed into that narrow single bed... But after that I was in more spacious rooms in the two older wings, Lady Chapman, followed by Maynard. There were other modern “high-rise” residential blocks, some even with twin rooms, but I escaped that fate. A year of sharing a room at boarding school had been enough for me, and I was relieved to have my own space however tiny. Compared to contemporary university residences it seems basic – no en suite (though my final room had the luxury of a washbasin!). The showers and bathrooms were quite spartan, as was the kitchen area. There was a solitary payphone at the end of the corridor – this was long before mobile phones of course. But I didn’t really like talking on the phone anyway, and my main method of communication with family and friends continued to be letters.

My final room in Maynard was the other side from the quadrangle courtyard, looking over the garden of the Principal’s house, and the path that ran along to the Chapel. That too has been sold and converted into a house. I am surprised it was big enough, as in my memory it was quite a cosy space. We used to stand or sit in a circle for services. It looks like the halls where I resided are still used as university accommodation. But the refectory canteen where we ate, along with the student common room bar and “disco” gallery were all in a nondescript modern building. They have been razed to the ground and replaced by a smarter edifice.

I’m afraid I don’t think I took any photos at university, which seems incredible now in this age of mobile phones and digital cameras. A friend took a few party shots. I had a basic camera that I used on vacation, but not in term time. The only photos I can find online so far either date back to the early days of the College, or are modern, following the conversion to residential use. No use going back to revive memories, but in my mind’s eye I can still see myself collecting post from pigeonholes in the reception area; drinking tonic water in the bar; dancing in the gallery to Santana *Black Magic Woman*; sitting in the Refectory discussing with Leslie how great *Tubular Bells* and *Dark Side of the Moon* were and going back to his shabby digs in Cricklewood to listen to the albums. “*The past is a foreign country*” as L.P. Hartley wrote, yet it is still in the recesses of my head.

Westfield Days - Romance blossoms for Ally & Leslie at university in 1974



Ally wearing silver cross Leslie gave me, and my black velvet party dress plus choker. The dress was another bargain basement purchase-£10!



Alison & Leslie at university party



Ally 1974 – wearing first dress I bought myself with my waitress earnings – one of the first photos Leslie took of me.



Ally on ferry to Isle of Wight 1974- on an early trip to Leslie's New Forest home



Ally in Glasgow Botanic Gardens 1974



Leslie in Glasgow Botanic Gardens – Mr Cool



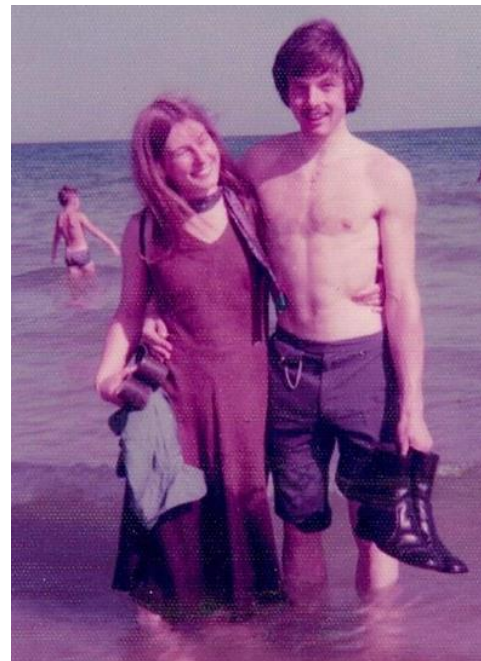
Leslie & Gelert Freeland House garden 1974



Ally & Gelert 1974



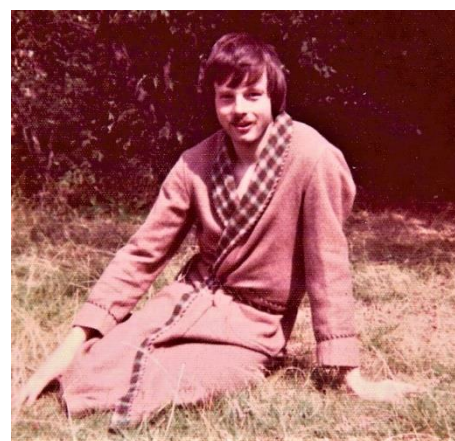
Leslie at cottage on honeymoon 1976



Leslie & Alison – Bournemouth c.1977 Yes he used to have a six -pack! And that moustache is shades of Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid.

19. Leslie & Courting Days

Leslie was born Leslie John Du Cane on 12 March 1954, a year older than me. In some ways, he had a more stable childhood than I did, in that his parents had a very solid marriage and they always lived in the same place, a pretty thatched cottage in the New Forest. But in other respects, his life was more insecure because he was sent away to public school aged only 8, first a prep school called Sandroyd in Wiltshire, followed by Winchester, and he had a tricky relationship with his father.



Leslie at Broadlands Ave our first home, 1976. His old school dressing gown appeared in a few plays, but sadly the moths got it in the end.

Although his schooldays were not as traumatic as some, I think he found the experience of being sent away to school upsetting, particularly prep school. He says he built up a protective mental shell like a wall as a coping mechanism, which meant he was less close to his parents than I was to mine, despite being deeply fond of his mother Rosamund. I expect his parents thought they were doing the best for him – even though his father Tony was unhappy at his boarding school Lancing! They still had the mindset that boarding school gave the best education – or at least for boys, because his two sisters were sent to local day schools.

Leslie started his academic life using a slate at his rural village primary school, and he played a bit of football, though he went on to be better at more individual sports. He recalls the football team travelling in an ancient coach, which was so feeble when going up hills that the boys had to get out the coach and walk up, and for some time Leslie assumed this was the normal method of travelling in a coach! Leslie's skill at other sports started to blossom at prep school.

Although in photos as a little boy Leslie looks rather weedy, he managed to do well enough at several sports to become "*Victor Ludorum*" (overall winner of the games – the classic education started early) and there is a faded Kodak photo of him in shorts and knobbly knees clutching the large cup he'd won. Leslie was bullied a bit at school, partly because he was put up a year due to being clever, so that was bad news; however, he was saved from real torment by being good at sport, both individual and cricket, as well as being not too "*pretty*"... My father was not so lucky at his school, but he barely told us anything about those experiences and implied it was part of everyday life, which you just had to put up with.

In the end Leslie quite enjoyed his years at Winchester, but he did not get to stay there for as long as he might have liked. Leslie's father decided he was not working hard enough and in disgust took him out of Winchester and sent him to the local Sixth Form College in Brockenhurst instead! It is arguable this may have made Leslie a more well-rounded and grounded personality, even if he missed some advantages at Winchester, and it certainly gave him more chance to meet girls which he enjoyed from an early age! Apparently, Leslie took the Oxford entrance test a year early and was told he had passed academically, but was too young to be

admitted, and should come back the following year – by which time he had stopped doing enough work and failed (something to do with discovering girls...)

Leslie decided to apply to Westfield College for university (having seen the generous ratio of females to men) but first he spent a year working for IBM, being allowed to “play” with a huge main-frame computer. Although this was not such an exotic experience as world travel would have been, it stood him in good stead for earning his living as an IT Consultant, in conjunction with accountancy work, and in these computer dependent days the family find it extremely useful to have an expert around the house, in addition to his client work.

Perhaps like many men, Leslie has a better memory for facts and figures rather than personal events. There were various early friendships (mainly female) that he told me about when I first knew him, but he barely seems to remember them nowadays. However, that might sometimes be due to more painful or traumatic factors. There was one girl he told me about called Joanna, who died after being either run over by a car or in a car accident. Every now and then he will come out with other snippets from his past, such as his landlady making a pass at him in her negligée, and I wonder what other intriguing nuggets may be buried in his memory!

When Leslie first came to visit my home in the Spring of 1974 it was the first time he had been to Glasgow. I think both he and his parents were a bit anxious, as their mental image of Glasgow was a rough city full of slums and high-rise flats! Their only real experience of Scotland had been the east coast, mostly Perthshire where they went camping. I dare say the Scots they met there from the Edinburgh region might have been quite derogatory about Glasgow, reinforcing their vision of a run-down city filled with dilapidated tenements, grim tower blocks and hard-core pubs.

Thus, it came as a pleasant surprise to Leslie to find Glasgow was so full of culture, fine architecture, leafy parks and friendly people (as well as crumbling tenements, tower blocks and seedy pubs). However, he did have difficulty understanding a strong Glaswegian accent – I had to translate what the conductor was saying when we went on a bus and Leslie could not work out what fare was being requested. That was when we still had green and orange buses in the city centre and blue buses going out to Bearsden and Milngavie – now superceded by SPT (Strathclyde Partnership Transport) and their rather unappealing orange vehicles.

Since Leslie has always had a keen interest in transport (he spent early days train spotting with his father), I think we also went for a trip on the Glasgow Underground or the “O”, where the tube trains seem almost miniature compared to the London Underground trains – perhaps reflecting the average height of wee Glaswegians! In those days we could travel in and out of Bridge of Weir by an overground train – and the splendid manually operated wooden departure boards were still in use at Glasgow Central (to be replaced by a soulless electronic system in 1978). Leslie was impressed by the fantastic station at Glasgow Central – one of the best examples of station architecture in the UK designed by James Miller. But there were no trams left – I have a vague recollection of catching one of the last trams with my dad when I was about 5 years old. The only one I’ve seen since then has been in the Glasgow Transport Museum along with a vintage tube train.

One of the first trips Leslie and I made in Glasgow was to the Botanic Gardens in Hyndland, which offered an example of fine engineering in the glasshouses and a verdant display of horticulture and was close to where I had lived as a baby. One of the earliest photos Leslie took of me shows me sitting in one of the glass houses. We also met up with some of my schoolfriends in a university bar in the west end of Glasgow, surrounded by elegant terraces. Little did we know that one day we would have a son who would go to that university and later buy a home near there with his family – and I would take my grandson to play in the Botanic Gardens!

Leslie agreed with me that Freeland House and the garden were delightful – even though he was put to work by my father – an amusingly similar trait to Leslie’s own father, although they were different characters in other ways. Dad’s attitude was friendly, but he also saw Leslie as a potential workhorse. He enlisted him into mowing the lawn at Freeland House, but poor Leslie managed to shear off a bit of the machinery (perhaps a cunning plan to ensure he was not given more jobs). Leslie’s father could have warned Dad about this, as he complained that Leslie was hard on tools – although it did not stop him giving him tasks. Dad enjoyed Leslie’s company from early on, though he was a little disconcerted to find him cuddling me in bed when coming in to wish me good night – and Leslie was meant to be safely ensconced in the spare room! But I guess he did not feel he could be too critical bearing in mind his own amatory exploits (though I was unaware of those then).

My relationship with Leslie led to another prevarication at home, more serious than going to the cinema with a boy – I didn’t tell Mother we had started sleeping together. But she must have had a suspicion when we were planning a holiday alone staying in a remote Scottish croft, for our first summer vacation together. She tried to persuade us to go with friends and was perhaps surprised at how quietly stubborn I was that the two of us were going alone. My father either preferred not to think about such things or accepted the situation. A cynical observer might have observed wryly that he was too busy pursuing his own extra-curricular romances.

I couldn’t quite bring myself to explain that I had already arranged appropriate contraception some months earlier when Leslie’s attentions grew more insistent, and I was unconvinced by his airy reassurances of “It’ll be all right” “I’ll be careful” etc. The RC withdrawal system did not strike me as reliable. I can be as romantic and spontaneous as the next girl, but pragmatism and practicality eventually rear their unpoetic heads and drag me back down to the ground. Leslie was not good at addressing all the practicalities then – although marriage, parenthood and home ownership have brought him rather drastically down to earth since then.

My mother may have guessed I was serious about Leslie even before we went on holiday together. At the end of his first visit to us in Scotland, Mother drove Leslie and me to the bus station in Glasgow so that he could catch the long-distance coach back down to Hampshire and prepare for the new university term. Mother was surprised to see me burst into tears after waving goodbye to Leslie – she often berated me for not crying at sad bits in movies when she sat brimming with tears, so that probably gave her a clue about my feelings for him.

Soon after Leslie and I got engaged, in the middle of my university course, my parents moved again, this time more dramatically from Scotland down to Birmingham. Dad had got a new job as Principal of the Birmingham School of Music (later Birmingham Conservatoire). We were all sorry to leave Scotland, and friendly Glasgow, but the job was a promotion which probably marked the summit of Dad's career. However, I suspect that he was happier in Scotland when he was Head of Strings at the RSAMD, doing more teaching and playing lots of chamber music, than when he was bogged down in administration and academic politics.

Dad continued to play the violin and teach down south, but he had less time for these activities, as the job of Principal involved extensive management and administration, which were not really to Dad's taste. But he was a great one for fingers in many pies; he became involved in setting up the Benslow Instrument Loan Scheme, and a trustee of the Elgar Music School, and always seemed happy to sit on committees (shades of Leslie!). Mother was perhaps the saddest to leave Scotland. Although she and Dad spent the next 30 years living in the Midlands, I don't think she ever felt as happy as in our Glasgow days, while Dad ended up returning to Glasgow for his final years. I was also sorry, but I was preoccupied with my life at university and particularly my relationship with Leslie.

It was a wrench to leave Freeland House, which had been a special home. My parents bought a solid and attractive 1930s house at Barlows Road in Edgbaston, a pleasant suburb of Birmingham, bordering Harborne where our nearest shopping street was. Everything in the house at Barlows Road seemed well ordered to me and Mother, if not hugely exciting, but of course it was not long before Dad decided to do some re-arranging, swapping the kitchen and dining room around, which involved quite a bit of work for not much improvement. However, before those changes took place Leslie and I were married. The garden was big enough to hold a marquee for a wedding reception, and we were lucky enough to have the sunny weather of the amazing 1976 summer.

We married straight after I graduated from university. It felt strange to get married in the Midlands when I had been brought up in Scotland, and my parents had only recently moved south. As Leslie had lived all his life in one place, the village of Pilley Bailey in the New Forest, we tried suggesting to Leslie's parents we could marry in their local church at Boldre and have a reception down there. However, this was before the era when the couple decided on wedding arrangements, unlike today, and (although Leslie's mother might have been amenable) we were told firmly by Leslie's father that a wedding should take place at the bride's home.

So Edgbaston it was - or rather Harborne for the church, as that was where I had attended a few services and for some reason it appealed to me more than Edgbaston – maybe because it had quite a wild, romantic churchyard. Leslie was more interested in the medieval church tower which rescued the Victorian church from mediocrity as far as he was concerned, as he had already developed an interest in historic architecture which has remained one of his passions ever since.

Perhaps the Harborne church was also a portent, as we were married in St Peter's Church, and St Peter has gone on to be of huge significance in my life – principally St Peter's Notting Hill where I attended so many inspiring services and made so

many close friends from 1986 onwards, and now more recently St Peter's Hammersmith, which is becoming increasingly important as a church and spiritual home for both me and Leslie, ever since we moved to Hammersmith 6 years ago. St Peter's Notting Hill is also the place where we have performed most of our amateur dramatic productions with the Ladbroke Players, which has been such an important part of my life, and also for 9 happy years I worked as the Parish Administrator for that church, so there are a number of deep connections.

Returning to our marriage, we had a bit of a bargain basement wedding. My grandmother had sent an ivory silk dress over to me that she had fashioned roughly together embellished with some lovely crocheted white cotton lace. I decided that although perhaps not ideal, it would do for my wedding dress, as it would save money and it would please Granmargie that I was being married in it. However, Granmargie made all her dresses very wide (perhaps because she herself was quite wide by then...) so Mother and I had to take the dress in a huge amount, not as neatly as might be desired – and I seem to recall a few choice swear words from Mother as she struggled to make it fit me! But my veil covered a multitude of sins, and the crocheted Juliet cap Granmargie had sent looked very pretty on the veil – especially from the back as I walked up the aisle, so that was a plus point.

It was sad that Granmargie did not come over from the USA for the wedding – I am not sure if this was because she could not afford it. She had made several periodic visits to the UK since the advent of universal air travel. Possibly her health was not good enough, and she might have felt it would be an exhausting event and that my parents would be too busy organising it. Or perhaps she felt that as she had not been able to attend her daughter's wedding it would not be fair to come to her granddaughter's? I don't know.

She did come over to visit about a year later, and then made one final visit to the UK in 1989 so met her great-grandsons James and Gordon as small boys, but sadly never met her great-granddaughter Catriona (although I was pregnant when she came). By then she was nearly 90 and I remember her being in a wheelchair at the airport, accompanied by her friend Regina as a travelling companion. She was still living at home (at 3706 Rexmere Road, Baltimore) with my Uncle Ted, but a few years later she had to move into a home and then hospital. She died in 2003 aged 99, but wrote lucid and informative letters to Mother, me and other family members almost up to the end of her life. I made a visit to her with Mother in the mid-1990s while she was still at Rexmere Road and I felt quite choked up when going to get my flight home, as I realised it would probably be the last time that I would see Granmargie, and she had been such a precious presence in my life.

But to get back to my wedding, I feel embarrassed now that I bought material and patterns (probably Simplicity or Flair) for my bridesmaid dresses and gave them to Kay and Elizabeth asking them to make up the dresses! I think Kay's mum found a dressmaker and Elizabeth's mother helped her make it. I suppose because I did such a lot of sewing myself at the time it didn't occur to me it might be awkward for them, and by then we lived a long way apart so it would have been difficult to make them myself. All part of my low budget wedding. I used the same pattern that I had given to Elizabeth and Kay to make myself a going-away dress, but in a

different material, a blue and pink William Morris style design, which made a long floaty cotton frock, and so I continued my bohemian hippy look.

Being the 1976 heatwave year, it was so hot that I didn't even wear tights, just cream open toed sandals. On the wedding morning, I walked up the road to a florist to buy buttonholes for the gentlemen, while my mother created wedding posies from our garden – blue hydrangeas for me and pink and white roses for my two bridesmaids Kay and Elizabeth. Then we had a relaxed soup and sandwich lunch out in the garden, gazing at the marquee where the reception was due to be held, just a couple of hours before we got dressed to go to church – no visits to hairdressers or beauticians for us. Short of getting married on a beach it could hardly have been more informal! After everyone else had set off to the church Dad drove me there in his car, which he had decorated with ribbon and a rosette. As I was getting in the car, a bee landed in my veil, which Dad said was good luck – and I think fortune has indeed smiled on me and my family. That is not to say we have avoided sorrow. There have been some sad and upsetting times, but I have chosen not to write about most of these, but rather to focus on the good and happy things.

There were about 65 guests at our wedding who fitted comfortably into the marquee in my parents' garden. The catering was done by some friends of my Aunt Eithne who were professional caterers. The buffet food was tasty but poor Leslie never got any as he was too busy being polite and chatting to the guests, whereas (following my usual custom) I made sure I fitted in eating. However, Leslie probably ensured he had a glass of champagne, while I was much more interested in the food. There was the inevitable drunk guest (my cousin Simon who was only 13, so it may have been his first serious attempt at drinking). Simon was sick in the bathroom, but luckily Leslie and I were not involved in clearing up after him.

We didn't have much time to enjoy our wedding festivities as once the speeches and cake were out the way Leslie's father started urging us to leave (at about 5 pm and the service had only started at 2 pm). Tony informed us guests would be wanting to go and couldn't leave until we had left. It was one of his "*don't be so thoughtless*" harangues, and we did not dare disobey. So, the occasion was far more rushed than I or others would do it nowadays. On the other hand, those were the days when guests were mostly friends and relations of the parents, thus we did not have many of our own friends there and did not know some of the people at the festivities.

One elderly cousin whom I'd never met kept thrusting a microphone in front of us and asking Leslie and me to say a few words! Very disconcerting as this was before the days of routine videoing and phone recording of social events. Thus, we may not have been entirely sorry to make a swift exit, especially as we were heading up to the Scottish Borders from Birmingham, travelling on the train initially to Carlisle – probably not the destination for many honeymoon couples' first nights! My bridesmaid Elizabeth was embarrassed to find she was going to be on the same train as Leslie and me (as she travelled back to Glasgow) – she offered to go sit in another carriage, but we wouldn't let her, reminding her we were due to spend the rest of our lives together, so we could thole her company for a few hours!

We stayed in a rather utilitarian hotel in Carlisle for our honeymoon night, and all I recall is having room service sandwiches and a purple bedspread. But in my mind

our real honeymoon had been our first holiday together up in Scotland, near the shores of Loch Tay, a far more romantic prospect than the Station Hotel in Carlisle! The morning after our wedding we went to a service in Carlisle Cathedral. Leslie no doubt insisted on looking round the castle as well as the cathedral, (having developed a passion for medieval architecture – which extended gradually to encompass Tudor, Georgian, Victorian and 20th – even 21st – century buildings), confirming my suspicions about the cultural content of many excursions to come with Leslie. He knew the quid pro quo – decent refreshments had to be procured.

After our stopover in Carlisle, we took another train to Dumfries and proceeded by bus (or taxi?) out to Moniaive to my parents' cottage to spend a relaxing honeymoon in Galloway. Relaxing is not really the right word, as of course Leslie wanted to get out and explore, both hill-walking up Criffel and visiting historic architecture such as Sweetheart Abbey, so there were no days spent lounging in bed. University expeditions with Leslie had taught me that he always liked to have a full itinerary of both architectural and scenic splendours to cram into each day, and I was happy to explore the countryside and do a limited amount of building exploration – as long as tasty food and drink were included in the programme.

Although this low-key holiday in my parents' cottage may have been unremarkable, it did not matter too much, because it felt like our real honeymoon had been our first holiday together as students, including some of the jitters I experienced on the way there! That was even less luxurious than our Moniaive holiday, but it was memorably romantic. The week in September 1974 was spent in a Perthshire croft perched on a hillside above Loch Tay and gave me an insight into what typical holidays with Leslie would be like (he would not be a suitable partner for someone who wanted to spend lazy days sunning themselves on a beach or by a hotel pool in a hot country). I was 19, Leslie 20. It was my first holiday away with a boy (and Leslie was my first serious boyfriend).

“Oot-o-sicht” croft at Loch Tay was romantic, but neither relaxing nor comfortable – it was indeed out of sight of transport and facilities. To get to the croft we had to catch a train to Dunkeld, then a bus, then walk several miles from the nearest bus stop – Leslie had blithely said we could probably hitch a lift, but we were not offered one until we were about to head into the fields. The croft had no running water, so we had to walk a mile to fetch water in big plastic containers, and at the end of the holiday Leslie had to dig a big hole to bury the sewage waste. There was no electricity; just a Calor gas stove and a few gas lights; the furniture minimal and spartan – I think we slept in a double sleeping bag on a bare mattress. However, the views of the Scottish highland scenery were fantastic, and the only creatures that disturbed us were a few sheep trying to wander into the croft.

The experience was certainly a good test of my endurance and gave me a fair idea of life with Leslie – romantic and interesting, but with few luxuries, and including several challenges. It rained most of the week – when we climbed the highest mountain, Ben Lawers, we found ourselves in cloud at the top (but the views lower down were good). Further down the hill Leslie tried to take me fishing in a wee lochan but despite the overcast weather no fish were to be had. I was also introduced to what has become a regular signature feature of a walk with Leslie – the so-called “shortcut” through a bog, resulting in muddy and wet feet.

Despite all this we had a happy time and returned to university an even closer couple than before. Overall, I think the only thing that had hacked me off during the vacation, before we went on our Tayside jaunt in September, was that I wrote every few days from Scotland to Leslie down in the New Forest, but I got no replies for weeks until just days before we were due to go away, when suddenly a 13-page epistle arrived. This was nice, full of poetic ardour and detailed plans for our holiday itinerary, but I felt frustrated that there had been no dialogue prior to that.

This solitary, tardy but effusive epistle revealed another of Leslie's characteristics which has plagued me and others over years, but I guess I was too besotted early on to take much notice of the warning! Many friends, family and clients have waited in vain (sometimes weeks, sometimes months) for replies to letters, telephone messages, emails and queries of all sort – only to receive a carefully composed and exhaustive response at the last (or past the last) minute – usually admirable, but maddeningly late. When he became self-employed and had a portfolio of clients this trait meant that inevitably he lost several clients over the years.

This was well before the days of Skype, Facebook, Facetime, text messages or indeed mobile phones of course. Nowadays people chasing Leslie use email or texts rather than letters - though don't necessarily get a better response. Back in our youth there were of course landline telephones, but Leslie would probably have got a lecture from his father about phone bills if he'd tried calling me regularly or at any length, and I have quite an aversion to talking on the phone anyway.

Letters were the thing as far as I was concerned, but unfortunately regular correspondence is not one of Leslie's skills. When I was writing thankyou's for our wedding presents, I made the mistake of leaving Leslie to write a few to people I had never met, including his old primary school headteacher. She had kindly sent a modest cheque. Unfortunately, despite several reminders from me, Leslie had still not got round to writing to her when she died!

Nowadays I would know it was safest to write myself to minimise embarrassment. In his years of career as a self-employed accountant/tax adviser and IT consultant, not to mention charity volunteer, one of the banes of my life has been seeing puzzled, frustrated or angry communications from people waiting to hear from Leslie, sometimes feeling obliged to send holding replies to them, making excuses for the prolonged silence or inaction. To be fair, one of the main causes of this stems from Leslie's kind-heartedness as well as over-work – also for a long time he did not want to risk turning away work and so would take on too much, along with a tendency to underestimate how long tasks would take.

Basically, Leslie is terrible at saying "NO", and continues to fall into this trap with both clients and numerous charity trustee duties that he has taken on over the years – the cry would go up among the children "*not another meeting Daddy*" as he would head off in the evening to a church PCC or School Governors' meeting. Now Huguenot charities have taken over much of his life introducing another whole raft of meetings combined with intensive financial work as the charities make use of Leslie's accountancy expertise. But at least the Huguenot work has become interspersed with open water swimming – which after a slight recession for a few years, has grown into another obsession... I don't think Leslie understands the

concept of “*dabbling*”. But swimming gives him healthy exercise and I enjoy joining in a bit (dabbling) whereas Leslie has to be full on. Over last year, he covered over 600 km swimming in the river in our Hammersmith and Chiswick area - not to mention swimming in the sea and lochs up in Scotland – and has set his sights on some longer swims.

However, at the time of our first holiday any such irritations about Leslie’s timekeeping were just the tiny tip of an otherwise invisible iceberg. Apart from being my first holiday with a boyfriend, the Loch Tay adventure felt like a honeymoon couple in other respects. Although my parents had their anxieties about the trip, they accepted in the end I was going and, presumably because they had travels of their own planned, they were not at home to “see me off” regardless of any misgivings of my mother’s.

But my brother Colin was there, and he waved us off at the local railway station in Bridge of Weir as we set off on our expedition (heading into Glasgow prior to heading north to Perthshire). Meanwhile I felt a slight pang, like a nervous bride or boat being cast off into the unknown. This feeling of being overwhelmed and anxious about the future grew on me as we progressed north on the trains – possibly a reaction to the months of silence that had greeted my ardent outpourings and almost sabotaged the whole trip.

By the time we got off the train at Dunkeld, Leslie could see I was uneasy, and as he endeavoured to find out what was wrong, I suddenly burst into tears. The other passengers must have wondered what on earth the matter was, and it was unnerving for Leslie as he had hardly ever seen me cry, and he usually found it quite hard to get me to talk about my feelings. However, he displayed the sympathetic and kind side of his nature, reassuring me that if I had changed my mind about our relationship I didn’t need to worry, and we could just enjoy a platonic holiday if necessary [though I suspect a thought bubble above his head would have said something like *Curses - bloody emotional women!* or *WTF?*] But to his credit he said I mustn’t feel pressured that we were irrevocably committed. He was able to calm what amounted to bridal nerves in me, and we went on to have a magical holiday despite abortive attempts at hitching lifts and fishing, not to mention the primitive conditions and inclement weather.

Once we reached Loch Tay and settled in at the croft, Leslie’s measured assurances soon began to be overtaken by outpourings of youthful ardour, but at least I was in a slightly more receptive state. The countryside was filled with waterfalls (due to high rainfall), and beside almost every cascade, Leslie would stand, sometimes with a rainbow shimmering in the background, making extravagant declarations of love “*You will marry me won’t you?*” Waterfalls and rainbows feature prominently in my memory of the holiday; I was reasonably enthralled, but also a bit circumspect, and not yet convinced that Leslie was in earnest (or indeed whether I myself could be in earnest) so my answer was “*Maybe – we’d better wait and see*”. I remembered when we first met that Leslie had neglected to mention that he had a girlfriend who had gone up to York to study a PhD. I also recalled him agonising about whether he should break up with her – deciding he should, but afterwards having second thoughts. Therefore, I felt I needed to be a bit cautious before taking his marriage proposal seriously!

Nevertheless, one thing that might surprise some people about Leslie is that, although when I first met him, I felt he might be a bit fickle and unreliable, and the first few months of our friendship were indeed quite a rollercoaster of emotions. (For instance, on our first outing together to see the Turner paintings he arrived hours late – a foretaste of years of tardy behaviour to come!) Yet since he started asking me to marry him, he has never appeared to waver from wanting us to be together and has been constant and faithful. If anything, I was the one who suffered periods of hesitation and uncertainty in our early years, and occasionally felt attracted to other people. But I have been fortunate to have such a devoted sweetheart, who has been passionate and supportive as a husband, father and friend, fun to be with, kind, generous and a kindred spirit (if a trifle moody at times, and a dreadful procrastinator – but nobody’s perfect).

Leslie continues to make extravagant compliments to me – though also sometimes to other female friends with whom he is particularly taken; I tease him about who is the latest “GOM” (Girl of the Moment) and even started keeping a list of potential replacements in the event of my untimely demise. But he also continues to display quite a soppy level of adoration (unless he is in a grumpy mood). This leads to calls for pinches of salt or even a bucket, from me and any others in earshot of the gallant remarks. His father would have called it Leslie’s “*feathery voice*”. Yet most of the admiration seems heartfelt, if a trifle over the top!

I am glad my mother, after a few initial doubts, came to appreciate that we enjoyed a good marriage. Mother was not someone to be taken in by shallow charm, and like me she learnt that while Leslie might make comments that seemed ridiculously flamboyant and enjoyed making some flirtatious remarks about other women, this appeared to be harmless banter and his heart seems to have remained truly mine. Indeed, Mother observed that we seemed “*happy as bees*” and once commented pensively that “*Leslie’s very romantic*”. He had just bought me a sapphire pendant neck chain after I gave birth to our first son James, surprising even me as he had not been the most enthusiastic of prospective fathers. He had also given me some romantic gifts while we were at university including a silver cross on a chain and a silver identity bracelet, while I gave him a gold cross on a chain. Unfortunately, I lost the silver cross in the woods near the cottage (at least it was near our honeymoon spot!) I managed to find a similar cross to replace it but this was an early warning to Leslie that I could be careless or forgetful.

The pendant for James was followed by sapphire stud earrings when I had second son Gordon, and a pearl choker necklace for daughter Catriona, making the pains of labour worthwhile – although of course the babies themselves were reward enough. But for me the precious, unexpected element was that Leslie recognized the births of our children as significant and special events in our lives, however reluctant he had appeared in advance. It was good to know that it was not just foolish optimism on my part that Leslie would make a devoted father – which he has certainly proved to be (apart from the odd grumpy episode...) And now when it comes to our grandchildren, he has also been amazingly appreciative of their charms.

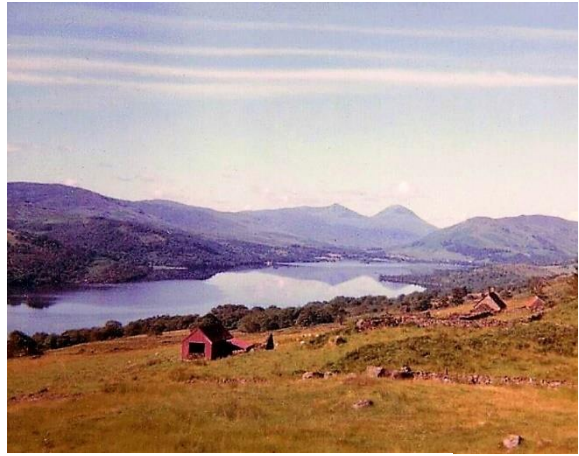
My family and friends were surprised and slightly sceptical about me getting engaged aged only 19, and to my first serious boyfriend – particularly as we went ahead and married as soon as I had graduated. Looking back, I don’t know if it was

because we were prepared to work at it, and learn the art of compromise, or whether we were just lucky, and we were quite well suited – I guess all these factors played a part. One of the things I had always felt I wanted to do was to fall in love, get married and have children – this might seem terribly conventional and horizon-limiting to an ardent feminist, yet those events have brought me great happiness.

As a parent of adult children now, I can understand why people thought we were too young - and it wasn't as though I hadn't got some other ambitions. As a child, I was a bit of a tomboy for a while and even thought it would be exciting to do something more adventurous like being an explorer or sailor – however neither of those ideas would have worked out as I have a terrible sense of direction and get lost very easily; I also get very seasick! I liked the idea of writing or being an artist, and I could well have been tempted to try acting professionally if the practical side of my nature had not overridden romantic dreams of going on the stage, while I also lacked the confidence to “*give it a go*”. But the romantic “*getting married and living happily ever after*” still had the greatest appeal – the amazing thing is how well that has worked out!



Leslie & Alison – wedding day 17 July 1976



Loch Tay, Perthshire and Oot o'Sicht – the Croft where Leslie & I had our first holiday and love blossomed 1974; me at the top of Ben Lawers which we climbed.



Leslie & Alison – honeymooners July 1976

20. Leslie's family – In-Laws

I cannot be certain, but (notwithstanding Leslie's own not inconsiderable charms!) it might have been partly Leslie's family who attracted me to marrying him, and most particularly his wonderful mother Rosamund, whom I loved when I first met her, and who became the most incredible mother-in-law. Although most people called her Ros, I nearly always called her Rosamund (which I think was at her suggestion, and how her beloved father addressed her).



Leslie's mother Rosamund c. 1997

I loved my own mother dearly, and we were extremely close, but, as with most human beings, I was aware she had a few faults. With Rosamund it was hard to see that she had any flaws; yet she was human and lovable – no statue on a pedestal, but just a lovely, truly special person. On the other hand, Leslie's father Tony had enough flaws for them both, though in his own way he was admirable and could be lovable. He was an explosive character, sometimes unpredictable and scary in his outbursts of rage, often over seemingly trivial matters. But he also had great charm and enthusiasm, along with fantastic qualities of honesty, hard work, loyalty and devotion, and he could tell the funniest and most entertaining stories which endeared him to many friends and family.



Leslie's father "Tony" c. 1990

When I first met Leslie's parents, I made a mistake that I think a lot of people did – I assumed Tony was Anthony and my thank you letter for the visit was duly addressed to Mr & Mrs A. Du Cane. However, I was soon set straight. When Leslie's father was born, he was a twin, and the second boy to arrive. In those days (1910) they did not know that twins were expected, and the cry went up "*who's that?*" whereupon, apparently, Nanny pronounced "*that's Tony*". He was subsequently christened Charles Edward Byron Du Cane, but the nickname Tony stuck for the rest of his life, leading to a succession of misapprehensions with people who met him who initially assumed his real name was Anthony! But probably appropriate since Tony regarded his Nanny as his real mother and hated his own one – perhaps she was just not interested in children. Tony was very fond of both his Nanny and Cook! I don't know whether his parents had so little to do with him that his Nanny carried on calling him Tony, but the name certainly stuck. Tony was 18 years older than Leslie's mother, so in many ways he was from a different era, and more like a grandparent to his children – but a very active and domineering one! Yet Tony must have had some special attractions to persuade the beautiful young Rosamund to marry him – and to maintain a happy marriage.

With such engaging parents, and their delightful home Forest Cottage (a picturesque old, thatched cottage, with low beamed ceilings and thick cob walls), my initial instinct that Leslie was a nice boy, and a kindred spirit was heightened – even if I was a trifle disconcerted the first time that I visited. Having been told the cottage

was in the New Forest I imagined it would be surrounded by a forest of trees and leafy glades, and I was at first a little disappointed to discover that much of the Forest was quite open heathland, with low scrub that was mainly gorse, heather and other bushes, although there were also woodland areas of well-established deciduous and conifer trees. But I came to appreciate that the heathland was part of the charm of the Forest, rather like moorland in places like Yorkshire and the West Country, and we enjoyed many happy walks on the Forest. However, without Leslie or his family I was in danger of losing my way home – with my poor sense of direction, I found it hard to distinguish any landmarks on the heath, if I went out of sight of the village houses.

It is somewhat amazing that several years later I managed to stay in the cottage on my own, looking after it and the animals for a few days, while Ros and Tony made a trip up to Scotland to see daughter Louise with husband Glenn, who at that time were living on an estate at Kilfinan, where Glenn was a gamekeeper. It is even more amazing that Tony trusted me either with his beloved elk hound, or not to set the house on fire. I think I may have stayed there first when I was pregnant, but had stopped working, and then again when James was a baby. As well as livestock (dogs, cat, hens, pig) there was also the “household God” – the Aga which was on solid fuel then and had to be riddled every day and on no account allowed to go out.

As well as maintaining the Aga, I had to take the dogs out for walks on the forest every day without getting lost. Tony and Ros had two dogs when I first met them, one an elk hound and the other a sheep dog collie called Diamond. Tony absolutely adored his elk hounds. When one died Leslie would be dispatched to dig the grave in one of the fields, while his father wept over the grave. Apart from the first elk hound (Peter Wool), which was a wedding gift, subsequent elk hounds were acquired from the Elk Hound Rescue Centre. This mostly worked well (though who knew there were enough elk hounds to have a whole Rescue Centre devoted to them? – I’d never even heard of the breed till I met Leslie). But it was harder to be sure of the temperament and history of rescue canine creatures, and unfortunately one called Hawken had to be put down after biting someone.

By the time I came to look after the dogs the elk hound was a docile dog called Prince (nicknamed Pudman, something to do with large paws) and the companion dog was a beautiful black Labrador/cross collie named Bess – similar to my own dear Gelert. As often, Leslie was too busy to accompany me. He was not really a workaholic because he found a lot of the accountancy work quite tedious – but having become self-employed he never liked to turn work away and always seemed to have too much on to take much time off. But no doubt he would also have been too busy if he had stayed working for a big firm like Price Waterhouse or DeLoittes where he was employed for a few years. This was of course in the days before laptop, Ipad and mobile phones meant that people could work almost anywhere as long as there was electricity and good internet signal. Tony might have organised that if it had been available as he was always keen on the latest technology.

But on our early visits to Hampshire there probably would not have been a good internet signal. Life still felt very rural and not so different from how it would have been decades before when Leslie’s parents first moved to the tiny hamlet of Pilley Bailey, close to the pretty sailing town of Lymington. Forest Cottage had no

central heating (supposedly bad for the cob walls), and apart from the Aga stove which heated the water, and the odd electric fire the main heating was the log fire in the large beamed fireplace. For years there was only one downstairs bathroom and no shower (although eventually they squeezed in a loo upstairs with a macerator system). The downstairs floor was red terracotta tiles as occasionally the house would flood from the ditches surrounding the property, which precluded having carpets or wooden floors!

The house had a cess pit rather than mains drainage to deal with sewage. This was the same for the two cottages nearby, which Ros and Tony also owned and let out as holiday cottages – one reason Tony would put a limit on the number of holiday tenants they could take. For some strange reason Tony claimed that German visitors produced more sewage than other nationalities - but I don't know what he based this on as I'm not sure that they had many German tenants!

In terms of facilities, Ros and Tony's cottage was a little reminiscent of the cottage which my parents had in Dumfriesshire, though Forest Cottage was larger and more ancient – and doubtless much more valuable as a property. It probably had more cachet too, looking like a chocolate box cottage with its pretty thatched roof, whitewashed walls and turquoise framed windows and picket gate (later changed to cornflower blue paintwork). But I preferred the more austere Victorian style of Cairndale Cottage with its traditional dormer windows, as I find most thatched cottages rather dark and cramped with their thick walls and small windows. However, Leslie and his family lived quite comfortably at Forest Cottage, despite not having all the “*mod cons*” and being not so different from how their ancestors would have lived.

Turn the clock back a few centuries and the Du Canes were poor Huguenot refugees from Belgium fleeing religious persecution; but by the late 20th century they were a solid middle-class family well established in traditional English society. Thus, Tony and Ros may have had a few misgivings or reservations about my slightly more bohemian or mongrel background with my American mother and musician father. But our parents had plenty in common; they were all hard-working, loved art, gardens and gardening, country houses, and had similar cultural roots, and strong bonds with their families. Both had 3 children and had sent a son to boarding school, had enjoyed DIY holidays in Scotland (self-catering or camping) and both had a dog and cat - indeed Leslie's parents had two dogs – but that would have been a bridge too far for my parents, unlike my Grannie. And I don't think my mother Nancy would have coped with camping, unlike Rosamund. My parents were keener on a bit of luxury. Leslie's family squashed into a big frame tent although Leslie was soon moved into a separate wee pup tent (Tony used to claim this was because of Leslie's smelly feet but I suspect it was just that the big tent was over-crowded as the children grew bigger.)

Tony may even have welcomed the American side of my ancestry. Like many adults who had lived through the second world war, Tony felt a debt of gratitude to the U.S.A. for helping the UK win the war, and he also had a strong interest in American culture, including popular music, films and musicals (such as Busby Berkeley) and the technical advances fostered by the USA. Tony was less keen on classical music however, describing it as a “*discordant jumble of sound.*” But, like

my parents, he was a great fan of Alistair Cooke's *Letter from America* on the radio, and they all listened to it regularly through the years it was broadcast.

There were some other less happy common elements in the background of my father-in-law Tony and my parents, namely divorce. My mother Nancy was probably unusually fortunate in not being upset by her parents' divorce, having a devoted mother, and not missing a father figure. In the case of my father Louis' mother Enid, her lack of demonstrative affection for her children may well have been caused or exacerbated by her parents' divorce, and certainly affected Louis' sister Christine, and possibly Dad. With Leslie's father Tony, his parents' divorce clearly had a devastating effect on his childhood and adolescence. He was not allowed to see his father until he was 21. He had a terrible relationship with his mother, and he hated the schools where he was sent away, so he had quite a miserable childhood, only relieved initially by the care of a kind nanny and cook, and latterly by visits to his older brother Peter and his wife. Tony was extremely short-sighted but for years this remained undiagnosed, presumably due to his mother's lack of interest, and he was regarded as stupid at school because he could not read the blackboard, yet he was actually very astute.

Despite this childhood trauma, Tony was full of funny stories with which he regaled his family and friends (we never knew exactly how true they were, but the content did not change so maybe they were more veracious than we thought!) One such story concerned his christening – Tony said he was due to be baptised “Charles Byron” (Byron being one of his ancestors, and Charles also a family name) but the ceremony was taking place shortly after King Edward VII had died. Supposedly one of the King's “lady friends” was attending the service and started wailing “*Call him Edward after the dear King!*” Tony said she made such a racket that, to shut her up, he was christened Edward as well as Charles and Byron (CEB Du Cane) – yet he was known as Tony by almost everyone. It was never explained who had passed this story on to Tony, who could hardly have remembered it from infancy!

Some of Tony's other amusing stories related to his twin brother Dick. They were identical twins, and they showed some uncanny similarities, both ending up living in a thatched cottage in the New Forest and driving similar cars, but they were different in their careers and their marriages, and although Tony said they were playmates as children, they did not get on very well as adults.

Tony did a business course and worked mostly in admin, but Dick's career included working as a lingerie salesman – a job which maybe gave him too much contact with females. Tony himself had several girlfriends (including 2 other fiancées, Juliana and Esmé – or was it Hermione?) before marrying, but remained faithfully married for 45 years to amazing Rosamund, whereas Dick went through three wives and reputedly also had other affairs. Tony told of an occasion when he was accosted by a man in Lyons Corner House who accused him of carrying on with his wife. When Tony tried to explain the man must be mistaking him for his identical twin brother his story was unsurprisingly greeted with guffaws of disbelief!

Tony also told the more poignant story of arranging to meet his father in the Savoy Hotel when he was 21 and having to ask one of the hotel staff which gentleman was his father, because he didn't know what he looked like. About the only comment

Leslie and I heard Tony make about his mother was that “*she was the most selfish woman in the world*”. Perhaps she had some cause to complain about Tony’s father as according to the divorce citation he had conducted multiple affairs – but maybe he was driven to it? He married again, a French woman called Mathilde, and had two more sons, and stayed with her till he died in Paris in 1938.

Tony established good terms with his half-brothers Robert and John when he was able to meet them– in fact he got on better with them and their wives, as well as his elder brother Peter, than he did with his twin brother. Fortunately, Tony ended up happily married to Rosamund, who proved to be a splendid wife, mother and mother-in-law, but his unhappy childhood probably made some of his relationships quite dysfunctional, especially with his own children and grandchildren. He did not marry until he was 41, though Rosamund was only 23, yet perhaps surprisingly the marriage worked out very well (probably in no small part because of Rosamund being such an exceptional person, and maybe also “*wise beyond her years*” so that an older man suited her mature and slightly shy personality).

Although Tony had an unhappy childhood, life looked up when he left school. He was sent to business school in Switzerland and often said that learning how to type was one of the most useful skills he acquired in life. It meant that despite appalling eyesight, he was able to join the RAF in the war – not to fly (fortunately for others), but to become an administration officer on Lord Mountbatten’s staff team. This meant he was posted to India where he spent some fascinating years, including getting engaged to one of the girlfriends who preceded Leslie’s mother Rosamund.

The years have taught me that Leslie is prone to exaggeration or misremembering, but when we first met, I had not fully grasped this as he talked like a walking encyclopaedia and indeed had a wide knowledge of historical and architectural facts. Leslie used to tell me in admiring tones that his father had been engaged 7 times – but when I happened to mention this to his mother, she said indignantly that while Tony might have had 7 girlfriends over the years, he had only been engaged to two of them apart from herself! Tony was obviously regarded as a decent fellow because he remained close friends with his former fiancées, one of whom (Juliana) became Leslie’s godmother. Another previous amour was probably pleased with the divvying up of goods when they split up, as she returned the teddy bear Tony had given her but retained the fur coat! (However, it is possible that the teddy bear ended up being more valuable as it might have been a Steiff...)

Tony’s success with the ladies was probably due to personality as he was not particularly good-looking – he himself being the first to exclaim “*We Du Canes are no oil paintings!*” (slightly ironic bearing in mind the number of oil portraits of Du Canes that have survived, several now covering our walls). But Tony was a great example of the importance of having an entertaining personality. Although he was 18 years older than Rosamund, the age difference did not seem to matter and I think they enjoyed a happy marriage most of the time, even though Tony’s short temper could cause tensions, especially with his children. But when he wasn’t in a rage, he could be very good company, informative and kind-hearted.

He was full of expressions which could be rude or impatient, and stories and mantras that we still find ourselves repeating today, years after his death. Favourite

phrases included “*You can do anything with your friends, but you mustn’t bore them!*” “*Don’t FIDGET!*” “*So THOUGHTLESS*”. “*That was a good blow-out!*” “*You blithering idiot!*” When describing the spelling of a word like psychiatrist, he would chortle “*the p is silent, as in bathing*”! While some of his sayings and conversations might be a little dogmatic or vulgar, they were rarely boring, and his stories were usually amusing even when we’d heard them several times, as he had a great gift as a great raconteur.

Tony was devoted to Ros, but he liked to pretend that when he married her, he had no idea whether he was marrying the right woman – he said the veil over her face when she came up the aisle was so thick that she could have been an Indian or Arab lady! I have only seen one rather blurred wedding photo and Ros does look like she was wearing a beautiful lace veil, in the style of a Spanish mantilla so I suppose Tony might be forgiven for claiming to be unsure who was at the altar beside him!

Two more stories that amused us were his trip to the opera, and a railway journey with his brother. As already mentioned, Tony loved musicals, but was not a great fan of classical music. (This did mean it was hard for him and my musician father to establish much common ground when they met.) When Tony was a boy, he was taken to see an opera where a rather large lady appeared being transported across the stage in a mechanical swan while warbling. But the weight of the lady meant the wheels were bending and squeaking as the swan moved along and the singing was masked by the sound of the swan screeching “*Week, week, week*” which Tony found very funny, though it didn’t make him like opera any better. His idea of a good night out was watching the Ziegfeld Follies or *The Sound of Music*. He loved films – a taste he has passed on to his son, although Leslie is less interested in musicals and keener on violent thriller or sci fi movies!

As well as enjoying watching musicals and dancing girls, Tony also loved railways and often travelled on them. When he was a pensioner, he would take advantage of special deals on offer to travel all over England, doing marathon day returns to places like Carlisle, Durham and York from the New Forest. As a boy, he was on a trip with his brother in an old-fashioned compartment style train without a corridor. They both realized they were desperate for the loo, and Tony’s brother had the bright idea that as a couple of tunnels were coming up, they could take it in turns to pee out of the window in the door. This worked fine for Tony’s brother, but as Tony began peeing the train emerged from the rather shorter tunnel, directly into a railway station, and apparently Tony found himself unable to stop mid-stream and spraying the platform to the horrified and astonished gaze of the passengers waiting for the train! Although I was not always a fan of Tony’s beloved lavatory humour, this tale did strike me as quite funny.

Tony’s jobs included working for Peter Jones in the 1930’s – he spoke indignantly of Mrs Simpson sending Edward VIII out to the store to buy things for her. My own view was that Edward probably enjoyed doing this, as I don’t think he did much that he didn’t want to, apart from abdicating, and shopping might have been a novelty – but I found it was wiser not to get embroiled in political or moral arguments with Tony. I believe he recognized it was lucky we ended up with George VI and his wife Elizabeth on the throne, so perhaps he realised some of Edward’s shortcomings after all. After the war, Tony worked for Esso, but

although he did not receive as much inherited wealth as his older brothers Peter and Dick, he was fortunate enough to be left some money by a cousin.

This legacy (plus his Forces pension) was enough to enable him to retire from work in London when he got married, aged 41, and to move into the country, buying a small cottage in the New Forest with a bit of land. When Leslie was born and Tony went to register his birth, the man in the registry office asked his profession and Tony answered "Gentleman". This did not impress the petty official who said with a sneer "*We're all gentlemen nowadays*". Having made further enquiries about Tony he wrote down with another sneer "*Smallholder*". But although Tony's smallholding was modest compared to the grand houses where he had been brought up, he enjoyed living in Forest Cottage (which he called his mud hut) and spent the remaining 45 years of his life there, bringing up his family and becoming immersed in village life. However, he also remained in touch with the world at large, listening to the news and enjoying current affairs programmes.

Tony was also a great one for getting the latest technology and gadgets. His manual typewriter was exchanged as soon as an electric one was available, and he owned one of the first electronic calculators, paying dearly for the privilege – and as large as early mobile phones. I don't recall him getting familiar with computers, but he died before pcs became omni-present – had he lived he would probably have become quite adept with a laptop, Ipad or Iphone, like his son! He also enjoyed fancy cars but accepted quite a change in models once he and Ros had children – swapping an MG for a Morris Traveller; later upgraded to a VW camper van!

Retirement was not the right description for Tony as he and Rosamund were two of the hardest-working people I have ever met. Tony increased his smallholding, buying neighbouring fields and two more cottages, and as well as working hard on the land and his property, he did a great deal of work in the community, serving for many years as Clerk to the School Governors plus being active on the Parish Council. Ros also contributed to the community, including working regularly in the *Save the Children* shop in Lymington, and helping at fêtes and various WI events.

When Leslie and I visited his parents, Tony would usually be working outside digging ditches, fencing, mending gates, pruning trees and hay baling – or other agricultural tasks. We were often drafted in to help, barely before we had crossed the threshold. On one visit from university, we took a friend Helen down with us and all three of us were enlisted to break rocks to create a car park hard standing area that Tony was making outside their third cottage! Luckily, Helen saw the funny side of this.

After a period of long lets Tony and Ros turned their two extra cottages into holiday cottages, which meant a lot more hands-on work for them between changeovers plus dealing with bookings administration. Ros did cleaning, laundry and gardening, as well as looking after their own house beautifully and being a great homemaker in terms of cooking and making her own jams, marmalade and other produce. Tony did the heavier work including mowing larger grass areas, chuntering around on his sit-and-ride mower (though Ros could probably have managed that fine as she was a nippy driver). Tony and Ros also joined in with local community tasks. The year Leslie and I were married was the long hot

summer of 1976 and the parched conditions meant there was an outbreak of forest fires on the New Forest heathland. Arriving down there, brooms would be thrust in one's hands as there was a general rush onto the heathland to beat out the flames.

Events like these meant that country life was never as humdrum as some people might have imagined, and I never felt that either Tony or Rosamund led restricted lives. It is perhaps harder to write about Rosamund because she was not such a "larger-than-life" character as Tony and there are not so many amusing anecdotes about her. It is hard to make goodness glamorous. But she is one of the heroines in my life, and probably for many others too, not only for her quietly impressive achievements but for the loveliness of her nature; her generosity and humility; one of the wisest, most tolerant and most compassionate human beings I have ever known – and with a sense of humour and fun too. She had strong views on certain issues (aged 74 she came up to London to go on a great Countryside March waving a placard!) but I never recall hearing her speak in real anger, however righteously indignant she was about something. She was a sterling example of how it is possible to be an only child and not be a spoilt brat.

Rosamund was the only child of Maxwell (Max) Staniforth, who became an Anglican vicar after a varied career, and his wife Ruby Di, who died when Leslie was still a schoolboy. Ros was shy as a child and a young woman though photos show her to be beautiful and even exotic looking. She went to a small boarding school which was evacuated to the country during the war, and she recalled a fighter plane crashing near them when the girls were out on a walk. Although she was a clever girl there was no thought of her going to university and she ended up at secretarial college in London. But she enjoyed the job where she ended up, working at the College of Arms. That work sparked an interest in genealogy which she pursued over the rest of her life, though mainly after her children had grown up.

The College of Arms work culminated in arranging the order of precedence and seating for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and this work meant that both she and Tony were enabled to attend the Coronation (Tony having worked for Earl Mountbatten when he was in the RAF during the war in India). Those admitted to the event were afterwards allowed to purchase their chair or stool for the princely sum of 10 shillings. Their faded blue velvet seats lived at Forest Cottage, and Tony used his as a typing stool for many years. The centuries of tradition represented by the stool with its embroidered "ER" was a great contrast to Tony's latest model electric typewriter. Leslie and I still have the chair now, while Leslie's sister Louise has the stool. Tony was also interested in genealogy, having inherited many letters from his family, dating back centuries. Rosamund's research was rather overshadowed by Tony's during his lifetime, but after he died, she had more time for investigating her own family, and she wrote and self-published a book "*Sicklesmiths and Spear Carriers*" about her ancestors in Yorkshire, as well as establishing links with family all over the world.

Rosamund's father's exploits ranged from organising publicity for South American railways in Argentina (Leslie has an ID card for his grandfather proclaiming him "*Jefe Propaganda*"), to becoming one of the first radio DJs for a programme that was broadcast in France back in the 1930s. The programme had young children singing an advertising song proclaiming, "*We are the Ovaltineys!*" We're not sure

if young Rosamund joined in this singing, but she did read out birthday messages to children. These activities came after his career in the War, and when he read the Greats (Classics) at Oxford University. When Max was at Oxford, he was one of the first people to read *The Lord of the Rings*. He liked it so much that he wrote to congratulate J.R.R. Tolkien who wrote back expressing gratitude, especially as at that point he said, “*not many people seemed to like it*”! Leslie has been a huge fan of Tolkien since he was a boy (though unable to convert me to the fan club) so he was delighted to be given this letter.

Like my grandfather Martin, Leslie’s grandfather Max fought in and survived the First World War, but his war was probably more traumatic than Martin’s as he was in the trenches, including the Battle of the Somme. My Great-Uncle Louis also fought in the trenches and they were both lucky to survive, though probably with psychological scars. Sadly, my Great Uncle Louis died of illness (“Nile Fever” rather than Spanish Influenza) a mere 4 years after the war ended, aged only 26. Max wrote a fascinating series of letters back to his parents from the trenches, which were eventually published a few years ago. Although they do not dwell on the horrors of war, they give a vivid picture of everyday life at the front.

Leslie said his grandfather never spoke of the war to him, but there was an occasion when Leslie thought Max was going to be horrified at something he’d done, but he remained his calm, phlegmatic self and said, “*When you’ve lived as long as I have nothing much shocks you.*” Like Rosamund, he was a calm and wise person, and I imagine those qualities, combined with all his life experiences, must have made him a good and sympathetic vicar. However, I believe it was quite a shock to his wife Ruby when he decided to enter the church, as she was not particularly keen to be a vicar’s wife... (and although I’ve gone to church for most of my life, I can sympathise with such qualms!)

By the time that Tony met Rosamund, he had travelled extensively abroad, including his RAF work in India, and although he’d enjoyed this, he no longer wished to continue such exploits, so apart from a few trips to France, family travels were restricted to the UK. Rosamund did make one trip abroad long before Tony died, when her father Max was asked to lecture about ancient Greek civilisation on a Swann Hellenic cruise (presumably to Greece) and asked his daughter to accompany him – but Tony was not happy about this, and the experiment was not repeated. Those with more feminist leanings will think Ros should have ignored his strictures, but she came from a different more traditional generation, and she did not want her marriage to become a battleground. Tony did sometimes accuse her of being a stubborn Yorkshire-woman, so I guess he did not always get his own way, but in general Ros was very peace-loving. And Tony could be so fierce that most of us found it easier to comply graciously with his wishes.

I suspect Tony was jealous of Rosamund’s father Max and he did not have much good to say about Leslie’s grandfather; Max remained wisely reticent in his views of Tony, and the rest of the family were extremely fond of him, regarding him as gentle, wise and perceptive. Leslie’s grandfather had been a vicar in places like Dorset (the delightfully named Sixpenny Handley) but by the time I met him he was retired and living in an almshouse in the village near Leslie’s parents. He had tried applying to a picturesque almshouse elsewhere in Winchester (in the early 1970s)

but was informed “*we had some trouble with a clergy-man back in the 1950s – so we haven’t taken any clergy since then*”. Tony would perhaps have endorsed this view. His feelings towards Max were not overly warm, and his general view of the clergy was quite jaundiced; he would describe them darkly as “*black crows*” (presumably referring to their black cassocks).

Max’s residence in Pilley Bailey meant that he quite often came for Sunday lunch and feast-days such as Christmas and Easter, and Rosamund would visit him in his flat, but apart from that he catered for himself. He helped local clergy out by taking occasional services in one of the village churches, and it was a delight that he was able to marry Leslie and me, as well as christening our first child James. He was lucky enough to maintain his wits and health until shortly before he died aged 92.

Even in death Max was considerate. He had been in bad health for a few weeks, and Rosamund was anxiously wondering how she could accommodate him in Forest Cottage if he needed serious long-term nursing care (or perhaps more precisely wondering how to persuade Tony to let him move in). Meanwhile a friend of his kindly agreed to have him visit at Christmas time and when Max died on Boxing Day 1985 it was almost as though he had planned it so as not to inconvenience Rosamund – letting her and Tony enjoy Christmas Day and then passing away so she didn’t have to cope with him in the same house as her husband. Tony still managed to mutter one or two remarks about dying at Christmastime being inconvenient, but even he must have been relieved it happened so swiftly.

Although in general he had a rather low opinion of priests, Tony did admire one or two individual vicars and attended church fairly frequently, though he preferred to go to the early 8 am service, particularly on Christmas Day “*to get it over with quickly*” – he was keen to get on with the present-opening as soon as we returned from church! It was sometimes more embarrassing if we were attending the main morning service with Tony, as he would usually have on his anorak and there would be a loud screeching sound as he pulled apart his Velcro fasteners, followed by further rumblings as he caught up with his neighbours in a loud stage whisper – regarding church primarily as an opportunity to conduct business and social matters.

However, one noise in church that Tony was not responsible for was one Christmas carol service where there was a howling baby. Instead of going out, the mother tried to calm the infant down by walking up and down the aisles. Tony described the scene in tones of disgust mixed with hilarity as the mother “*playing her child like a bagpipe*”. He often had an apt turn of phrase. In the group photo of our wedding, he was amused by the fact that my brother Colin’s arm was round his girlfriend, hand out of sight, and Tony was convinced he was enjoying hugging her rear end, which meant afterwards he always referred to her as “*Huggums*”.

Another favourite expression of Tony’s, usually delivered in a withering tone, was “*You know what thought did* – Leslie and I did not know, but on further enquiry Tony enlightened us – “*stuck a feather up its bum and thought it was a chicken*”! I often wondered if Tony made up this choice phrase, but when watching an old Taggart recently I was amused to hear Mark McManus as crusty detective Taggart utter the very same words! Tony was full of quaint old-fashioned descriptions such as “*poodlefaking*” (canoodling) or “*feathery voice*” (for flattery or smooth talk)

used along with downright sarcasm. Another of his little quotes if he thought family were helping themselves rather freely to food, drink or belongings was to proclaim wryly “*Oh go on - LIBERTY HALL!*” He was very well-read; Leslie remembers him reading Dickens *A Christmas Carol* aloud to the family at Christmastime. He would read most afternoons when he went up for a “ziz” (nap).

One famous occasion (which Leslie and I would have preferred to forget) was when Leslie and I were trying to catch a train down to the New Forest at the end of term. As usual, Leslie had cut it rather fine for getting on the train. Leslie had a large amount of luggage including a big stereo in a box and a train official on the platform at Waterloo was exhorting us to put items onto the train. To our horror, when half the things were loaded and half still on the platform, the train started moving out of the platform (despite the door to the guards-van being open).

We were both so stunned that it didn't even occur to either of us to try leaping on board – which is what Tony thought one of us should have done. We had to phone him and sheepishly confess that not only had we missed our planned train, but that he would still need to come meet it to take half of Leslie's baggage off the train – and then meet us on a later train, which turned out to be an extremely slow stopping train. Thereafter Tony would refer to us in a gently mocking tone as “*Cream of the nation's intellect – can't even catch a train*” and ask in a puzzled voice “*Why didn't he shove Alison on the train?*”

Tony often made fun of his children, particularly Leslie. Leslie's view was that his father had a rather low opinion of him, but I don't think that was true. However, I think he found it hard to express intimate emotions and easier to make jokes, especially if catching somebody out. Another time he caught Leslie out was when we made a family expedition to the Isle of Wight, organised by Leslie. This involved catching ferry, buses and going for a walk. Unfortunately, we had a long wait for the bus back as it transpired Leslie had looked at the timetable for Saturday instead of Sunday. As with our ill-fated train journey when half our luggage went on the train ahead of us, Tony never let Leslie forget the train or the bus mishap, but I don't think he intended to be malicious in his teasing, though Leslie was less convinced. He felt that Tony wanted to wrong-foot him. When Leslie got married and we had found a small flat in Streatham Tony wasted no time in announcing that he had now left home, and bringing up his stuff from Forest Cottage, including a desk, trunk, books, Welsh rug, angle-poise lamp and other sundry belongings, which took Leslie aback, but helped to make our abode feel more home-like.

By the time that we moved to Notting Hill, 6 months after getting married, Leslie had collected a few more items from home. On one of Tony's rare visits to our house he browsed through Leslie's books and professed outrage to find one of his own railway books in Leslie's library (*Red for Danger* – one of Leslie's favourite railway tomes). Tony claimed his own name had been crossed out and replaced by Leslie's but that might have been dramatic embellishment. Leslie hastily bought a replacement volume for Tony, but he was never allowed to forget the plundering – on almost every subsequent visit to Forest Cottage we would be greeted by Tony saying, “*I suppose you've come down to steal a few more of my books!*”

Tony and Leslie both enjoyed factual books (which I would dismiss as boring, although I did enjoy reading *Red for Danger* – but mostly I devoured a range of novels, occasionally interspersed with biographies). They also shared an interest in railways and canals and other historic transport networks, so inevitably their taste in literature was quite similar. Indeed, Tony used to take Leslie train spotting when Leslie was a small boy, and he is probably responsible for Leslie's avid love of collecting all sorts of things (train tickets, stamps, coins, postcards, church-guides, books, railway signs, magazines about model railways, real railways, Meccano, mugs... the list goes on). I tried to weed out a few things when we moved from Notting Hill to Hammersmith – with limited success.

Tony found it easier to relate to animals than people, especially his beloved elkhounds, each successive one described as "*Pa's adored*", and showered with fond embraces. My Grannie Enid was similar – she too showed great affection to her pets but was very sharp with her children and grandchildren, which perhaps also related back to her parents splitting up and she also not seeing her father afterwards. Yet they both could write affectionate letters to their children, even though they found it hard to express fondness in person. Who knows whether things would have been different if their own childhoods had been more stable and loving?

Tony was a man of contradictions; he had been overlooked and put down in his early life and he could be irrational and quite scary (as his grandchildren witnessed), but he also became the person who formed the most stable hub among extended family members in later life, regarded by them as a benevolent patriarchal figure. Amid divorces and acrimony between his nephews, nieces and cousins he managed to remain on good terms with most of them, and "*Uncle Tony*" was viewed very fondly by all the family. Tony was also scrupulously honest as well as meticulous in keeping accounts. Once when totting up his spending for the day he discovered that a garage in Southampton had given him too much change, so he drove all the way back there from Lymington to return the extra change (which must have cost him more in petrol than the extra change). He said he didn't want the sales assistant to get in trouble (the employee concerned was perhaps a pretty young female...)

Our children enjoyed seeing both sets of their grandparents, but our visits to the New Forest when they were young had to be rationed as Leslie's father Tony's patience for small children was limited. Perhaps partly because he was 18 years older than Rosamund he found children tiring and of limited interest. He always made his feelings clear, with expressions like "*Don't expect me to be the doting grandfather!*" and "*Children are exhausting!*" – and with a wry smile, dripping with sarcasm he would refer to children as "*God's little presents*".

Tony would be kind in buying the children presents such as Easter eggs, and later on sending them gift tokens, but his fuse was short in having them physically near, and he had little sympathy for accidents that might befall them. We were out for a walk on the forest when James was about 5 and he walked near the back of a pony which kicked his leg. Tony's reaction was that James was a "*blithering idiot*" and should have known not to go around the back of a pony! This seemed a little harsh at his age, especially with James being a town boy, but we knew that remonstrating with Tony would not improve the situation.

When the children grew a little older, James was invited to go for a few visits at Forest Cottage on his own. Tony managed to tolerate having one child at a time to stay, and most of the interaction was with Granny Rosamund, who was sweet with the children. She let James dress up as well as play with a variety of toys, games and books. Catriona also had fun when it came to be her turn to visit, but Gordon refused to go on his own, feeling nervous of how Grandfather would treat him, although ironically Tony would probably have got on best with Gordon.

Sadly, Tony died before Gordon was old enough to appreciate him properly. But they were quite similar – both early risers, punctual beings who liked to have a plan and stick to it, responsible, hard-working, loyal souls monitoring the rest of the less mature family, getting things done or pointing out when things needed attending to, sighing and shaking heads when things remained unattended to, brusque on the surface, but soft-hearted and devoted underneath. Now Gordon looks back admiringly saying Grandfather was “*the man*”.

Leslie was the eldest and only boy, with two sisters. He gets on well with his youngest sister Louise and her husband and son, and it is pleasing that they still live in the cottage next door to the cottage where Leslie and his sisters were born and brought up, and they were able to spend so much time with Leslie’s mother in her final years. We find his other sister more awkward – many of the family have had problems with her, which is a shame, and she doesn’t seem to like any of us much, and now we have not seen her for a long time. There have been various difficult situations with her over the years which have left us feeling frustrated or upset. And we didn’t like the way she treated Rosamund after Tony died. She seemed to try to blame her for Tony not liking her enough. But as one gets to know other people over the years the more one discovers that there is often a relationship within a family which is dysfunctional – sometimes it may improve, but other times the situation remains intractable, and one has to accept it.

Ros and Tony aimed to treat their children in as fair a manner as possible, especially when it came to distributing money or worldly goods. Tony found it hard not to show some prejudices in personal terms and could get quite irritated with his middle daughter and son, but he always had a soft spot for Louise, the baby of the family. However, in terms of property distribution he and Ros were extremely equitable. Over the years that they lived in the New Forest they bought three cottages with adjoining gardens and grounds. Forest Cottage and Greenacre were picturesque, thatched cottages of a similar size, but Forest Cottage had been extended a bit. Laurel was a smaller Edwardian brick house, but with a bigger garden. Their initial plan was to leave Forest Cottage to Leslie, and to give Greenacre and Laurel to their two daughters. Years before Tony died, they proposed passing on Greenacre and Laurel in advance to minimise inheritance tax. But while Louise was happy about this, her sister was not and insisted she wanted to have Forest Cottage, even though it meant she would have to wait until both Tony and Ros had died. Leslie was agreeable to any arrangement that his parents proposed, so he and I took ownership of Greenacre, while Louise and Glenn took over Laurel.

We enjoyed some short holiday visits to Greenacre with our children, and it was a good way of being able to see Leslie’s parents without exhausting Tony with an excess of “*the little darlings*”, but we did not want to move down there. There was

one infamous occasion when at the end of the day Tony yelled at us “*get those f_ing little bastards off my property*”! I don’t recall them doing anything especially horrendous (says the fond mother about her boisterous offspring), but Tony had obviously had more than enough of their company – worse than Jane Austen’s Mr Bennet’s euphemistic remark to his daughter Mary “*You have delighted us long enough*”, when her piano playing was becoming excruciating! Those with a limited tolerance for small children may find this outburst quite understandable... But such remarks were not likely to encourage us to make plans to stay longer-term, even if we had otherwise wished to.

We had not intended to stay long-term in London either, but somehow – “*events, dear boy, events*” – it transpired that we stayed while other more ostensibly died-in-the-wool city dwellers moved out to pastures rural. Ironically, it was partly because we both preferred the northern climes – the Lake District and West Coast of Scotland; but moving up there would have been a greater upheaval and there would have been more restricted opportunities for employment. We quite liked the heathland countryside of the Forest, but it was not our favourite part of the UK. Also, neither of us drive, and although Leslie could no doubt have mastered this skill, I was not keen to, or to live in a place where driving was necessary. (Other road-users are probably also glad that I didn’t attempt to acquire this skill!)

While the children were young, I liked the fact that we were able to walk or cycle to school, shops, church, friends’ houses and other social activities, so in that respect urban living was preferable to the country. Also, after becoming self-employed Leslie had built up a client portfolio in London for both his accountancy and computer consultancy services, and it would have taken a while to build up new clients in a different area, especially in the country. Meanwhile we continued building up close friendships at church, drama group and with fellow families. We were also fortunate to be living in the leafy and architecturally attractive area of Notting Hill with its garden squares and elegant terraces. Hanover Lodge, where we made our home, was in the heart of the Ladbroke Estate conservation area which made it a very pleasant place to live and bring up a young family.

Thus, apropos Greenacre, we decided to carry on with the holiday lettings that Tony and Ros had already been doing, and Louise and Glenn initially did the same with Laurel. That proved a good way of covering the costs of the property, though we had to do quite a bit of maintenance (principally re-thatching which is a big expense that only gets done about every 40 years, but we had to do it quite soon – Ros and Tony cannily passed it on to us just before the re-thatching became an urgent priority!) I made various trips over the years to do minor redecoration work – and at least with the small rooms and low ceilings this was not too difficult.

Eventually, after Tony died, there was a further cash distribution to all the children and at this stage Louise and Glenn approached us to ask if they could purchase Greenacre from us. Having been a river keeper in Dorset for several years, Glenn had now decided to retrain as a furniture restorer, and they wanted to come and live back in Louise’s home village. Meanwhile Leslie and I were keen to acquire the last major portion of Hanover Lodge where we had made our family home, so we did a deal. This provided us with a flat that we could let out, and it gave us financial security since neither of us had a significant pension; Leslie having been

mainly self-employed, and myself having worked primarily for small charities. My Aunt Christine was still living in the top flat at this point, but we purchased the reversionary interest for her flat from my parents, along with the rest of the house.

By the time Rosamund died she was in her late 80s and had to spend her final years in a Care Home due to dementia. But Tony was lucky enough to continue living at Forest Cottage all his married life, even though he was quite ill for the last 2 or 3 years, but he had Rosamund looking after him devotedly. This no doubt took its toll; after Tony died and someone suggested that Ros might like to marry again, she refuted the idea firmly saying rather drily "*I tried that once*". Tony would not have been the easiest of husbands; and could be quite dictatorial; however, Ros did comment later that she was starting to remember all the good times they had enjoyed together, even when their views differed, before he grew so ill and querulous, and to me they seemed in the most part to be a very happy couple.

Tony had said he would like to be cremated when he died, whereas Ros wanted a burial, so she had planned to be buried in the grave along with her parents, in the local churchyard at Boldre. However, before Tony died, he indicated that funeral arrangements should be whatever Ros wanted or was easiest for her, and as it happened it would have been more awkward to have a cremation because they lived in the country, a long way from a crematorium, so a burial was arranged.

The funeral service was held at the nearby church of South Baddesley where Tony had mostly attended services, and it was decided to bury Tony there. This was very appropriate, as it was beside the playground for South Baddesley School where Tony had been Clerk to the Governors for many years, and we could hear schoolchildren playing outside as the burial took place. However, when the undertakers enquired if they should dig a double depth grave, planning for a future reunion of spouses, they were a bit taken aback when Ros shook her head declaring that she was planning to be buried with her parents up at Boldre Church. This was when the last 3 exhausting years of caring for a crotchety and demanding invalid had worn down even saintly Rosamund's equanimity. But 20 years down the line gave her perspective and she changed her mind. Luckily it was still possible to expand Tony's grave slot to accommodate her! They now lie together in a classic country churchyard under a simple and elegant headstone.

To lower the tone for a moment – as Tony often did with his lavatorial humour - poor Leslie had a bizarre and somewhat agonising experience on the way to his father's deathbed. His mother had rung him up in London to warn him that his father was dying, and he should travel down that evening if he wanted to say goodbye. Leslie beetled off to catch the last evening train from London to Brockenhurst, via Southampton. When he went to the loo on the train, he was disconcerted to hear a locking sound outside the door – and when he tried to get out, he found he was locked in. He tried shouting for help but got no reply and was forced to endure over an hour travelling in the cramped confines of the train loo, pondering how he could get out and wondering if he would have to pull the communication cord when they reached his station.

Luckily, just before reaching his destination, a railway official finally heard his cries for assistance, and released him from his bizarre incarceration, much to his

relief – but it was a pity that when he reached Tony’s bedside, his father had lapsed into unconsciousness and was unable to appreciate the story of Leslie’s unfortunate journey – he would have been delighted to add it to his repertoire of lavatorial tales. I remember his amusement about the prospective wedding of a neighbour’s daughter who was planning to have Vindaloo curry at the reception, and Tony spent hours chortling imagining the effect on the intestines of the wedding guests.

Rosamund made the most of the 17 or 18 years of good health which blessed her after Tony died, taking up activities like bookbinding and pursuing her genealogical research with extra zeal – as well as doing some major world travel. With Tony safely buried Ros took to the high road, the high seas and the skies! She proved to be an intrepid explorer, and we were delighted that she was at last able to explore many corners of the earth that she had wished to see for so long. Being much younger than Tony, she was young enough to be able to indulge her wanderlust. She travelled with a friend, but we still thought she was brave to make these expeditions in her late sixties. Her travels included South America, visiting the Falklands and Argentina where she was born; Australia; the Baltic; Europe and Canada.

In her last few years of life Rosamund’s travelling days came to an end due to her dementia. Her daughter Louise and husband Glenn did their best to look after her, but eventually she had to move from Forest Cottage to live in a Care Home. Even then staff commented on how her gentle personality shone through all the confusion and unhappiness. Before she had to move into the Home she managed to attend her grandson Gordon’s wedding to his beloved Emma in 2013, up in Scotland, although I think by then she was a little bewildered as to what was happening. When she finally died in 2017 it was a merciful release. The funeral was a marvellous occasion with many family and friends joining to give thanks for the life of such a special and wonderful person, even though her middle daughter was conspicuous by her absence, which the rest of us found almost incomprehensible.

After Gordon and Emma had their first baby Archie in 2015, they went to visit Rosamund in the Care Home to introduce her to her great-grandson. Bearing in mind her passion for genealogy and family history, we like to think that, despite her dementia, she was peripherally aware of the significance of meeting Archie John Maxwell Du Cane, carrying on the family line into the new generation.

After Rosamund’s death Gordon and Emma had a baby girl and we were delighted that they gave her the middle name of Rosamund in memory of Gordon’s lovely Granny. My mother might also have been amused at this, because Rosamund was the name that she and her mother gave to the baby grand piano they had in their Baltimore apartment! As an aside, I wonder now how they afforded the piano, but maybe it was a gift from the munificent Mr Jones. I imagine piano lessons were something Mother treated herself to once she was earning money, as I doubt that she would have had them at the Home. Certainly, by the time she came over to the UK she could play even if only as a Jane Austen character might say, “*a little*”.

My own piano playing was at a similar or more basic level – I crawled up to Grade 3 in the exams, but it was really singing that I loved - as Catriona described me in a Mothers’ Day tribute when she was about 5 “*this creature has a nose like an elephant and sings like a hummingbird*”! No doubt closer to the truth than her

other over-the-top epithet for me “*She is as kind as God*”! Gordon’s homage was much more down to earth, thanking me for cooking him nice meals! I loved both accolades – each so characteristic of my different children. Like Catriona, James would also make delightfully extravagant compliments to me in cards, and all such written appreciation would mean more to me than any presents that might be bestowed (though I wouldn’t say no to being taken out for a meal of course). However, I don’t think I could compete with Rosamund for being an exceptional parent; but then Leslie is not quite so grumpy as his father Tony was, so perhaps that balances out our parenting!



View of Forest Cottage & Pink Cottage across the Green, Pilley Bailey



Rosamund aged 7 c.1935



Rosamund c. 1945



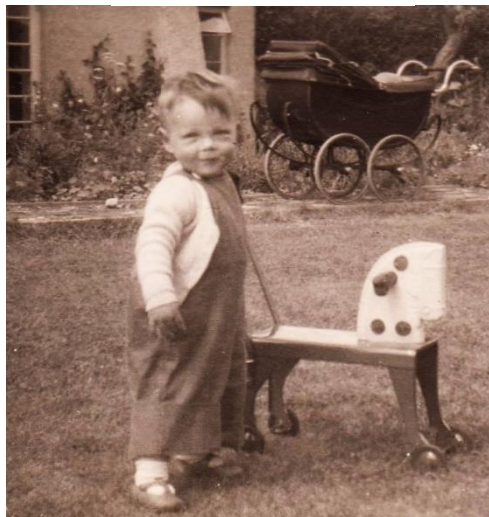
Rosamund, wedding day July 1951



Rosamund c. 1954



Leslie's christening at Boldre Church 1954 – his Granny Ruby Di, father Tony, Mother Ros & Grandfather Max Staniforth



Leslie c. 1955-56, Forest Cottage garden



Leslie c. 1960-61



Leslie c. 1965 "Victor Ludorum" at Sandroyd Prep School



Forest Cottage with Tony's cars – before and after children! MG followed by Morris Traveller



Forest Cottage, where Leslie was born and brought up.



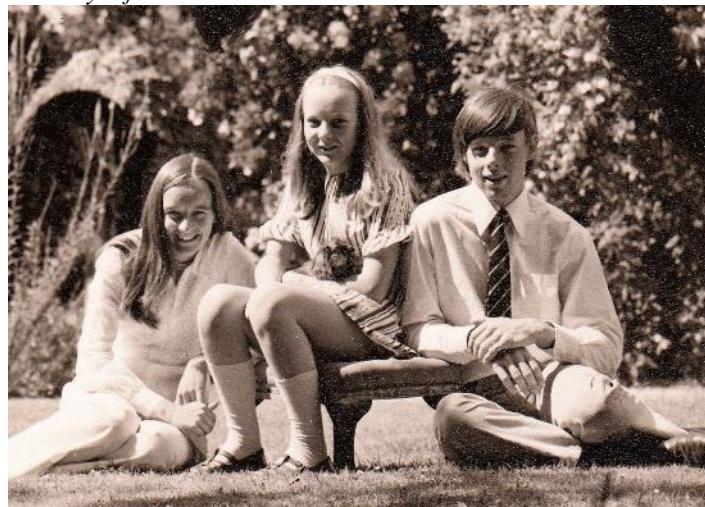
Jane, Louise, Leslie & Rosamund on beach in Hampshire c.1961



Leslie & Peter Wool (the first elkhound) camping in Perthshire with Tony's frame tent c.1963-4



Rosamund & Prince 1980s



Jane, Louise & Leslie c. 1970-71



Du Cane & Sutcliffe Family gathering after Rosamund's funeral – Leslie, Glenn, Louise, Gemma, Max, Catriona, James, Wayne, Emma, Gordon, Alison [NB before Leslie's teeth were fixed!] 2017.

21. Notting Hill Days

Before Leslie and I embarked on having children, we first wanted to create a home for ourselves. After graduating from Westfield, neither of us intended to stay living in London, and we had vague ideas of moving into the country probably in northern climes. But soon after marrying we found ourselves occupying part of Hanover Lodge, following my Aunt Nora's death. This was an accident of fortune, with the combination of my father needing caretakers to look after the family house, and us being "on the spot" while Leslie was doing his accountancy training and I was in the middle of secretarial training.



Living room at Hanover Lodge c.1977 in our early days in Notting Hill with our first sofa

Aunt Nora retained sharp wits to her final 80th year and I remember Leslie and I playing fiercely fought games of Scrabble with her during the last weeks of her life. Years later I would also find myself playing Scrabble with my father in the last months of his life – though by then his wits were far from sharp. In the intervening decades Leslie and I had made our home in Hanover Lodge, joined by three children along the way, not to mention a cohort of student lodgers, and it was good to have filled the house and garden with young people for such a long period.

Hanover Lodge was a house in Notting Hill, that was left to my father following the death of both his father and later Aunt Nora – they had been brought up there and Nora lived there most of her life. Louis inherited the house in 1977, soon after he had started working as Principal of the Birmingham School of Music, and he and my mother were living in Edgbaston, a leafy suburb of Birmingham. Although Dad enjoyed visiting London, especially for the music scene, my mother had no desire to live there. While she had lived in two big cities, Glasgow and Birmingham, she regarded London as a much larger and more terrifying urban jungle.

That might not have stopped Dad from moving to London, but it would have been difficult for him to change jobs at that point. He was not sure whether he should sell or keep the house, but he had to wait until Aunt Nora's elderly housekeeper, Mrs McLean, moved out before he could do anything, as she was a sitting tenant, and there was also the short-term complication of the top half of the house being occupied by tenants in two flats. My mother would certainly not have wanted to move to a house that was shared with motley strangers, not to mention the challenge of having to manage the lettings.

It was perhaps serendipity that Leslie and I were in London. At that time my brother Colin was living in Leamington Spa with musician friends, and they were trying to pursue their dream of achieving some commercial success with their band - hoping to emulate the Beatles or even a less successful group. Unfortunately, that

would prove to be fairly abortive, but they had some fun trying. Meanwhile, following our marriage, Leslie and I were living in a small flat in South London, while doing our respective training following graduation from university. Dad suggested we move into Hanover Lodge to caretake the house, including the flats. It was pleasant to move to Holland Park from Streatham, though we were rather over-awed by Mrs McLean, who was a fierce, plain-speaking Northern woman.

She had been a splendid housekeeper to Aunt Nora, but had perhaps stayed on too long, and become too proprietorial. She was 70 by the time Aunt Nora died, but despite her age she was still looking after Nora, and she regarded it as her mission to keep the house just the same after Nora's death, observing disapprovingly, if Leslie and I made any changes, "*that's not the way your aunt did it*". She would come out with other unsettling comments. We were sleeping in what had been Aunt Nora's bedroom, which happened to be above Mrs McLean's basement flat. One morning she exclaimed "*What were you doing last night? It sounded like you were moving furniture!*" It was hard to know what to say.

Aunt Nora's quarters had never been fully separated from the communal hall, and in order to reach the loo and bathroom by the front door, Leslie and I had to dive out of our bedroom into the main hall, where tenants might be making their way in and out the house. Mrs McLean seemed to make a point of having the front door wide open when we got up in the morning, and would be busy polishing the brass doorknocker, as if to suggest we were late getting up. We had been in residence for months, not daring to change anything in our living area, when my mother came to visit. Being both considerate of us and bold in nature, she insisted that it was time we should start arranging things the way we wanted and not be intimidated by the housekeeper, so we did a bit of re-arranging.

One early change was buying our own sofa with Liberty peacock fabric (Leslie was doing the audit for the furniture company, which meant he got a discount – so he insisted on getting the biggest sofa!) In contrast, for many years we had a small armchair that Leslie had picked up in the street (abandoned), and I covered it in turquoise fabric. I did finally persuade Leslie it could go back out in the street and luckily someone else took it away. One amazing feature of living in Notting Hill was that if you put out an item of furniture or equipment it would almost always disappear overnight. Our biggest coup was a heavy old photocopier that had been in Leslie's office and eventually stopped working – even that disappeared!

At a later stage, Mrs McLean's behaviour became more peculiar, and she began accusing us of taking away items of her furniture - but then replacing them with others she said looked the same but were not hers! We wondered what we could do about this awkward situation, but fortunately Mrs McLean found herself sheltered accommodation in nearby flats, and she moved out voluntarily. Perhaps her spirit lingered on, glowering over us, as one morning there was a terrible crash in the bathroom and we found most of the plaster ceiling had fallen down over the bath, which could have killed us if we'd been having a soak – just as well we got up late!

Eventually Dad decided to develop and divide Hanover Lodge into five flats, with the assistance of an architect friend, and to fund part of the development by selling half of the basement once it was a fully self-contained flat. Meanwhile Leslie and I

had reached the stage of wanting to buy a property and it was agreed that we would also buy into the development, initially paying for a share of the work and acquiring a quarter of the house (half the ground floor and half the basement, which made a two-bedroom maisonette apartment including the garden), and thus we became property owners in 1980. Over the next 25 years we eventually went on to purchase the whole house, including buying back the basement flat that Dad had sold to a third party. Quite a lot more alteration was required, finally returning half of the house to an arrangement loosely resembling its original Victorian layout.

Leslie and I were not keen on the architectural work of Dad's friend, which made the inside of the house look like a modern 60's conversion complete with a stark boxed-in staircase that was unsympathetic to the Victorian style of the house. The one advantage was that it was safer for small children because the steps went down and around in several short squared off flights, so there was no danger of a fall down a long flight of stairs, which was useful when our kids were little.

Fortunately, we were able to reverse and improve some of the less appealing work when we reached the stage of acquiring the whole of the bottom two floors, and we opened out the central hall area installing a long gracious staircase with a wrought iron balustrade matching the original balustrade that was upstairs. We also put in a solid oak floor both on our stairs and in our living room. One of the regrets about saying goodbye to the house when we eventually moved out was saying goodbye to that wooden floor. I hope that one day we will get round to installing a similar floor in the living room of our current house – being Georgian or older in parts, we feel sure it must originally have had a wooden floor. When Leslie and I finally acquired the whole of Hanover Lodge we continued the pattern of letting out one or two flats while we lived in the bottom half of the house with our family (quite often plus lodgers!), so the house remained very fully occupied until 2014, when the era of my family's ownership finally came to an end, after a chain of related owners dating back over 170 years to the 1840s.

During our years at Hanover Lodge, we regularly entertained friends, mostly for weekend dinners or Sunday lunch after church. The children would get used to visitors sharing meals, which they didn't mind as long as I didn't take too long with the cooking (Gordon hated waiting for his food!) But if Leslie had provided enough crisps and dip to accompany drinks, they were more forbearing if they had to wait for the roast to cook. My parents made quite regular visits to us, especially at Christmas, or for the children's birthdays, and to come see the plays that Leslie and I were involved in through our amateur dramatic group. Once our children had arrived, we spent nearly all our Christmases at Hanover Lodge, often joined in the festive season by both my parents and brother Colin (sometimes plus his current girlfriend), as well as my Aunt Christine, who had come to live in the top flat a few years after we had moved in. If my family were not with us, we would invite friends so there was always a big feast on Christmas Day.

Leslie's family would have been welcome too, but Leslie's father rarely wanted to leave his own home – and once we had more than one child he made it plain that he did not want us to spend Christmas with him and Ros! After he died, we did once persuade Leslie's mum to come spend Christmas with us, which was joyous, but I think she preferred to have Christmas in her own home at Forest Cottage, or next

door at Greenacre with daughter Louise, her husband Glenn and their son Max. However, we made occasional visits at other times once Tony was safely underground. But I loved having Christmas in our own home despite there being quite a litany of tasks involved in the festivities when the children were small.

Although stockings were left on our beds when Colin and I were kids, when my own brood were little, we put the stockings by the fireplace (partly because we had a real chimney for Santa to come down) and son James started up the tradition of leaving a drink and mince pie (or other snack) for Father Christmas – suspect he saw this in the movies! He remains a huge film buff. At Christmas time Leslie or I had to remember to consume the goodies before staggering to bed around 3 am after wrapping up all the presents – I never seemed to get organized in advance; present buying was another challenge, the majority of which was conducted by me as Leslie only made last minute purchases on Christmas Eve. These late-night tasks made it rather gruesome having to get up at 6 am to put the enormous turkey in the oven – Leslie and Gordon insisted on having the biggest bird in the shop, and we usually had extra guests joining us which justified the large size; as well as other extensive shopping, a fair challenge for a family who don't drive – and of course I was never organised enough to get my order into Tesco in time for them to deliver! As we always went to church on Christmas Day, I had to make sure the turkey was in the oven and other preparations under way.

Putting up the tree was another hurdle. Leslie insisted on getting the biggest tree which had to be watered outside and then secured to the curtain rail (so it wouldn't topple over); then came the business of finding working lights and draping them round the tree. Only once Leslie had done all that, was I permitted to decorate. Leslie was reluctant to buy the tree till Christmas Eve was almost upon us so there was always a nerve-wracking time when I wondered if it would be up by Christmas Day. Despite this I do love Christmas, even if my family think I get a tad stressed sometimes! In recent years Leslie has relaxed his rules about when the tree can be bought – and we can only accommodate a smaller tree in Hammersmith, so tree business has become easier. And since going to Scotland for Christmas sometimes, Leslie has even conceded that we don't need a turkey for Christmas Dinner! As the children and I prefer other options (lamb, beef, venison...) which are quicker to cook, this is also a relief. So, Christmas has become positively relaxing...

Cooking and meals together have formed an important part of our family life from when the children were small. Since getting married I have done most of the cooking, but on holidays Leslie has occasionally produced a spaghetti bolognaise (very garlicky). Another time on Colonsay we'd been given a crab and Leslie thought he'd use the leftovers to make a crab "bisque" - but it tasted more like pepper water as he attempted to give it flavour by grinding lots of black pepper into it. On the occasions when Leslie does cook it is a huge production that usually takes hours to achieve and is a great song and dance performance. It can be quite tasty when the meal FINALLY ARRIVES. But it is probably lucky he is not in charge of day-to-day catering – neither Gordon nor I enjoy waiting for our food.

There have been a few significant occasions when I've been absent (probably singing ...), such as Easter Day when Leslie has decided to make a feast of roast lamb with vegetable trimmings, but he has enlisted helpers like my son and his

partner to create the banquet. When the meal finally appears it looks splendid, even if people have almost lost their appetite waiting! In the early months of our friendship Leslie would invite me over to his digs for supper, usually the same standard menu of spag bog and apple crumble (though he did teach me how to make a dessert which I must admit has been a staple ever since, lemon syllabub tart, one of his mum's recipes I suspect). When Leslie cooked, I recall consuming a large quantity of bread and butter while waiting for the food to appear and trying not to chew my arm off with hunger. Leslie's next tack was to recruit me as sous chef when inviting additional female friends over for meals. I managed to remain good humoured, as apart from myself the female guests altered and there was perhaps even an implied honour in my position (spot the inadequate feminist).

As well as cooking, sewing skills were useful for me after I was married to make costumes for our plays and children's shows, as well as assorted curtains and some rather slapdash upholstery work. I made a rather splendid multi-coloured silky quilted coat which James wore as Joseph in *Joseph & the Amazing Technicoloured Dreamcoat* – to be followed 5 years later by Catriona also in a Year 6 show at their primary school. Over the years the coat appeared in 2 subsequent productions. I'm beginning to wonder if grandchildren will take over the mantle.

When the kids were little, I managed to make quite an array of novelty cakes for birthdays taken out of an indispensable Jane Asher Cakes book, including Humpty Dumpty, a James the Red Engine train cake, Loch Ness monster, a doll in a cake; a fairy castle made from meringues and silver balls and even a swimming pool cake (complete with optional shark and gruesome bodies). And I knitted several jumpers for James such as a rainbow striped pullover and a grey jumper with a picture of James the Red Engine. For Gordon I produced a powder blue pram-set and some mint green woolly dungarees embellished with blue and pink stripes.

But by the time Catriona was born I didn't seem to have time or energy for any more knitting. And I've not done any proper sewing for ages (partly because my sewing machine gave up the ghost). But maybe one day I'll take sewing and knitting up again... along with making cakes, home-made soup and other domestic skills that I seem to have mislaid over the years. (Can't believe I used to make about 15-16 cakes when I ran the Cake Stall at our church May Fair!) But I could not rival the sales of Leslie's second-hand book stall which raised hundreds of pounds each year (with Leslie buying a large number of the books himself!).

Leslie, however, has not developed many household skills in the department of sewing, knitting, loading washing machine, dishwasher, changing nappies – he's not much of a new man... On the other hand, he is brilliant at trouble-shooting computers, repairing bicycles and doing various DIY jobs round the house (which I am hopeless at) – though it may take an inordinate time for him to do them... But when one female friend, quite a bossy feminist, enquired when the children were small what Leslie did, I said "*he provides emotional support*" – which is true, and very important. And he's good at removing large spiders for me. He also occasionally manages to sew on a button – so maybe boarding school was not a complete waste of time. And he knows how to heat up cans of spaghetti hoops and can even make scrambled egg!

As our family grew, we made occasional visits with the children to both sets of grandparents, (Leslie's parents in Hampshire; mine initially in Birmingham, but mostly in Powick, Worcestershire). Since Leslie's father Tony was not keen on prolonged contact with grandchildren, we tended to make more frequent visits to my parents, who both loved seeing their grandchildren, even though my mother would get a little impatient of the boys fighting (claiming "*you and Colin never fought*") and Catriona's tantrums ("*I'm glad you never behaved like that Ally*").

Our children don't remember the Edgbaston house (where Leslie and I had our wedding reception) as James and Gordon were only aged 4 and 1 when my parents moved to Worcestershire, soon after Dad took early retirement from the Birmingham School of Music (now Conservatoire). They moved to a house on Kings End Road in Powick (between Worcester and Malvern) where they remained for nearly 20 years, till Mother died, when Dad decided to move back to Glasgow.

The Powick house did not have a big garden in terms of land, because most of the property was taken up by a lake, which was quite long, and shared with the neighbouring house. Originally it had been a monks' pool for a nearby abbey - but my parents' house was not old. It was a modern unassuming residence, probably built in the 1960s, and vaguely reminiscent of a Japanese bungalow. Leslie and I were sorry they did not buy one of the more characterful period houses nearby.

However, the house, called "Moonrakers", was easy for them to maintain, and practical, with a downstairs master bedroom and bathroom, and a separate "guest wing" upstairs with two bedrooms and bathroom, so it worked well when we visited. The children and I enjoyed many happy trips here. Leslie did not always come due to pressure of work. When he did accompany us, he always wanted to rush off on an expedition somewhere, making Mother sigh ruefully, thinking he did not enjoy spending time with his in-laws but that was not really true. I tried to explain that whenever we travel, Leslie tends to want to head out exploring as soon as we've arrived – and of course Dad was even more consumed by "*wanderlust*".

Although Dad kept busy after he retired from the Birmingham Conservatoire, doing plenty of musical activities, committee work and private teaching, he had more time on his hands. So, he carried out even more "*home improvement*" work at Powick, building on two separate conservatory rooms, installing an extra loo, and putting in a dormer window upstairs. Home improvements were like a compulsion with Dad – along with re-arranging gardens (though always second to music-making which remained his passion to the end of his life). He loved to plant trees and shrubs dotted all over lawns, and to create water features. He did this at Powick despite there already being a large lake in the garden!

I was nervous when Mother & Dad bought a house with a lake because our children were small, and I was worried they could drown. And indeed, there came a day when toddler son Gordon did fall in the lake. Luckily, I was close by and rushed to fish him out. Dad did all his work on house and garden while still busy with his musical activities. I suspect it drove Mother mad, but she felt she had to accept it as Dad was someone who could not bear to sit still and just relax. Unfortunately, it was partly a symptom of him feeling discontented in his marriage, even though he loved his family, and his restlessness also resulted in a more profound upheaval.

When our children grew older, they enjoyed rowing on the lake as well as feeding ducks and other birds that lived on “Duck Island” (when not carried away by foxes), and I have fond memories of them helping my mother with the feeding. She gave names to some of her favourite ducks – which increased the anguish if one of these became a victim of foxes or other marauders. In the end the lake was a fun thing to have at the grandparents, though I never managed to master the art of rowing – but both my parents were quite adept and taught the children how to row.

James went on to do kayak paddling and instructing, while Gordon got a rowing blue captaining the Boat Club at Glasgow University, so perhaps that early experience at Powick was seminal! We acquired two sea kayaks to keep at our Scottish house in Skelmorlie, and Gordon and wife Emma have been out in them and paddled with dolphins in the sea. We have also recently acquired kayaks for River House to use on the Thames, so James has been able to brush up his kayak skills and instruct Catriona, Edward and Wayne in paddling. What with rowing and swimming, early exposure to activities on and in the water definitely bore fruit!

Water sports also seem to be in the blood of myself and Leslie, probably inherited from both sides of our families. Leslie recalls skinny dipping in Loch Tay with his family on childhood holidays (and the later embarrassment caused by his mother bringing out photos to prove it). On my side, love of swimming also came from both my parents – and further back; I recently came across references to outdoor swimming in India in some of my grandfather’s letters. Mother loved swimming and told me and Colin about the joys of swimming in the River Potomac when she was a girl with her friends from “the Home”.

She even enjoyed swimming in the sea over here sometimes, though she found it cold compared to the USA, and she was shy about appearing in public in a swimsuit because of the mastectomy she had suffered in her twenties. Going to a pool could be tricky if they only had communal changing facilities. Dad was hardier at the beach, but I think he preferred swimming in pools, which he did when he was abroad and on the cruises he and Mother went on in later life. After Dad moved back to Glasgow following Mother’s death, he was proud to join the Western Baths, and go swimming there as he approached 80. When the grandchildren were little, he enjoyed helping me take them swimming at a pool in Malvern “The Splash” – though latterly he would stick to reading his paper with a coffee, while I braved the tumult of the Wave Machine and the waterslide with my 3 water babies.

Dad also took the kids swimming at the Camelford pool in Cornwall when I was singing at St Endellion Festival, and we had fun at some of the North Cornwall beaches. For many years, I took the kids swimming at pools in London, so they all learnt to swim at a younger age than I did, and they have grown up comfortable in the water. This was partly thanks to the “Ducklings” class at the local pool, and to their primary school providing swimming classes as part of the curriculum – something sadly less on offer today, with the increasing strictures of Health and Safety, and pressures on the timetable restricting trips outside the building.

Our offspring was a lucky generation. Leslie would occasionally join us in the pool, but with his fondness for long-distance outdoor swimming, the pool didn’t give him enough space, and he has always preferred the smell of algae or seaweed

to chlorine! However, on our many Colonsay holidays we have all enjoyed swimming in the sea, the occasional loch (despite the cold water) and the stunning lakes in the Lake District. More recently Leslie and I have done a lot of our open water swimming in the Serpentine and River Thames, but our children tend to be more concerned about what grunge might lurk in those waters. Leslie remains the hardest (some might call it obsessed) long-distance outdoor swimmer, while I enjoy it for shorter periods if the temperature is not too arctic.

When I took the children swimming when they were young, it was usually at the Kensington “New” Pools near our home, though occasionally we would visit establishments with more exciting waterslide facilities. The kids also had a few pool parties for birthdays (complete with a couple of swimming pool cakes that I made, following the instructions of my trusty Jane Asher cake book). Hiring the kiddy pool plus lifeguard and refreshments room for afterwards was more expensive than having a party at home but worthwhile in terms of avoiding cleaning up back at the ranch not to mention organising one’s own party games. One advantage of living in a city is that such facilities like a pool and other sports centres are close by – usually the children and most of their friends could get to the venue just by walking. When it came to 10 pin bowling or ice skating at Queensway that involved a short tube train ride, but even that did not take long.

We had a joint party for James and Gordon when they were about 7 and 4 with a bonfire in our garden supervised by Leslie, but in typical macho male fashion he created such a conflagration it burnt half the leaves off a tree and threatened to immolate the young guests. After that I decided a pool party would be a safer plan.

Other happy memories of life with the children growing up include such everyday pleasures as trips to the park – whether the rambling spaces of Kensington Gardens and Holland Park or the more intimate environs of the garden squares near us – principally glorious Ladbroke Square, as well as the closest garden across the road, Hanover Gardens, which had a tranquil charm. The garden squares are one of the special attractions of living in Notting Hill and Holland Park. Ladbroke Square was central to social life when the children were young. It had a nice playground with a large sandpit, swing and slide, and we would often meet other families out there, playing in the playground and in the central grassy gardens enjoying picnic teas.

Hanover Gardens featured more prominently when Leslie helped organise and set off fireworks at the annual Bonfire Party in November, while in the summer we would enjoy the summer garden party with a live band and the delights of dancing on the grass under the moonlit sky. We also sometimes attended garden parties and fireworks in Ladbroke Square, a bit more of a scrum, but with the advantage that Leslie was not responsible for organising any of it.

As a non-car family, London has been a great place to live, with so many amenities either in walking distance, or by a short trip on public transport. Another nearby sporting amenity was at Westway where the children could do a bit of indoor tennis, rock climbing and football on Astroturf. Despite coming from a family who hardly knew one end of a football from the other, Gordon developed a passion for “*the beautiful game*” early on, and once he was at secondary school, he was able to play in school matches. James was less keen on such team sports, but a whole new

world opened up to him when Leslie did some accountancy work at the Canalside Activity Centre (CANAC), based on the canal near Ladbroke Grove.

At CANAC James got the opportunity to do water sports, principally kayaking, and subsequently trampolining, which used to be on offer at the Centre (although no longer unfortunately). James turned out to have a great facility for both trampolining and kayaking, and he ended up competing up to county and national level. This was a real confidence booster for him at a time when he was struggling with dyslexia and the challenges of secondary school. He had been happy in the small pond of our local primary school, but once he had to enter the bigger secondary pool, he faced quite a few struggles. Things improved in sixth form, but before then he faced bullying which became quite upsetting. One longed to return to the cosy family atmosphere of primary – but you cannot go back. Leslie and I always found the church service which marked the end of Year 6 and bid farewell to the leavers a poignant and tear-jerking experience. A rite of passage that is good as children stretch their wings and move on to the next stage of life, out into the wide world, yet in other ways it is also heart-rending.

However, one lifesaver for James as he entered his teens and a more challenging school environment, was a flourishing youth group at church and supportive youth group leaders. We were lucky that just as James and Gordon were hitting adolescence, our church at St Peter's, led by vicar Mark, had developed lively youth work ranging from children's Sunday School up to teenage level. James, Gordon and Catriona had attended Sunday School at both St John's and St Peter's Notting Hill, when the churches were a joint parish, and I attended services at both of them, even after they became independent again. Leslie took Sunday School at St John's for several years, and our kids took part in quite a few of those classes, but they also enjoyed going away on youth trips with St Peter's to places like Thorpeness.

As the boys grew older, they attended the weekly Youth Group known as YOYO (You're Only Young Once). This was basically a social activity evening with a bit of theological and philosophical or moral input – along with emotional support for those who wanted it, and I think James found this particularly helpful, while Gordon liked playing Gameboy or Nintendo! Catriona enjoyed attending later on.

There were two youth workers of whom James was particularly fond – the first was a sweet girl called Rachel, and James seemed to have quite a crush on her. Then came a young man called Chris and it became clear that James had an even bigger crush on him. This was before I knew for sure that James was gay, and I felt mainly that Chris was kind and supportive to James – indeed I think that is mostly how it was, as even James himself didn't seem to be certain what Chris's sexual orientation was when we talked about it later. Whatever his deeper feelings, Chris provided friendship and support to James at a challenging time in his life, which included some traumatic events affecting the whole of our family. Our vicar Mark and his wife Laura were also hugely supportive to us then, and I will always be grateful to them for that.

There were many other marvellous people at St Peter's Notting Hill (SPNH), some of whom also became close friends; others I did not know well, but several gave me support and encouragement, particularly when I went through a bad phase of

depression – and then there were those I just enjoyed spending time with, such as doing many years of singing (shh 25+!) with the Worship Band with a range of different inspiring musicians – people like Julia, Phil, Lisa, Elisa, Peter and others. But I think the person I found most inspirational at SPNH over many years was Jen D – she is a true shining and delightful star, like Leslie’s mother Rosamund, who is the lodestone against whom I measure other radiant spirits - those who make the world a better place, who encourage and uplift with kindness and joy, and never seem to have a bad word to say about anyone and yet they are not irritatingly pious. It is no surprise that after spending years as a dyslexia teacher, she has now gone into ministry as a priest, where her pastoral skills must be invaluable and inspiring.

SPNH played an important part in my life for many years. I am less comfortable with the new style of that church, but I am happy attending St Peter’s Hammersmith which is now our local parish church, where we have an inspiring vicar Charles, reminiscent of Harold back in our St John’s days, and it is good to be able to attend church with Leslie again. It was probably time for me to detach myself following our move from Notting Hill and commit fully to Hammersmith. However, I still have fond memories of events and people at SPNH. Mark was a lovely vicar – as was Harold (who oversaw both St John’s and St Peter’s).

I had a happy time working for both of them when I was Parish Administrator, even though they were such different people, and some tensions grew under the surface. But there was a golden era when we had Harold, wise, compassionate vicar whose sermons could be long but were deeply spiritual and philosophical; Sister Denzil, gentle nun with a twinkle who also became a priest; and curate Sue Gent who was as kind and wise as Harold (and Leslie and I formed a particularly close friendship with her), and then Mark, a warm, endearingly human Associate Vicar, who was as happy playing football or going down the pub as being in church, and gave short no-nonsense sermons – but which could still be thought-provoking.

Leslie and I did not get on so well with Harold’s successor at St John’s; for me that did not matter so much as by then I was going regularly to SPNH where Mark had progressed to being Vicar in charge after Harold retired, but it was more difficult for Leslie who had been hugely involved at St John’s for nearly 30 years. Although he came occasionally to SPNH, he was not keen on the modern worship music, and ended up being in a slight spiritual wilderness for a few years. However, this enforced “sabbatical” was perhaps a blessing in disguise because Leslie had been so busy being a churchwarden and treasurer and needed a break.

This also gave Leslie more opportunities to do outdoor swimming at the Serpentine and take part in long-distance swims in the Lake District and Scotland, culminating in three attempts on Loch Lomond. After that there were a few years when he found less time for regular open-water swimming – probably because he started getting involved with trustee work for the French Hospital (a Huguenot charity administering an almshouse in Rochester, which interested Leslie due to his genealogical research into his Huguenot forebears), which expanded into also being a trustee for the Huguenot Museum. Now he has become immersed in church life at St Peter’s Hammersmith, it was perhaps inevitable that he would be inveigled into being church treasurer (his relatively rare accountancy skills combined with an even rarer interest in sitting on committees were bound to be discovered). The children

and I wonder if he will ever give up attending all these meetings? However, at the same time, he has recently been getting back into serious open water swimming, swimming most days in the river from April to October and showing no sign of stopping much through the winter! The latter activity may refresh him to survive the demands of the former, along with his other charity trustee work.

As our children grew older, like so many teenagers, they became less enamoured with church, and Leslie and I were certainly not going to force them to come along, so we had to accept that apart from special events like Christmas carol services, weddings or funerals, we would not usually have our offspring with us. But fortunately, they have continued to be happy to spend time with us in many other aspects of our lives, including sporting activities, drama and going on holidays or other expeditions together, which is a great joy.

Before the children were born, we had the odd lodger, including a young man doing accountancy training with Leslie. When the children were little, we had a succession of young female lodgers (mostly friends via church). Although not au pairs, a few babysat for us, each one staying about a year. However, once our children were old enough to need separate rooms, we had to stop having lodgers for a while, as we only had 4 bedrooms in our half of the house. But after Gordon had settled in at university in Glasgow, he suggested we could use his bedroom for a lodger, first for a friend, Marianne, who had been a cox on his boat and was coming down to do post-graduate studies in London. Thus began a new era of lodgers. This provided a useful addition to our income and offered cheap accommodation to students, who often became like one of the family, even if there could occasionally be irritations arising from sharing at such close quarters.

At one stage we suffered a flood which put one of our two bathrooms out of order, and we all had to share one, which was a bit of a strain in the morning. James found it aggravating that one lodger always seemed to have jumped in the shower just when he wanted to go in the bathroom. James could cause annoyance himself though as, being such a deep sleeper, he would sometimes sleep through his alarm and the lodger in the neighbouring room would end up having to hammer on his door to get it switched off! There were times when we would all be queuing to use the washing machine, or competing to use the kitchen facilities, but I was just relieved that we had lodgers who were self-reliant when it came to making food – although occasionally we would share a communal meal for fun.

For a while it was only Gordon's room that was used, but then we had two girl student contacts of Gordon both wanting to move in, and Catriona was going up to Leeds to university, so I suggested that one of the girls could use her room. Catriona was not happy, as she felt much more attached to her boudoir than Gordon was to his monkish cell (poor Gordon had the smallest room even though he was the biggest child – however, at least now he has acquired the biggest house).

In the end I think I felt more pained about the room loss than Catriona. I suggested she should take down a few pictures to give the lodger a bit of her own wall space. I did not intend anything drastic as I loved Catriona's "Aladdin's Cave" – but in true Catriona fashion (always thorough) she proceeded to do a drastic cull of her pictures and decorations, so when I went into her room I burst into tears because it

looked so bare! Catriona had little sympathy “*it was your idea – it’s your fault*” even when we tried to explain that we were doing it so the lodger rent would help contribute towards her university expenses.

The next move was to do a “make-over” of Leslie’s old “office” upstairs. This had become an unusable space because it was so cluttered with Leslie’s boxes, files, old computer bits, old unidentifiable bits, virtually impossible to reach his desk... and unfortunately, the advent of laptops meant Leslie could now work in the living room and let his work stuff spill into there – a source of frustration to me when we were entertaining, and I had to try to tidy up! However, a mega clear out and clean up by me, James and his partner Wayne meant we transformed the old office into a room that James and Wayne took over as a studio flat (it still had a shower room and kitchen attached from when Dad had made it a separate flat). This meant that downstairs we had potentially 2 or 3 spare bedrooms in addition to Leslie’s and my room, although we ended up keeping Catriona’s room free for her or occasional guests. But James and Gordon’s old rooms became used by two more female lodgers (Arianne and Liz) – once more via a university rowing friend of Gordon’s.

Our lodger tradition continued for a while after we moved into River House a few years ago, and sometimes we still have guests for odd weeks or even months. At the time of writing, we have reclaimed one or possibly two “spare” bedrooms (though enquiries continue to come in so who knows...) In theory we can now have guests to stay – particularly Gordon and his family, but also other visitors. There was recently a bit of encroachment from daughter Catriona’s boyfriend Edward using one room to accommodate his music equipment; however, that did not stop visitors sleeping in there, and most of our friends are used to the Du Canes having plenty of clutter around! But during Covid lockdown over the past year, we’ve sadly not been able to have many visitors anyway. Having had such a variety of lodgers has added a rich extra dimension to family and social dynamics. Occasionally there has been a tricky situation, but most of the time it has been a delight, and good to feel we are giving lodgers a springboard into independent living while contributing a bit to our expenses. As we are lucky enough to live in a beautiful house it is nice to be able to share the space a bit.

Edward was the only lodger recently; one distinct advantage being that as Catriona’s boyfriend he shared Catriona’s room; but they have now moved into their own house – so of course immediately a young friend at church asked if she could lodge with us and somehow we couldn’t say no. Meanwhile son James lives with partner Wayne in the “garden annexe”, a one-bedroom flat at the bottom of the garden (sometimes they are referred to as the garden gnomes...). But it is lovely to have young people still around us (even if food and gin supplies sometimes disappear rather quickly). We feel like we have more space at River House and can keep it a bit tidier, even though it is technically smaller than Hanover Lodge – but of course we only ever lived in half of that house. River House also has the advantage of a large cellar where Leslie has stored a lot of his stuff ... So, we manage to keep this house slightly less messy and more comfortable than Hanover Lodge, which became ludicrously cluttered as well as dilapidated.

Leslie and I left Hanover Lodge with mixed emotions, due to the long historical family connections and having spent 37 years of our married life there, bringing up

our three children and making many of our closest friends. The move was virtually forced upon us, because neither of us had much of a pension (Leslie having been self-employed most of his life and me having worked for various charities, mostly without pension provision); while most of our capital was tied up in our house – which by 2014 had become amazingly valuable due to the incredible rise in property prices in the Notting Hill area. It had got to the stage where the house needed serious renovation, but we could not afford to do it. Several of our rooms had not been repainted for about 30 years; damp in the basement was spreading, and the garden had become a wilderness. We came to the reluctant conclusion that we needed to sell the house to provide ourselves with pension income, and to enable us to do estate planning and help our children make property purchases.

Thus in 2014 we made the difficult decision to sell Hanover Lodge. At first this was a huge and traumatic wrench; however, when we started looking for a London property outside Kensington and Notting Hill, we found there were charming houses and apartments that were far cheaper and in delightful places such as beside the river. We were fortunate to buy an enchanting period house by the river in Hammersmith for far less than half of what we could sell Hanover Lodge for. This meant we could “downsize” to an attractive house, while still providing pensions for ourselves, and giving us the ability to help our children buy property.

Yet for most of the time we resided at Hanover Lodge, it just seemed like an ordinary family home, where we lived in rather shabby surroundings, unable to afford to make it as smart as many of our neighbours, but providing a happy home for our children and us in a desirable area of London with fine architecture, leafy garden squares where the children could play, and good schools – not to mention attractive churches, a good range of shops (including the famous Portobello Road market) and a lovely local peer group of friends. When moving day finally arrived both Leslie and I were in floods of tears as we left the house; even though we now love River House as much as (if not more than) we loved Hanover Lodge.



*Young Du Cane Family on front steps of Hanover Lodge 1991 –
James (7), Catriona (2), Leslie, Gordon (4), Ally*



10 years later Family outside Hanover Lodge front door on Millennium morning – 1 January 2001 – after Millennium Ball at St Peter's



Alison & Leslie outside Hanover Lodge 2017 (3 years after our departure in 2014)



James c.1985 at Forest Cottage



Ally (expecting Gordon) & James Oct 1986 – his 3rd birthday



Gordon & Ally c.1989 Powick garden



Catriona & Ally 1991



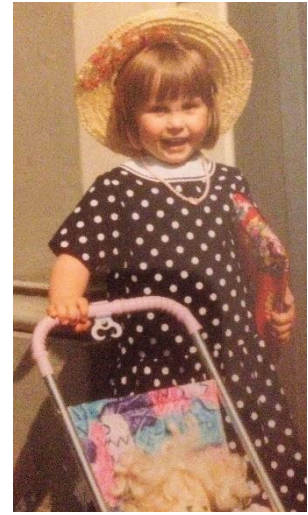
Ally, Gordon, James, Granmarginie & Aunt Christine – Hanover Lodge April 1989 (I am expecting Catriona)



Granmarginie c.1990s Baltimore She died aged 99 in 2003.



Gordon & James Dec 1988 (I knitted the James the red engine jumper)



Catriona June 1992



Gordon (2), James (5), with Granny Rosamund, baby Catriona, Ally, June 1989 at Hanover Lodge



Gordon & Catriona c. 1992 on Colonsay



James, Gordon & Catriona making snowman in Hanover Gardens c.1993



Gordon, Leslie, James, Nancy, Colin, Aunt Christine, Ally, Catriona - Christmas c.1994



Ally (me) & Leslie Christmas c. 2001



Christmas Hanover Lodge 2002: Leslie, Nancy, Colin, Soo (Colin's girlfriend at the time) Christine, Louis, Ally, Catriona, Gordon, James & his friend Randy

22. Children

After we had bought our first quarter of Hanover Lodge, our children were born – all at St Mary’s Hospital, Paddington: James in 1983; Gordon in 1986 and Catriona in 1989, bringing both joy and chaos to our lives. I adore all my three children and they each have qualities and traits that endear them to me in the most profound and heartfelt way. So, I cannot say I have a “favourite” child. However, as with friendships, there can be a child with whom one feels an intimate and harmonious connection – perhaps because your personalities just “click” or get on well. In Leslie’s case, it is clear that he and Gordon have a special rapport and we have often teased Leslie that Gordon is his “favourite” (partly because if he thought one of the other two had done something bad, he would start railing about the misdemeanour; if we pointed out Gordon was the culprit there would be a pause and then “*oh well, I’m sure he didn’t mean to...*”) In my case it may have been less overt (or maybe not?), but James and I have always felt a close affinity with one another.

That might seem to leave Catriona on the sidelines, but because she is our only daughter, that itself bestows a special quality on our relationship, especially in terms of myself having a close mother-daughter bond with her, and she is also an amazingly original personality. She was a cheerful, determined and extrovert child, who might get upset if she could not do something right away, but would keep trying if she really wanted to achieve it – whether it be mastering maths problems (assisted by Dad), working out her career or getting a boyfriend. I admire her initiative and perseverance. Although she expresses woes and frustrations freely (or maybe because she does this) she appears in some ways the happiest and least angst-ridden of our children. She has an infectious tinkling giggle which rings through the house (at other times shouts of annoyance fill the air and we lay low as the storm passes). Leslie and I hope all our children are happy but, over the years, some anxieties and difficulties have inevitably occurred, and we have to pray they are not too serious or long-lasting, while endeavouring to support them. But I believe our offspring are aware that compared to huge numbers of people in the world, suffering from hunger, war, cruelty, disability or other hardships, they are among the most fortunate, and our whole family have many blessings.

It is a joy that our children have all blossomed in many directions and made their own close friendships. There have been a few rows with Catriona over the years, but they are storms in teacups, and she is good at apologising, so clouds blow over quickly. Gordon keeps things more bottled up so he can get upset or irritated about things and hurt feelings may linger on a bit longer. That may also be true for James, even though with James it feels like he and I never argue, but I suppose that cannot be completely true! I know he tends to hide his feelings (unlike Catriona!) and apart from occasional rows with his partner, which can be noisy, he doesn’t show his annoyance much. Yet I suspect there are some frustrations and anxieties that he is concealing. I am not sure whether that is because Leslie has been bad-tempered with him in the past, so that James may think he needs to keep his feelings buttoned down; or whether it is due to a secretive or sensitive nature.

We are thrilled that our children have grown up to be conscientious and responsible citizens, both to us and in society. They have all presented thoughtful gifts to me

and Leslie over the years. James will remember that I prefer blue and white flowers, Bendicks bittermints or delicious bath products; and that Dad likes gin. Gordon has attended to Leslie's fondness for malt whisky, buying some incredibly old and fine malts in Scotland to mark certain special occasions, and has selected other carefully chosen gifts such as a tour behind the scenes of Glasgow Central Station – while for me, he and Emma have bought other thoughtful presents, like a voucher for tea for two at Claridges to celebrate a significant birthday. Leslie and I had a splendid time enjoying our poshest tea ever! Catriona has also chosen brilliant gifts including a luxury cinema voucher with a token for a meal at a nearby café – delectable! Leslie sometimes complains that children cost a fortune, and cause disruption, but like me he knows we are blessed with three considerate and affectionate children, who broaden our horizons; and whose kindness, love and support enrich our lives so much. This is more important than any worldly achievements, and regardless of any time and trouble they have ever caused us.

Family life can be so complicated with subtle tensions and hurt feelings – yet we are lucky in being able to discuss much of what we do and feel, usually (I hope) managing to apologise or forgive when we hurt one another. I like to think that open atmosphere goes back to early years, and to Leslie and myself trying to be honest but kind with one another, as well as treating the children as valued individuals whose opinion matters. But having described these worthy aims I am struck by uncomfortable memories of myself screaming tearfully at the boys when they kept fighting “*I can't stand it anymore!*” and yelling in a similar manner at Catriona when she kept having tantrums! Leslie has also had the odd moody outburst... I look back wishing I had read more bedtime stories; watched James in more of his trampoline competitions; played more on the beach or done more activities with the kids and been more caring – many areas where I wish I had done more and given more. I love them to bits but maybe I have not always shown it. Thus, I confess that there are regrets; all has not been “*sweetness and light*”, and we have not been perfect, mature parents. I only hope we have been “*good enough*”.

James

Growing up, James was a gentle, friendly boy who gave his parents very little trouble – apart from fighting with his brother and teasing his sister! I suppose that was due to sibling rivalries and jealousy. But unlike the other two he did not often have real tantrums – except possibly if he lost a game. He was competitive and not above a bit of manipulating results! He was good natured, affectionate and anxious to get hugs from me (especially if I was embracing one of his siblings). Although he enjoyed playing with cars and trains, and transformer toys, he was also keen on Catriona's dolls, like her “Skydancer” doll and “Polly Pockets” – and on his own large collection of “figures” ranging from superheroes like Batman to Disney-themed characters like Beauty and the Beast, Peter Pan and the Little Mermaid.

We had a dressing-up box; James and Catriona were often bedecked in flowing sparkly robes, playing make-believe. James also loved being in a children's drama club run by Betty Roe and Marian Lines. They put on short musical shows, written by themselves or based on Shakespeare, with the children dressed up as elves and fairies, or sparkly rubbish. And James enjoyed performing in the local W11

Children's Opera which happened annually in one of our local churches. If I'd been more attuned to such things, these proclivities might have given me a clue that James could be gay, but he was in his late teens before I knew for sure.

All our children attended a local CofE primary school, St Clement & St James. The pupils came from quite mixed backgrounds, economically and in terms of ethnic backgrounds, but the school provided quite a cocooning, positive and open learning environment, with many excellent teachers. Our children made friends with kids from all kinds of backgrounds, many of whom lived in social housing, and I think the school gave them a firm grounding in tolerant social interaction and accepting people from different backgrounds. For James this perhaps marked the start of a lifelong friendship with many people from black and other ethnic minority backgrounds. I sometimes wonder whether this is because being gay he feels himself in a minority which is sometimes looked down on or victimised, and so he feels an affinity with ethnic groups who have been or are similarly persecuted. But maybe it is just that many BAME people live in West London!

Primary school was a protected environment, especially for James. Parents were encouraged to get involved – for instance with reading schemes, homework, helping on trips (which I did) or becoming a school governor (which Leslie did, ending up as Chair). I also helped with annual fêtes and other fund-raising events, and I made hats for the annual Hat Parade for Key Stage 1 and costumes for more elaborate productions like Nativity plays and the Year 6 show. Watching James play the title role in *Joseph and his Amazing Technicoloured Dreamcoat* performed as the Year 6 leavers show, was a proud and heart-tugging moment for me. I am not an uncritical fan of Lloyd-Webber music, but when I hear the line sung about “*how he loved his coat of many colours*” it brings tears to my eyes and a lump to my throat remembering James dancing on stage. James was such a happy boy at primary, apart from a few challenges caused by his dyslexia. It took Leslie and me quite some time to realize this was why he was having trouble learning to read, since he was our first child and we had only a hazy knowledge of dyslexia. Fortunately, it was spotted at school, and James began having some individual tuition from a dyslexia teacher, which assisted him considerably in learning to read and write.

But once in the bigger pond of secondary school other problems began to emerge, even though James went to a good high school called Twyford. Halfway through his time there we found out he was being bullied, though, as is often the case, he did not tell us until things had got quite bad. I felt dreadful when we discovered the misery he'd been experiencing, but at least when James moved up to sixth form, school life became much happier for him. Some of the more unpleasant specimens had left, and James made some good friends. He was also able to focus on the subjects he enjoyed – drama, sport, photography and art, which had a high emphasis on course work rather than exams which was helpful in view of his dyslexia.

At the end of his sixth form Leslie and I were delighted that James managed to secure 3 A levels and get a place at Oxford Brooks University - initially to do a joint degree in Sports Coaching and Performing Arts, subsequently converted to single honours in Sports Coaching. Unfortunately, he did not manage to complete his degree. His school had been keen to encourage all their students to go to university, but I wondered later if this was a mistake. It is hard to know, because

James is extremely intelligent and quick-witted, with great emotional intuition, so he is suited to tertiary education in many ways – but not to exams. He has worked as a PE teacher in school for many years – also providing cover for a variety of subjects, which impresses me hugely, but because he does not have an official degree or teaching qualification (QTS), he is paid less than qualified teachers like his sister, who have far less experience, which must be disheartening for him.

James was not mad on team sports like football, but he became proficient at kayaking and trampolining and he also started doing high diving where the skills linked in with his bouncing. His aptitude for these sports meant he took part in many competitions, particularly in trampolining winning quite an array of trophies and medals (must have his father's gymnastic genes – certainly not mine!). He also demonstrated a great rapport with children and teenagers and an ability to coach trampolining and do kayak instructing. Trampoline coaching provided a way into schools leading to full-time employment teaching PE - but so far minus the formal QTS. I feel both incredibly proud of him for his brilliant teaching, as well as frustrated on his behalf that he does not get full recognition or full pay for his abilities and dedication to his work and students. However, it looks like at last he has been confirmed on a course which should lead to QTS – fingers crossed!

Some of this long drawn out situation might be down to James not being pro-active enough or working hard enough to obtain a qualification and may not necessarily be due entirely to dyslexia, or even possible attention deficit disorder. Like his father, James has a tendency to procrastinate (but Leslie often escapes dire consequences by an uncanny ability to work like an express train achieving last-minutes results that looked impossible). Also, like his Dad, James is soft-hearted and not good at saying “no”. He shows sympathy and care to friends going through a rough time. And he is not just helpful to friends but also compassionate to strangers. After qualifying as a First Aider, he has sometimes stopped to help people in the street if they appear ill or are involved in an accident. Such kindness is to me a virtue whose value is above rubies, and worth more than any degree. But it is a dilemma wondering if there is anything we could or should do to help him further his own career or whether we need to leave it up to him now.

James has spent more time at home than his siblings – not just because he's the firstborn! Since Gordon went off to Glasgow University in 2005, he has not lived full-time at home, and he has been married since 2013, and lived up north for most of the time. Catriona went away for a year au pairing in France before spending 4 years at Leeds University, followed by 3 years over in La Reunion in the middle of the Indian Ocean, doing TEFL work. However, James has made several short trips abroad. Catriona organised for him to visit her in La Reunion; another friend arranged a trip to Florida in his teens, one more invited him to go skiing in Canada, and Wayne's sister galvanised him and Wayne to visit Tobago in the West Indies. James also accompanied a youth group expedition to Nepal. So, he's actually ended up doing more foreign travel than his parents! (Not that difficult...)

There were just a couple of years when James was ostensibly living away at Oxford Brooks University – but in practice he still spent most of his time with us back in London, so he could continue his trampoline training, and he became familiar with the Oxford tube when he had to return to Oxford for the odd lecture or tutorial.

Since moving to Hammersmith 6 years ago he and Wayne have progressed to occupying a separate building – albeit at the bottom of our garden! We still see a lot of James as he often comes up to the “Manz” for a visit or Catriona and Edward go down to the garden grotto to play computer games or watch Netflix. It is good to see how well they get on (most of the time). I enjoy helping walk Micah the dog, and I love seeing James whenever he drops by (so does Leslie really; he just likes to tease me about it, but James makes the best gin and tonics for Leslie). And if Leslie and I get too decrepit, we may be even happier to have James close at hand!

James is kind about including me in special celebrations even if Leslie is less keen to join in. When he turned 21 and was celebrating with a small group of friends, he asked me to come out with them “partying” -first having drinks in a cool bar, then going on for some lively dancing – what a blast! Perhaps it is part of the supposed gay penchant for older women (James certainly loves the Golden Girls). He likes strong female actresses and singers – such as Gillian Anderson, Maggie Smith, Judi Dench and Whitney Houston, and has several close female friends with powerful personalities – who all adore him. A stand-out event in 1999 when James was 15; he and I went to see Whitney Houston perform at Wembley Arena – I think it was James’ first pop/rock concert but also mine! (Leslie and I saw Runrig at Shepherd’s Bush Empire before then – but the kids would dispute whether that qualified.)

Many years later, after Whitney’s sad demise, an actor friend of ours, Tristan, ended up playing the title role in *The Bodyguard* (stage musical) with Beverley Knight playing Whitney. We made a family outing to see the show. There were not many singers whom James would have acknowledged could play his beloved Whitney, but he loved Beverley. Almost more exciting was when our friends Tristan and Emily held a fantastic party at their country house to which we were invited and so was Beverley Knight! Thus, James had the thrill of meeting her.

I have taken James to see a few other memorable shows over the years – most recently Gillian Anderson on stage in *All About Eve* – scintillating. We also loved seeing Eve Best in *A Woman of No Importance*. James enjoyed being directed by her in one of the W11 Operas he did so that was another thrill. I love seeing live theatre, and over the years have taken Leslie, James or Catriona with me since they are all interested in drama too. However, I don’t think any of them have quite my level of passion, so often I will just go along on my own and then I don’t need to worry about them being too busy or turning up late at the theatre!

James has always been supportive of me and my dramatic ambitions and has quite often agreed to take part in a play with our group, even if he’s busy with teaching and I’ve slightly twisted his arm with disingenuous promises like “*you won’t have to attend many rehearsals*”. But I think/hope he has positively enjoyed most productions he has participated in, and has proved able to do some demanding roles, as well as making friendships with other members of the cast who of course think he is lovely! Catriona and I sometimes observe wryly that “*everybody loves James*” but of course we are part of the fan club. Before I managed to direct anything, but when he knew I was thinking about it, James gave me a book called *The Artist’s Way* which was all about developing your inner creative self, and he helped to encourage me at a moment when I was thinking it could never happen.

James also appreciates art and nature. He loves David Attenborough programmes about the planet, and I remember when he was a boy him exclaiming at the beauty of a sea of purple crocuses in our garden. Another passion is his Vizsla dog Micah whom he adores – and he is indeed an incredibly sweet-natured dog. James is the dreamer of the family and perhaps the most tender-hearted. One downside may be that he is not as single-minded and focused in achieving goals as Gordon and Catriona. But his qualities are precious in that they give him a great empathy for other people, and I am so often touched by his compassion and kind-heartedness.

Gordon

Gordon is perhaps the most determined and self-reliant of our three children, yet when he was very young, he was the clingiest. He may be a Dad's lad now, but when he was small, he was also devoted to his Mum. I look back fondly to those days, even though him being a clingy toddler could sometimes be tiring. I remember trying to have a brief swim in the sea shallows on Colonsay and Gordon screaming for me to come out - even with Daddy there! And on the rare occasions we went out, making use of the baby-sitting circle, it would be Gordon who would cry and protest at the prospect of us going out. Most of the time he was a well-behaved child, but on rare occasions if he had been naughty and got in a tantrum, I might resort to telling him to go to his room and stay there till he had calmed down. This tactic worked for James and Catriona, but not Gordon. He was so stubborn he would refuse to stay in his room, and I remember standing outside his room pulling on the doorknob to keep the door closed, hoping he would get bored or calm down! Don't think it worked. Thank goodness he wasn't a very naughty child!

Gordon loved school, perhaps partly because he was bright and usually top or near the top of his class. He had an enthusiastic response to most of the activities. I vividly remember him coming home excited, because the class were going on an outing and the highlight would be tea back in his teacher Mrs Kelly's garden! He also threw himself into residential school trips (which I think were designed to give urban kids a taste of rural life) – one to Sayers Croft and one to Boreatton Park. There were indeed outdoor country activities – but it was the food that seemed to make the biggest impression on Gordon, judging by his diary of the trips!

He loved playing with Duplo and Lego; I had to carry a stack up to Colonsay in my rucksack to entertain Gordon on rainy days, while James did imaginative play with his figures, and Catriona played with Barbies or paper dolls. Gordon also loved transport modes like trains, cars and planes. One favourite toy was the Thunderbird Island which I created from papier maché following Blue Peter instructions (a famous “make”) – luckily, we already had the rockets. He was also intrigued by facts and figures, preferring stories about *How Things Work* whereas James and Catriona loved fantasy and fairy tales. But as a toddler favourite videos included *The Snowman*, *The Angel & the Soldier* and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. And they all enjoyed *Postman Pat*, *Thomas the Tank Engine* and Disney cartoons – as did I!

Gordon was good at sport and developed a love of football at primary (despite Leslie and I having only the sketchiest knowledge of the game, but Leslie brushed up on it to converse intelligibly). He also became keen on cricket, rugby and tennis (in fact most sports) which gave him and Leslie plenty to talk about. As well as

being focused on goals, Gordon was pro-active about achieving them. Being an Arsenal fan from early on, he got himself registered as a Junior Gunner and directed me to the right day and time to apply for match tickets on the internet. I was not always successful, but when I managed to get him a ticket Leslie would escort him to the stadium and wait outside to see him home at the end of the match. I was happy to fund such expeditions, but I fear I was haphazard in my distribution of pocket money. However, once at secondary school, it was not long before Gordon worked out he could earn himself some regular pocket money. Again on his own initiative, he secured himself a job as a paper boy – a post that suited him since he has always been an early riser, unlike the rest of his slugabed family.

Another job that Gordon did was assisting at *Highland Store* - and James was soon enlisted too. This Scotch Shop style emporium ran on Saturdays out of St Peter's Hall, Portobello Road. This housed the parish office where I worked. I worked with Andrew who ran it, and he was delighted to learn I had two strapping lads, who could help with loading and unloading boxes as well as working the till. Gordon also found himself modelling a kilt out on the street, to lure tourists into the shop. He became a reluctant model for many photos taken by Japanese tourists! Later Catriona joined the *Highland Store* staff cohort; after finishing university, she spent a year working in the tartan outlet (which by then had expanded to a trio of full-time shops), and this helped her raise money for her globe-trotting adventures.

Gordon sailed through secondary school, gaining an excellent crop of GCSEs. Yet again he showed himself proactive and ambitious, proposing that for sixth form he should change to a fee-paying academic school, and he applied for 3. Leslie and I thought his current school Twyford was very good, even though it was a state school, and we doubted he would do better elsewhere, but we did not wish to quash his desire to maximise academic achievement. So, he headed off to City of London.

Gordon had a brilliant time at City of London, but he enjoyed the social and sporting side so much that his grades slipped a little bit, and he didn't make it to Oxford as he might have hoped. He was a bit upset because I think he felt he'd let us down, but he ended up with perfectly good A levels and an offer to study at Glasgow University, which turned out to be the ideal place for him. As well as emerging with First Class Honours in Economics and earning a "blue" as Captain of the rowing team, he met his lovely wife Emma, who was studying veterinary science at Glasgow University, and he made some close friends among the rowers, so Glasgow was great – and of course I was thrilled he went there – as was my Dad, who moved back up there soon after Gordon started his course (unfortunately not in time for us to use his address to get Gordon's fees waived!)

Having been such a home-loving body, Gordon continued to spread his wings in his teenage years. First, he made a sun-kissed trip to Glastonbury with some pals (poor Catriona was less fortunate a few years later when there was a sea of mud – but she still had as good a time as Gordon did). We all loved our trips to Colonsay, but Gordon perhaps even more than the rest of us. He could be quite a humourist, organising activities like an impromptu synchronised swimming display in Kiloran Bay and followed other pursuits. For several years he became very friendly with a family related to the laird, who owned a house on the island. Leslie found he had been relegated from "*the man who cycles over with a wagon on his bike*" or "*the*

man who swam from Islay to Colonsay” (see Ch.23) to “*Gordon’s father*”. Gordon would go sailing and swimming with this family or whizz round the island in an open-topped Suzuki truck, and we would tease him that we had been supplanted. Although he was very friendly with the eldest son, who was his age, he also enjoyed the sisters’ company, and went on a camping holiday with one, so maybe the friendship was not just platonic... To be fair most of the children enjoyed great friendships on the island, and our last family holidays there included some fantastic barbecue parties with great gangs of grownups, teenagers and children. I think we had a wilder social life on Colonsay than the rest of the year back in London!

Gordon also embarked on a ski-ing holiday in France with Colonsay friends, but sadly it came to an abrupt halt when he had a bad fall and tore the ligament in his knee. He spent the rest of the week hobbling round the snowy landscape till one of his friends accompanied him home on a plane. Leslie and I naively thought it was good he had not broken a leg and did not realise the torn ligament could potentially cause more long-term problems. It affected his football career at City of London – but luckily did not impede him developing rowing skills once he got to university.

Gordon remains keen on sport and pursues cycling, plus the odd bit of kayaking and football or hockey, when he can fit this in with the demands of work and family life. His young son Archie seems to do even more sport than his Dad – before lockdown his activities included swimming, dry-slope skiing, soft play gym, rugby tots and of course football! However, it is amusing that, although Gordon and Emma appear slightly baffled by Leslie’s and my pursuit of dramatic activities, Archie also displays quite a theatrical bent and loves to dance and entertain the crowd – the results are both impressive and hilarious! His wee sister Isobel seems less interested in performing, though she has already displayed a determined personality.

Gordon can sometimes appear impatient, even brutal on the exterior, but deep down he is soft-hearted and caring, and kind in actions if not always in words – despite shaking his head in exasperation or disbelief at the foibles and failings of his parents or siblings. He might not express extravagant sentiments (except perhaps to his beloved Emma – he is really as great a romantic as James and Leslie). But he will show by an idea or gesture that he is being thoughtful in other ways. In years when I was trapped in a mire of depression, I was surprised that Gordon came home with the suggestion from a friend that I ought to “talk to someone” and when I was dully picking at food in the evenings, he would try to find something nice for me on TV to watch. He even tried to help me start a website for our drama group despite his view that amateur dramatics was a rather silly activity. He also agreed to help my Dad with his financial affairs when Dad was back in Glasgow and Gordon had started doing accountancy training. I think his heart sank a little at the prospect, but he was willing to help his Grandad out, partly because he knew how fond Dad was of him, and perhaps also because he knew how much I would appreciate it.

Gordon has always been the mature, sensible child, making the rest of us feel a bit silly or disorganised by comparison. Catriona sometimes describes him as the cuckoo in the nest since his efficiency, hard work and punctuality make the rest of us feel a little inadequate! Even in primary school he would be the child the teachers sent off to do photocopying or some other responsible task. At Twyford Secondary his parting description was being the student “*most likely to become*

Prime Minister". However, I suspect he is wise enough to avoid that particular poisoned chalice, and I think his favourite roles are husband and father. It is a delight to see him being such a caring and pro-active family man.

It is probably no surprise that Gordon was the first of our children to get married, start a family and buy a house, and it is so good to see what a wonderful husband and father he makes. He is the highflier in his finance work earning the big bucks (which he needs to do for the school fees!) It is also no surprise that his house is already in better order than ours; Gordon producing elaborate Excel spreadsheets for plans and costings of development works, only occasionally ringing up his Dad to discuss the latest project. However, as he is so organised and efficient most of the time, it is quite heartening when he makes the odd mistake – such as the time he drove off in his Discovery landrover with the key on the roof – by the time he realised, the key was long gone... (of course that is a drawback to modern technology in my view – you shouldn't be able to start a car without your key in the ignition... And don't get me started on electrically operated windows which seems a real disaster waiting to happen!) But most of the time Gordon is way ahead of the rest of us and yet he too has a caring heart. When he was just a toddler one of my fellow mums observed "*Gordon is a real star isn't he?*" and how right she was.

Catriona

Of course, I think all my children are unique, but in Catriona's case this has extra resonance – she illustrates one of my mother's catch phrases "*they broke the mould*". She has always been incredibly friendly and extrovert. She is an unusual combination of being occasionally "on the spectrum" along with being hugely sociable and displaying a slightly wacky world view – or perhaps I should just say "*original thinking*" - a real force of nature. She would happily go up to anyone in a shop and start chatting to them, and it was impossible to instil in her the mantra of "*Don't talk to strangers*". This interest in other people is a real skill. She has the artless art of asking personal questions so that people find themselves confiding all sorts of information about their lives, which probably makes her a great teacher. After she had quizzed her Granny about other boyfriends, Leslie was surprised to discover that his mother had gone out with a man who only had one leg! I think he lost it in the war, and Rosamund felt ashamed that it made her feel a bit uneasy.

Most people find Catriona's friendly approach delightful, however the marginal "spectrum" quality of her personality can also get her into trouble. I remember one school report observing she could have an overdeveloped sense of justice e.g. pointing out vociferously if another child had misbehaved and should be castigated. She applied this enthusiasm to various projects, but did not always stay the course, and then worried if she thought she was not doing well enough. Piano lessons were an example. She got in a tizzy about exams; I explained she didn't have to do exams, but she got so worked up about it that we agreed she would give up piano. Years later when a friend had reached Grade 6 she complained I had not pushed her to carry on "*Why didn't you make me?*" I said wearily we had enough battles over homework without arguing over something that was not a compulsory activity.

With the boys, Gordon was able and conscientious, if a trifle slapdash, and would get his homework done mostly on his own, usually as soon as he got home; James

tended to procrastinate and needed help but did not try to do too much. Catriona was ambitious to do as well as possible (good) but got so obsessed that she would spend her entire weekend struggling to do the work (bad), while I tried to reason with her that the teacher did not expect her to spend all her free time on this. She suffered particular agonies over Maths, but luckily Leslie was able to give her much patient tuition which bore fruit, as she ended up with Grade A in Maths GCSE!

Leslie also enjoyed helping with (taking over?) history projects whereas I tended to be the one who helped the children with English language and literature. This got more demanding at secondary level. I recall several occasions being up all night and hearing the dawn chorus as I toiled away on the computer assisting one or other offspring with an essay – most likely Catriona as she would under-estimate the time a task would take but be a perfectionist in wanting to do well. Gordon was more independent than the others, but even he appreciated some maternal assistance in honing phrases. The parental input seemed to bear fruit, as after leaving school they all proved capable of producing surprisingly well-expressed essays and reports.

Catriona was a very “girly” girl, loving pretty sparkly dresses, dolls, pushchairs, dollhouses (including a lurid pink plastic Barbie house plus a traditional wooden one that we bought at a church May Fair) And she had a large collection of Polly Pockets – fascinating miniature toys. She was devoted to our cats and had fun pushing Kiloran, our grey tabby, in her toy buggy. He was a placid cat, who put up with being carted around. When she got a black and white kitten as a teenager, he was a feistier creature (christened Benny, short for Bengal tiger, though I later said it should be short for Benjamin the favourite son since he became Leslie’s favourite pet. Now we have another grey tabby Ella who is very affectionate and adorable; discussions are ongoing as to whether Catriona & boyfriend Edward can take her to their new home.) Catriona’s room was also “girly”. At its height most of the wall space was covered in posters of fairies or beautiful artwork or filmstars, photos of herself and friends, plus strings of fairy lights, beads hanging on mirrors, and it was a bit like entering a magical grotto or Aladdin’s cave (until the lodgers arrived...)

Like me, Catriona was a bit accident-prone – partly because of being quite impulsive and rushing into things. One Christmas she injured her toe and I had to take her off to A&E on Christmas Eve – luckily quite empty (everybody else busy at home getting ready for Christmas). Another Christmas she was in a hurry to open a present using scissors to cut the tightly wrapped paper – but this also cut up the umbrella material that was within. I bought a replacement, but some other accidents had more severe consequences. The year Catriona was 5 she had a potentially serious accident on Colonsay. I was usually quite safety conscious about strapping her into the child seat on the back of my bike when we cycled round the island, as well as ensuring all the children had helmets on. But there came a day when Catriona was having a tantrum, and to distract her Leslie took her for a ride on the back of his bike, which meant just perching on his rack.

Unfortunately, as Dad went sailing down the hill, Catriona’s ankle got caught in the spokes of his bike. Although initially painful, this ended up being an exciting escapade, as the island doctor sent for the helicopter to take Catriona down to the children’s hospital in Glasgow. Leslie went with her, and he enjoyed making full use of his new video camera as they flew down the coast, while I took the boys back

to our cottage at Kiloran Bay. I remember Gordon being particularly upset, crying that he “*wanted the family back together*”, and I agreed with him. The doctor wanted Catriona to have an X-ray and was also concerned she might need a skin graft. In the event the ankle was not broken and did not need a graft. But while the helicopter flew you to the hospital it did not fly you back, so Leslie had to figure out how to get back up to the island. In those days there were only 3 ferries a week, so it was fortunate that the accident happened on a Sunday and Leslie managed to get them back to Oban on Monday in time for the evening ferry. This was especially lucky as there was a train strike, so they had to brave the bus all the way from Glasgow to Oban – not pleasant since Catriona suffered from travel sickness then. However, to help make her feel better, Leslie bought her a “sleepy Barbie”. We were all relieved to be reunited. Catriona spent the rest of the holiday hopping around on one foot, with a heavily bandaged ankle, but it didn’t stop her playing on the beach, and it gave me something new to put on the holiday postcards!

Catriona’s sociable nature extends even to wanting someone to sit and watch TV with her or talk to her while she is in her bath. I used to be the prime companion candidate but now she has a regular boyfriend the pressure is off a bit. Boyfriend Edward’s hobby is making and listening to music, with headphones on which gives him an excuse not to spend all his free time interacting with Catriona. Catriona also has a clutch of close girlfriends and the wonders of technology mean she can spend a lot of time chatting to them even if they are not in the same city or country.

Catriona is a startlingly open person, sharing information with everyone not to mention bodily functions. Like her father she will happily wander round the house naked, but unlike Leslie she even sits on the loo with the door open, keen for a chat. Bras and knickers festoon her room along with other items of an intimate nature – nobody could accuse her of false modesty! Maybe those are partly my genes – when I was a small girl on the beach I would happily run around with no clothes on while brother Colin huddled in his sweater. And I don’t mind changing in our AmDram communal changing room – I guess it is all part of our thespian exhibitionism; perhaps Catriona and I are more alike than I realise. But Leslie is also a great one for being in the buff, especially when swimming, and in general I would say she is more like her Dad – both are passionate, enthusiastic, gregarious people, great at telling other people what to do (and occasionally a bit moody...)

Like the boys, Catriona enjoyed primary school, and later was fortunate to fit well into her secondary school, Greycoats. Her first year was a bit unsettled but after that she made some good friends and made progress with her studies – still finding some subjects a slight struggle but determined to do as well as possible and to aim high. Luckily, she ended up with an inspiring English teacher, as that was probably her strongest and favourite subject, along with Drama, which she was also able to pursue at Greycoats, taking part in some striking drama productions.

One delightful circumstance for Leslie and me has been sharing our love of acting with both James and Catriona. They have acted in several of our plays and been excellent. Catriona is an impressive and instinctive actress; and initially she had ambitions of pursuing acting professionally. Leslie and I worried that with her sensitive nature she might find it hard to cope with the rejection that is part of the acting life. But she was keen to apply to drama school and we would not stop her.

However, despite her talent, she did not get into any of the drama schools, as there was of course huge competition. She then decided to apply for university, to read English and Drama, after doing a year abroad working as an au pair near Paris. She got a place at Leeds University which she enjoyed, although after her first year she decided to change course to English and Religious Studies, ending up with an impressive 2:1 degree. Her rationale was that if she was at university, it was better to pursue more academic courses, and do drama as a hobby - which she did, acting at university and being in a group of students who took a show up to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, which she loved. She had been there once before with some of her fellow sixth-form students at Greycroats School, performing a powerful play about slavery (the title "*Flesh*" may have misled one or two members of the audience...)

Even before she went to university Leslie and I thought secretly that Catriona would make a wonderful teacher as she is such a great communicator, as well as a hard worker (plus a fearsome "hard stare" rivalling Paddington's, which helps keep discipline), but we figured it would be unwise to push the idea. With her love of drama, I thought teaching drama might be appealing, but I knew she also enjoyed English. So we were pleased when after 3 years doing TEFL in La Reunion, Catriona decided to apply to do a PGCE to teach English, and then got a good job teaching English and Drama at an all-girls school – similar to her own Greycroats!

Like many teachers she complains the job is hard and stressful – and I sympathise as I could not do it. Who knows how long she will stick it out? But she also realises there are some advantages to the job, and she is good at it. It is also lovely that she can share the joys and difficulties of teaching with both her brother James and boyfriend Edward. At present Edward and James teach at the same school which gives another bond (indeed Catriona met Edward through James), and it is quite a rough tough state secondary school, so they too face challenges. There is also the frustration that James does not have the QTS (*Qualified Teacher Status*) that Catriona and Edward do, and so earns less, even though he works just as hard, and I am sure he is an equally inspiring teacher. But we hope he may be on the way to changing that perhaps with Catriona propelling him over the finishing line!

Catriona is a great "*mover and shaker*" and will often stir us up into doing things we've barely considered. She is idealistic about the political and social causes she supports which is admirable and endearing, if occasionally tiring if one is not feeling able to espouse all of the causes so wholeheartedly – and woe betide, if you have a different opinion... She shows a generous passion about big campaigns, but also in her relationship with her family and friends. She does not hold back in her appreciation – both she and James write the most endearing, fulsome compliments in cards to me e.g., "*thank you Mummy for always being there to help*" or even just a casual note with biscuits or pastries "*help yourself to everything!*"

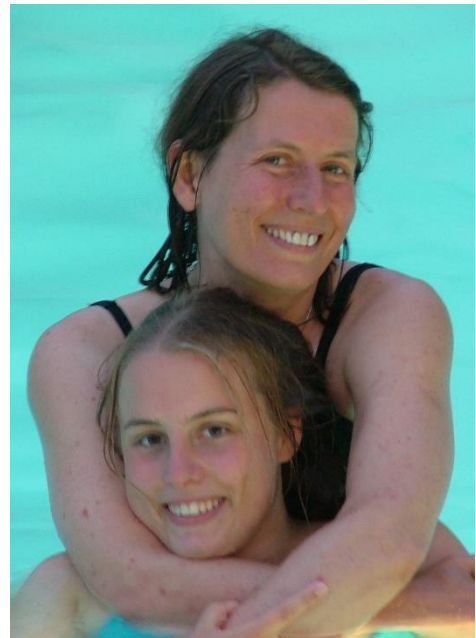
Since Catriona is the baby of the family, I can never quite believe she is really grown up – yet here she and boyfriend Edward are buying a house (albeit with help from Mum and Dad) and having a baby! We did not express any preference about where they should buy, but it is rather nice that they have acquired a house that is only a relatively short walk away (or at least I think so; Leslie seems less convinced!). We miss seeing much of Gordon and his family since he is up north in Glasgow, but it is marvellous to have James and Catriona on our doorstep.



James & Ally Christmas c.2001 Hanover Lodge



Gordon & Ally, 1st year Glasgow University c.2005



Ally & Catriona c.2005



Gordon, Catriona, James at Hanover Lodge Christmas 2007



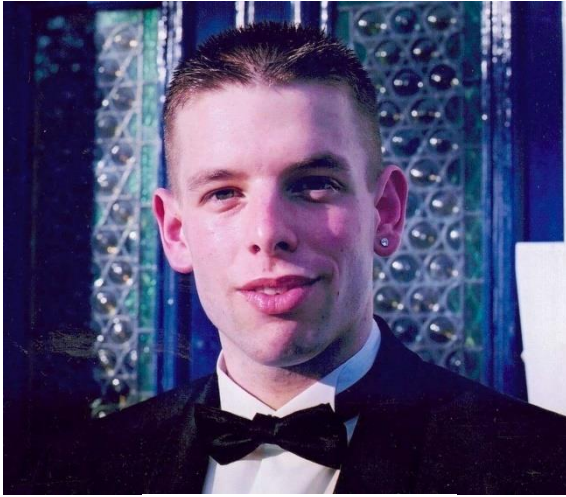
Gordon rowing in The Boat Race (yellow team) & celebrating with trophies, Glasgow Uni, 2007



Gordon's graduation 2009 Glasgow University, with his Grandad, Mum & Dad



G&E Wedding Day 31 August 2013: Du Cane family – Wayne, Rosamund (Granny) James, Alison, Gordon, Emma, Leslie, Catriona



James 2002, School Prom



Gordon & Emma, Graduation Day 2009



Wayne & James 2014



Catriona's Graduation Day 2012 with Mum & Dad



James kayaking accompanying Leslie on a swim 2020.



Catriona & Edward c.2019



Father & son – Gordon with Archie at St Thomas Hospital May 2015



Rosamund – Great-Granny – Emma, Archie & Gordon June 2015



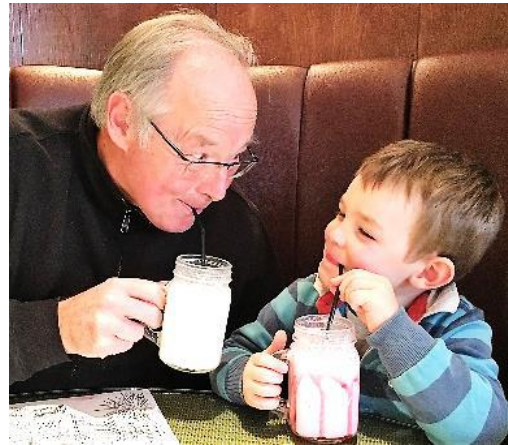
Uncle James, Archie, Dad Gordon & Aunty Catriona, July 2015, Clapham



*Northern Du Canes – Gordon & Emma with Archie & Isobel
+ Saoirse the dog! On the beloved Isle of Colonsay - 2018*



Archie & Granma 2018



Grandee & Archie 2018



Archie & Isobel 2020



Proud grandparents again! Leslie, Ally & Louis (Catriona & Edward's baby) July 2021

23. Over Lakes & Sea to Colonsay

Our family all like swimming on holidays, whether in the sea, lakes or lochs, though Leslie has covered the greatest distance.

Leslie also benefited from the boys' rowing prowess, when he embarked on swims organised by the BLDSA (British Long Distance Swimming Association – and typically, Leslie ended up serving on their committee for many years). James and Gordon were enlisted to row safety boats for Leslie on several occasions.

The swims included Bala Lake in Wales; and in the Lake District: Coniston, Derwent Water, Ullswater and the iconic Windermere, 10 miles long, as well as numerous races at the Serpentine back in London. The lake swims meant we could organise a few extra stays at our favourite B&B on Grasmere, Banerigg House.

Leslie's first assault on Windermere in 2005 was successful, taking place in sunny weather and he completed it just within the 9 hours limit prescribed by the BLDSA. Being a breast stroker he is generally slower than most of his swimming comrades who do the crawl – however this means there is a good chance of getting a breaststroke trophy or medal; and he and the boys did come away with trophies on this first attempt. Our Grasmere B&B hosts kindly provided champagne at the finish line for all the family – Catriona and I were there to cheer the conquering heroes. But on Leslie's second attempt (*why?*) at Windermere the weather was worse, which meant the boys got cold and wet in the support boat, and Leslie completed the swim just outside the time limit – much to Gordon's disgust. Leslie has a habit of giving historical lectures about places en route, so the boys put some of the blame for Leslie's slow time on the running commentary he felt impelled to give on the shoreline they were passing along the lake. Thereafter Gordon was warier about agreeing to crew a safety boat for Dad.

James tended to be softer-hearted, and did some solo kayaking accompanying Leslie in the smaller lakes. He managed to enlist his partner Wayne to row in the boat when Leslie attempted to swim Loch Lomond. This was a much more ambitious undertaking than Windermere – at 23 miles long, it is more challenging than doing a Channel swim as the water is colder and being fresh water provides less buoyancy. Due to cold wet weather overnight Leslie was forced to give up after about 16 miles and 18 hours in the water. On another occasion, Gordon agreed to provide a support boat accompanied by wife-to-be Emma rowing with him



Family celebrating Leslie's Windermere swim, 2005



(observed anxiously from the shore by her solicitous father John!). Sadly, Leslie was defeated by bad weather on this second occasion, and again on a third. After two failures his offspring were unaccountably unavailable on his last attempt, and he had to persuade other kind souls to provide a support boat. He has not yet decided whether to broach the loch again, but is considering the Hellespont...

However, Leslie did complete one other epic journey, swimming from Islay to Colonsay! This took about 10 hours, swimming in the open sea for 11 miles, battling jelly fish and sea sickness – and at one point followed by a basking shark. He undertook the swim during one of our summer holidays on Colonsay. Kevin Byrne, a local friend, who used to run boat trips from the island, kindly agreed to provide an escort with his boat the Lady Jane. Leslie wanted it to be a swim recognized officially by the BLDSA, which meant the safety boat needed 2 official observers. Son Gordon was recruited rather reluctantly to be the lucky volunteer, along with another friend. Observation meant being cooped up in a small boat chugging slowly on choppy waves for 10 hours, so they got quite bored and seasick.

James escaped enlistment as an observer because he was leaving the island that day. Indeed, Leslie was a little miffed that I elected to take James for a pre-ferry meal at the hotel rather than hanging about at Cable Bay beach for unspecified hours on the off-chance Leslie landed on shore there. However, the “young laird” himself, Alec Howard (perhaps alerted on 2-way radio by skipper Kevin), turned up at the bay to meet Leslie with his Landrover, complete with heated seat pad and foil blanket, and gave him a lift back to our cottage which was more useful than a wife on a bike. The swim was certainly an achievement, reported by two local Scottish papers – one of which ran with the headline “*The man too mean to pay the ferry fare*”.

Early on in our life together, Leslie and I realised that while we might be working in fairly mundane jobs, we could get great fulfilment from holidays and explorations of countryside (as well as amateur dramatics!). We had many glorious holidays when we did cycle touring, which we started soon after we were married – in the North of England; Devon and Dorset; East Coast of Scotland from Orkney to Edinburgh; West Coast from Sutherland to Glasgow; visiting Inner & Outer Hebrides including Skye, Mull, Islay, Jura, Lewis, Harris, Barra, Uist & Eriskay. We covered hundreds of miles and saw some fabulous scenery (plus stately homes, churches, castles and museums as part of Leslie Du Cane Heritage Tours). Much of the cycling was fantastic, and we stayed in a variety of hostels and B&Bs (mostly recommended by the CTC handbook) as well as camping. But when the weather got wet and windy, we treated ourselves to a hotel (or Leslie would be in trouble!).

Usually the CTC (Cyclists’ Touring Club) recommendations worked well with a few exceptions – either where the write-up was out-dated or the venue unavailable, but they passed us on somewhere else. This happened in Bourton-on-the-Water. It had been a long day’s cycling, so Leslie was promising me superior sustenance. On arrival we were taken down the garden and thought our bikes were going to be put in the garden shed, but it turned out that was where we were staying! The beds were camp beds; there was a small handbasin, and an electric socket for the kettle so we could make tea or coffee in the morning with something like a couple of slices of bread – felt a bit like we’d wandered into “*Prisoner: Cell Block H*”!

As our family arrived and expanded, staying in a holiday cottage proved a more economical and practical solution. After some interim destinations, our favourite holiday destination became Colonsay, the magical Hebridean island where we have spent so many family holidays staying in cosy cottages, enjoying stunning beaches, swimming, cycling, walking, playing with the children, ceilidhs, making friends, and most recently (for Leslie and me) attending festivals of Celtic music (*Ceol Cholasa*). We first discovered Colonsay when James was a baby and we had recognized it would not be feasible to do full scale cycle tours anymore, though we still took bikes (remaining firm non-drivers). Initially James went on the back of my bike; later Leslie constructed a splendid wagon trailer for the back of his bike, so he could carry luggage or small children, and this bridged the gap until the boys (and later girl) were strong enough to ride hired bikes on the island. For a long time, the smallest child went on the back of my bike.

Some people might have thought Leslie was not keen for me to give birth as he took us on a cycling holiday to the West Country in April when I was about two months' pregnant with James. Not only were there steep hills to negotiate with our pannier-laden bikes, but the weather turned snowy, so it's fortunate that didn't bring on a miscarriage. But at least I didn't feel too sick – and I went on to make a Trans-Atlantic holiday with Mother in my second trimester without incident, visiting Granmargie and other American relatives in Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina – a momentous trip in terms of genealogical as well as geographical exploration.

When we had just the one baby, we still managed to visit a wide variety of places. Our first official holiday with James (aged 7 months) was in May 1984 on the island of Lundy. This was when Leslie was still trying to persuade me that camping was a viable and enjoyable option with a baby in tow. We spent a sunny week camping on Lundy and found it quite an impressive island with intriguing old lighthouses and other attractive old cottages dotted around the greensward – but we realized it would not have been a relaxing place to be if James had been walking, due to the steep cliffs everywhere and the lack of beaches. Hearing tales of even adults wandering off the cliffs in the fog and plunging to their death was a little off-putting – not to say downright alarming.

We also discovered other hazards of travelling with a young baby. We were meant to be boarding a ship to reach Lundy, but due to bad weather the sailing was delayed, and we had to stay an extra night on mainland Devon. This was perhaps fortunate as James developed a high temperature and I began feeling a bit panicked about whether he needed a doctor, and should we be heading off to a tiny island with no medical facilities? In the end doses of Calpol brought his temperature down and we felt we could risk the trip, but it did add an element of anxiety to the holiday. As Lundy was such a small island, we did not attempt to take bikes, but used the back-pack carrier to transport James while we walked. Luckily he was a cheerful baby and coped happily with sleeping in a tent squashed in a sleeping bag with his parents – I guess from his perspective nutritional facilities were conveniently close at hand as I was still breast-feeding at this point.

Later that year we took bikes plus child carrier seat for James up to beautiful Dent Dale, stayed in a delightful old farmhouse, and spent a happy week cycling around the borders of Yorkshire and Lancashire. This included a trip to the picturesque old

town Kirkby Lonsdale, where many of my Carus-Wilson ancestors come from and is close to Casterton School which I had attended for one (reasonably) enjoyable year – the school (originally at Cowan Bridge nearby) that had been founded by my triple-great grandfather William Carus-Wilson, on whom the infamous Mr Brocklehurst was based in Charlotte Brontë's fantastic story *Jane Eyre*.

Brontë may have exaggerated a bit about what a martinet he was. It is one of my favourite books, along with Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* and Jane Austen's six masterpiece novels. *Jane Eyre* is fabulous in being a dramatic and romantic story, yet with great realism in the characters, including the fact neither Jane nor Edward is particularly good-looking and yet there is such passion between them. I love the image that Charlotte Brontë conjures up of Mr Rochester describing an invisible cord connecting him with Jane, and this cord or connection eventually calling Jane back to him. This holiday may have been when we visited Haworth Parsonage, home of the Brontë sisters, unless it was a cycling trip before James arrived. However, with just one baby in tow we managed to cover quite a lot of ground.

I also have fond memories of visiting my friend Elizabeth in Glasgow and Oban after I lived down in England. Leslie and I stayed with her a few times in Glasgow. But I made one trip in 1984, on my own but plus sweet baby James, going to stay with Elizabeth in Oban and making expeditions, including one to the nearby Isle of Kerrera where we dragged his MacLaren buggy over the stony beach. James and I also took a boat trip over to Iona, which I found so enchanting that I decided on the spur of the moment to stay overnight (amazingly, I must have been organised enough to have sufficient nappies with me plus baby food as well as establishing that the hotel had a room). Although a trip like this was fun and I liked proving I could show some initiative, on the whole I preferred to have Leslie with me on holidays, as he is more skilled at planning itineraries and reading maps (and enjoys it so much) – and is certainly better at cycle maintenance if a bike breaks down.

However even Leslie can't guarantee the weather. Our run of luck with good weather for camping came to an abrupt end in the year after our Lundy and Dent trips, 1985, when we spent a week camping on Barra with baby James (now aged 20 months) and we were subjected to a week of heavy rain. I had already endured 6 hours of feeling seasick on the ferry to the Outer Hebrides (luckily James seemed to have a stronger stomach, more like his father). What should have been a cheap holiday became quite expensive when we had to go to the hotel nearby for regular meals and drying out sessions etc, not to mention wrestling with the logistics of trying to wash and dry baby clothes and change nappies in a small tent.

The week after we had a lovely time staying in a cottage in the more accessible Southern Hebrides on Colonsay, and I indicated firmly to Leslie that there would be no more camping holidays as far as I was concerned. We have continued annual trips to Colonsay ever since that first visit, and we have almost always been blessed with a reasonable helping of sunshine. The varied scenery, as well as the stunning beaches, includes a wooded estate around the big house, providing a welcome contrast to the more traditional bare Hebridean landscape, and the low-lying hills mean most of the rain passes over to Mull, Jura or the mainland. Yet the hills are high enough to command spectacular views out to sea. The islanders are friendly and Colonsay is charmingly small-scale – one shop, one hotel, one café, one

primary school (with an average of 10 or less pupils!), one village hall – plus a few other amenities that have appeared over the years. In recent years the grocery shop/post office has been augmented by a bookshop and a small brewery with shop – which has expanded to producing gin to Leslie's delight!

Even when not enjoying sunshine on Colonsay, we've been able to keep cosy and dry inside with log fires, diverted by indoor activities in our cottage or apartment in the big house – definitely preferable to the camping experience in my view. Leslie has made occasional attempts to resurrect camping on his swimming trips but has failed to persuade me to join in such outings.

I have a bad sense of direction and have got lost on various occasions even on familiar territory, so it's perhaps surprising that in addition to the Oban/Iona trip, I risked going on another trip without Leslie, taking myself off on a short cycling holiday in the Scottish Borders with baby James in a seat on the back of my bike. For most of the time we were staying in a friend's cottage, but we did make some bike trips exploring the area. Looking back I think I must have been a bit crazy (maybe this was an early manic episode?) but amazingly I didn't get lost – and I also wonder how I managed to transport all our stuff in one front basket plus 2 small front panniers!

The trip included cycling on one rather alarmingly busy road and as a truck swept by my head was bumped against the side of the vehicle – fortunately I was wearing a helmet and it was just a glancing blow to me rather than James. Leslie may have felt a little alarmed when he read about this escapade on a postcard that I sent him. But I suppose he figured if I was capable of inscribing a postcard, I could not be suffering from severe concussion. Leslie was due to be with me on this holiday, but his self-employed work got in the way, and I was determined to go anyway. This happened on a few more occasions but again I remained undaunted – twice with 2 little boys when James and Gordon were little, and another with James, Gordon and toddler Catriona. Two of these trips were to our favourite island of Colonsay, and at least I knew my way around there since there was basically only one road and there were a few friendly faces around to give assistance if needed.

Although we fast became enamoured with the charms of Colonsay, we did continue making a few expeditions to other places, including an Easter trip to Tresco in the Scilly Isles when James was a toddler. Once again there was travel disruption – we were meant to be going by sea vessel (the Scillonian) but as it was not sailing, we ended up on small plane - rather exciting. I don't usually like plane travel and feel quite nervous, but I quite enjoyed this (illogically since the safety record of small aircraft is doubtless far worse than jumbo jets!) We made trips by small boat to several of the nearby Scillies, and found them a beautiful set of islands, but Tresco was particularly attractive.

James at 2 ½ was at a very cute toddler stage – I recall him togged up in a shiny turquoise mac with matching sou'wester hat and red wellington boots, plus a rainbow striped jersey that I had knitted for him (in the days when I still found time for knitting!) marching off to the beach or exploring the sub-tropical delights of Tresco Abbey Gardens. We shared a house with my parents and a couple of American friends for a few days – fun in some respects, and they loved the gardens,

but my mother found the house a bit cold, yet she did not enjoy the smoke from the wood-burning stove, so in other ways it was a relief when they departed, leaving Leslie and me on the island to relax a bit for the rest of the week. In another permutation on modes of transport we took a helicopter back to the mainland.

The Tresco expedition also included our first experience of a sleeper train, when we travelled down to Penzance, demonstrating to us that it was viable to go by sleeper with a small child. We began doing this on a regular basis when going up to Scotland, especially when we were taking one or two bicycles and the only trains with full-sized guards vans were sleeper trains. Once we had 3 children we expanded into 2 sleeper compartments with 2 berths each, which meant the boys fought over who had the top bunk, while I had to share my berth with Catriona, so Leslie was the only really happy bunny. But we all loved the sensation of waking up in the early morning and looking out on glorious Loch Lomond, having departed from the uninspiring confines of London Euston station.

Another trip I made on my own, this time with the two boys in tow, was to Glengorm Castle, a splendid Victorian, Scots Baronial edifice rising up from the seashore on the Isle of Mull– not much sand but a fascinating rocky shoreline. James was 5, Gordon 2 and it was in October 1988. Feeling terribly tired and having to take naps on the sofa gave me a clue to the fact that I was pregnant again! Although the scenery was magnificent, it was a tricky location as we were too far from the village of Tobermory to walk with small children, even using the pushchair. This was before mobile phones too and there was no landline in the holiday flat. However, the owner of the flat, who lived in another part of the castle, gave us a lift to Tobermory to buy supplies. I nearly had to ask her for an emergency trip later, as James managed to cut his finger quite badly when he was “helping” me prepare food, and I was worried he might need stitches. But thank goodness a long nap seemed to provide sufficient healing.

Leslie did accompany us on a week’s trip to Tiree, another Hebridean island not far from Colonsay, but an interesting contrast in some ways. The beaches and machair were beautiful, bedecked with wildflowers. It was much flatter with very fertile agriculture, which meant it was much more highly populated, and we decided we preferred Colonsay with its tiny population (around 100) and its more varied landscape of hills and even some woods – unusual for most Hebridean islands.

Once Catriona arrived and there were 5 of us Colonsay became firmly established as our regular holiday destination. Catriona was only weeks old when we took her there in 1989 and I remember carrying her in a baby-sling when I cycled that holiday as she was too small to go in a bike seat. By now I was using a bike hired on the island, hired from the delightful Archie McConnell, as I could not manage taking my bike as well as 3 small children and luggage, and in due course we also hired bikes for the children when they were too big for Leslie’s trailer wagon.

Before settling on sleeper travel, there were a few trips that we made up the day before our ferry was due to take us to Colonsay, and we would sometimes stay in a family room at the Oban Youth Hostel (bringing back memories of the night I stayed there as a teenager with Elizabeth and her sister Anne) – but as it was a mile from the ferry terminal this was not ideal, though we had most of the day to make

our way to the central High Street and potter round Oban. We discovered that the Palace Hotel was situated conveniently close to the ferry, was quite cheap and had a sea view of the harbour, which compensated for what it lacked in classy décor. It turned out to be ideal to stay in on the way back as we arrived after the last train. The lady who ran the Palace was friendly and helpful, and we could turn up late when we returned from Colonsay – in the old ferry days this could be very late.

Although the children and I started hiring bikes on the island, Leslie still liked bringing his own bike, partly because he found the bikes on Colonsay (while cheaper than mainland hire) were of variable quality, mainly due to the ravages of salty weather, but also because he liked to incorporate some more serious cycling into the holiday – first by taking his bike off the sleeper train and cycling the 30 odd miles to Oban by various different routes; and then on the way back he would cycle all the way from Oban to Glasgow (around 100 miles), again taking a number of different routes, sometimes involving ferries. This was great for him but rather less relaxing for me as I was left in charge of 3 small children and much of the luggage. To be fair he took some luggage in the wagon that he built and would be quite a distinctive sight on the roads between Oban and Glasgow with his wooden wagon trundling along behind his bike. But I would have most of my and the children's belongings in my rucksack – though as the children got older, they began carrying some stuff in their own backpacks.

When we began travelling up on the sleeper train, we had to change to pick up the West Highland line to Oban, while the sleeper headed further north. The official place to change trains was Crianlarich as Tyndrum had two separate stations (Tyndrum Upper and Tyndrum Lower), but over the years we mostly changed at Tyndrum, because it was a more attractive place to wait the 3 hours for the Oban train, with a better eating place for breakfast and there was plenty of time to change stations. The children found it a long wait, but we managed to do a bit of shopping for novelties, snacks and chocolate in one of the shops near the breakfast café.

There was one ill-fated year when there were some changes in the timetable of the trains. Before Leslie set off on his latest bike expedition, he assured me that he had checked the revised timetable and told me the Oban train would be arriving an hour later than before. So, the children and I did our usual extended pottering around before making our leisurely way to Tyndrum Lower – only to discover to our dismay that the train from Glasgow to Oban had already been and gone and we had a further 3 hours to wait for the next one! The children were not happy bunnies, especially Gordon who is an early riser, a punctual person (unlike the rest of us) and hates to wait around (probably his grandfather's genes). I'm not sure how I managed to entertain the kids (more food I suppose and sweets). This was before the days of mobile phones, so I think Leslie was rather surprised when he arrived in Oban by bicycle and found we were not there! And we were not very pleased with him ... Not sure if he'd looked at Saturday or Sunday instead of Monday-Friday or just misread the timetable. We were just lucky that even the late afternoon train arrived in Oban in time for the evening sailing of the ferry to Colonsay.

Since the ferries and ferry terminal have been upgraded it feels a bit like an airport when waiting to embark, and you board via an enclosed walkway. The old days were more fun when you walked up a narrow gangplank and could see the boat

bobbing up and down on the sea. I vividly remember James waiting at the front of the queue, so keen to be the first one aboard; the rest of us following close behind (apart from Leslie who would be on his bicycle waiting to board with the cars). The old ferries had more character; however, it is helpful that they are more punctual nowadays and generally have a slightly shorter sailing time. But there was a terrible September a few years ago when Leslie and I were trying to get over for a few days holiday leading up to Ceol Cholasa (the music festival) and we were stuck in Oban for 3 days because of stormy weather cancelling sailings. It did give us a chance to try out some of the many hotels (we looked for the best online deal which resulted in going to 3 different establishments!) Felt like hotel reviewers. At least without young children in tow it was easier to take a flexible approach about when we would get to the island and finding other activities to occupy us while we waited.

Once on the island time would fly by with a range of activities; some regular, some just a temporary craze; exploring on foot and bicycle and swimming; playing with an inflatable boat in a rockpool; playing cricket or rounders on the beach; playing badminton on the old tennis court or watching friends play tennis on the court—regrettably now too dilapidated for any games. Ceilidh dancing, first in the cramped old village hall and later the new spacious hall; playing games by the fire like Risk or Monopoly; evening barbecue parties with late night swimming – one year the sea was covered in sparkling phosphorescence – magic stars glittering on the waves. Once there was an impromptu long-jump competition on the beach – mainly the teenagers, but of course Leslie couldn't resist muscling in to show off his prowess resulting in a sprained ankle for one of the contestants! Another year was the great dam building project creating amazing “rapids” when the tide came in, and fun for the kids tumbling down the flowing water. Leslie has swum with seals and one time James swam with dolphins (a magical experience recently repeated at Skelmorlie when Leslie was swimming in the sea with Catriona's friend Bella and were joined by a pod of dolphins).

We were also entertained by the Dads, especially our friend John, who was extremely safety conscious, and insisted on aiming a large torch at his daughter when a group of the kids went swimming in the dark – much to her embarrassment as she was wearing a thong! John was a lovely man, but also a source of amusement. Where Leslie and I would choose our cottage by whether it had a good view or was near the best beach, John would choose depending on which one he thought was the safest – e.g. he liked the one storey bungalow style cottage with no steep stairs to worry about! Whereas Leslie and I thought the stairs added to the charm. I think only one child fell down the ones at Kiloran Bay – and no bones were broken. John also preferred to sit on wet sand rather than dry as he was worried that he might catch impetigo from unwashed sand! Another hazard that had not occurred to Leslie and me. I would say the risk must have been minimal given the small number of people on the beaches combined with the frequent rainfall!

Several of the Dads were a source of amusement (including Leslie) and another such character was Mike. He was an army surgeon (now retired) and always had lots of amazing gadgets – including a nightscope, which he used to keep an eye on parties on the beach when the kids were teenagers, crouching in a dark cape behind a rock on the hillside – also to his daughter's embarrassment. He is quite taciturn

and can seem rude and lugubrious, but under his gruff, world-weary manner he is very kind and devoted to his family. His wife could be quite impetuous and had escapades such as leaving it a bit late to cross the Strand when the tide was covering it – resulting in her swimming back and ruining a camera. Mike had some caustic remarks about that. She is the opposite to Mike in seeming always incredibly sunny and up-beat – which I guess she needs to be to withstand her husband’s withering comments. Another item he brought out one year when there were some windy days, was a huge rainbow coloured kite which he flew very skilfully. Dear John then produced a tiny rainbow kite which he began flying – quite a comical sightseeing the two of them running round the beach as John was a compact fellow, and Mike fairly tall, so it was like Little and Large.

Another Dad who worked in education was very politically correct and believed in resolving everything with the “*we understand you*” approach. He thought Leslie was an unreconstructed male and would tell him his remarks or behaviour were inappropriate – but he meant well... One other eccentric Dad liked to call by on families who were about to eat, in the hope of being offered titbits. He was also known to wander into people’s cottages and lie down on one of the beds for a nap!

Leslie and I both love swimming and given half a chance Leslie loves to “*go commando*”, i.e. keeping his bathers dry. I am less keen - usually because of the cold temperature of the water rather than prudishness. But we have both been skinny-dipping in the sea and various lochs on Colonsay; one sheltered one with waterlilies up in the hills. There was one memorable occasion at another secluded beach - Cable Bay, where we met up with two other couples and we all went skinny-dipping quite spontaneously. And I once swam naked on my own at Kiloran Bay – in the early morning, perhaps more surprising, but one of those unprompted impulses that liven up the day. My swimming is generally slow and cautious, but Leslie did persuade me to swim out to the island in Kiloran Bay once – he swims there regularly, but once was enough for me. My view with many such “*extreme*” activities is that if I’ve done it once I cannot see the necessity of doing it again (and I may not even see the point of doing it once!) whereas Leslie likes to keep doing it.

But it seems appropriate that I married a Piscean who is even more of a water-baby than I am. We have swum outside together since our first holidays down on the Solent and up on Loch Tay. Leslie has not, however, persuaded me to join him on his midwinter swims in the Serpentine and the sea at Skelmorlie! He did once get me in the Serpentine on Christmas Day – for about 30 seconds. We also had a freezing cold dip in a Sussex lake one frosty morning in March. However, I could not quite brace myself to join Leslie in a glacier melt lake in Canada which had lumps of ice floating in it. But we were pleasantly surprised to find how warm the water was in many other lakes around Banff and Jasper. And in recent years since moving to a house beside the River Thames Leslie and I have enjoyed regular swimming in the Thames – delightful as long as you go when the tide is right, watch out for rowers and pleasure boats and don’t swallow the water (a thorough shower to wash off detritus and hidden germs is recommended – and you have to desist from swimming for a day or two if heavy rain leads to a sewage discharge).

Having got to the stage of being not completely tied into family holidays on Colonsay (however delightful) Leslie and I also dared to venture further afield and

enjoyed two spectacular holidays in Canada in the Rockies, staying in Canmore, visiting Banff, Jasper and a variety of glorious glacial lakes and mountains. Although we mainly stayed with friend Nick, we also camped at Lake O'Hara, an amazing wilderness experience - including keeping food locked away from bears.

Canadian scenery was fantastic, but I prefer the scale of Scotland and the Lake District – Canada was a bit too vast for me! Most of my favourite holidays have been in the UK countryside, often by the sea or lakes, and on Hebridean islands, or Cornwall, enjoying some of the most scenic parts of Britain – although I've also loved brief trips that Leslie & I have made to Paris and – finally (only took about 40 years) - to Venice which was an absolute highlight - I can't wait to go back! And just short trips cycling in the UK including daytrips in London to houses, galleries or parks are great fun – part of the delight of swimming at the Serpentine when we lived in Notting Hill was the leafy cycle ride through the park to get there.

Meanwhile both Gordon and Catriona have done more trips abroad than Leslie and I have. Gordon and Emma have made trips to Croatia, Malta, USA and South Africa. But Catriona wins the prize for world travelling. She started by arranging an au pair placement for herself between school and university, staying with a family near Paris and acquiring a dab tongue at speaking French. After graduating from Leeds University, she showed further enterprise in securing a TEFL place on La Reunion – France's furthest territory, a tiny island in the Indian Ocean, near Mauritius and Madagascar. She went to teach English to French speaking students and ended up living there for 3 years, having acquired a French boyfriend.

Catriona managed to save up enough money to do more travelling which had been her aim. French boyfriend Tanguy was able to go with her, luckily, as Leslie and I had felt quite anxious at the prospect of her exploring the wilds of Asia on her own. They went to India, Thailand and Vietnam, plus a foray over to America which included Peru and San Francisco. It was a fantastic adventure and Catriona was only sorry she could not spend longer exploring the world – but she did get to meet an elephant on her travels! James and Wayne are not very proactive in arranging holidays themselves, but they have made many visits to Colonsay, and others have helped them venture overseas. Maybe one day they'll plan their own itinerary...

Trips to Colonsay will continue however, and not just because of Ceol Cholasa for Leslie and me. The children still love going there even now they are grown up and have brought friends and partners along too. In recent years we've enjoyed holidays with Gordon and all his family including grandchildren, which have been very special. Seeing Archie and Isobel play on Kiloran Bay brings back happy memories of when our bairns were young and enjoying the beaches on Colonsay and soon more grandchildren will be visiting there! Gordon and Emma are particularly devoted to the island, and they have now bought a house there – the old manse. It is much nearer to their home in Glasgow than it would be for us coming from London, and it means they can even go there for weekends as well as longer trips at other times (weather and ferries permitting). So, it looks like they will be spending many more holidays there in the years to come, and other family too.



Trio in Leslie's bike wagon c.1991



James & Gordon on bikes hired on Colonsay



All biked up. Meeting the ferry c.1992



Lord of the Isles ferry Colonsay



Gordon & James with hired bikes above Kiloran Bay c.1995



Leslie & James cycling on Balnahard road, Colonsay



Kiloran Bay, Colonsay





Leslie & Ally at Waterlily Lochan on Colonsay c.2001



Leslie at Cable Bay where he landed after his epic swim from Islay to Colonsay 2006



Ally, Leslie + Micah on Carn an Eoin, 2017



So you CAN get sunburnt in Scotland! Ally & Leslie 2002 after day out on Colonsay – Leslie with customary glass of wine and olives – Ally waiting eagerly for dinner!



Ally, James, Catriona & Gordon with some of Colonsay gang – c.2004



Family on Colonsay; James, Ally, Gordon, Catriona, Leslie 2009



*Docherty & Du Cane Family on Colonsay Ferry after holiday on the island:
John, Agnes, Wayne, Leslie, Ally, James, Gordon, Emma, Archie, Beth 2016*



James, Leslie & Micah on top of Carn an Eoin 2017



Leslie & Ally in Canada 2016 – Banff Park



James & Wayne on Tobago 2012



Catriona with elephant in Thailand 2016



James, Catriona & Tanguy on La Reunion 2015



Ally & her bike at Danson House 2010



James, Catriona & Micah Colonsay. 2017

24. Ravensburn

Another event that changed our pattern of holidays was buying a house in Scotland. This came about in a strange, serendipitous manner. When I was in the throes of bipolar episodes, one question the doctor asked me about the pattern of “hyper” phases was did I start spending madly? Apart from the odd spree in charity shops (one of my favourite places for retail therapy) I thought I didn’t. However, on our way back from Colonsay in 2008, Leslie and I arranged to visit an old friend Richard, who lived in a beautiful house in Skelmorlie, near Glasgow. This was only the second time we had been there, partly because he and his wife also lived part-time down in London. Richard and I were in the same class at Jordanhill School, but it was only years later that we met and became friendly with him and his wife in London. We enjoyed their company but had not managed to meet very often.

When we arrived, Richard commented that it was lucky we had got in touch to visit now, as the house was on the market, because he and his wife were splitting up! This was quite a thunderbolt partly because we had thought they were so well suited, and because we loved the house so much, and we each began wondering whether we might buy it! In my case this could indeed have been the product of a hyperactive manic mind, but Leslie’s ponderings were rooted more firmly in reality.

As it happened, we had recently paid off the mortgage on our London home, and had an income from letting out half of the house, supplementing our employment, and our children had all left school. Given the amazingly low prices of Scottish property compared to London, buying a place in Scotland began to seem not such a crazy idea, even if we kept our London house. We had long toyed with the idea of getting a property either in the Lake District or on the west coast of Scotland, and we knew we would want a period house with good views, but it couldn’t be too remote because neither of us drive. This house ticked many of our boxes, and we had both agreed it was a “*dream house*” when we stayed there a few years before.

The house is in Ayrshire, on the Clyde coast, with fabulous views towards the isles of Bute and Arran and the Cowal Peninsula. It is a splendid Victorian sandstone dwelling with a turret and a large garden leading down to the sea. Although not right in the country, and having quite a busy road nearby, the house was a good compromise for us, because of the excellent public transport links – Wemyss Bay railway station barely 10 minutes’ walk away with a direct line to Glasgow (as well as ferries to the Isle of Bute) and regular buses between Glasgow, Greenock and Largs stopping near the front door - a big advantage for us as non-drivers. (I should perhaps mention that all three of our children have wasted no time in getting a driving licence, keen not to follow in their parents’ low carbon footprints!)

We alerted Richard that we might be interested in buying the house, and we spent the train journey back to London making lists of pros and cons and discussing whether this was a completely mad idea or an inspired brainwave. A few months later we were the proud if slightly dazed owners of the house, then called Inchgower – though a few years later we decided to revert to its original name of Ravensburn. Almost as fantastic as buying the house, was that we were able to purchase it with most of its furnishings. Our friends each had a small flat in London and did not

have space for their Scottish furniture, or even want most of it. This was lucky as nearly everything was to our taste and good quality – eleven years later and we have still hardly changed anything! I think to some extent they had done the house up as a design project and did not want to dismantle it; perhaps also they did not want to take too many reminders with them. That said, we have remained in touch with them and, although they are divorced, they remain close friends with each other, are still working together, and have visited us at Ravensburn several times.

One rationale for buying a house up north was that it would be a place where we could retire. But in my initial rush of enthusiasm buying Ravensburn I had a vision of us moving up to Scotland within a couple of years and me maybe even finding a job in Glasgow after leaving London. However, our ties with London have proved to be more deep-rooted and entrenched. We have many close and dear friends there, as well as activities that make us feel wedded to London. Over the years we had conflicting emotions about living in London in general, and about living at Hanover Lodge. But we struggled so hard to acquire the whole house, and felt deeply embedded, partly because the property had been in my family so long, and we spent most of our married life there bringing up our children. So many core memories of our lives and friendships were centred around that house and West London; and two of our children still live in London. We found that although we were very fond of Ravensburn, we were not ready to quit London entirely.

But Ravensburn has also proved to be significant in the lives of our son Gordon and his wife Emma. After graduating from Glasgow University Gordon began accountancy training with PWC in Glasgow and Gordon moved into the house at that point. Some might think Leslie had encouraged Gordon to follow in his footsteps, but almost the opposite was true since Leslie has always been lukewarm about being an accountant, having been pushed reluctantly into the profession by his father in the absence of displaying any decisive ambition for another career.

Tony took the simple view “*You’re good at maths, you’d better be an accountant.*” Leslie reckons that Gordon makes a better accountant than he ever has – though Gordon too has ended up branching out from the big accountancy firms, but still works with another big firm as I think he enjoys the teamwork and the structure. Leslie is more of a maverick and long ago took the decision to go self-employed having assessed himself as “*fundamentally unmanageable*”.

Gordon moved into our Skelmorlie house when it was still known as Inchgower. He had been going out with his beloved Emma since his second year at university. Eventually they got engaged and began looking round for suitable wedding venues. After much consideration they decided to hold the reception at Inchgower, which entailed hiring a large marquee for the garden overlooking the sea. It also involved doing considerable renovation of the stonework and woodwork on the exterior of the house. We teased Gordon a bit about how much this was costing, but he pointed out that we needed to do the work anyway, which of course was true. Using our own house for the wedding made it a particularly special event. It was also a pleasure to work on the project with Emma’s parents and her sister, who are a delightful set of “*out-laws*” for Leslie and me, and fantastic in-laws for Gordon. They live near Glasgow, and it is amusing that I went south to university and married an Englishman, while Gordon came to Glasgow and married a Scots lass.

My main regret was that my Dad did not live to attend the wedding, but at least he had the joy of knowing about their engagement and looking forward to “*the event*” as he referred to it. And he did manage to attend Gordon’s graduation with us at Glasgow University, which was a hugely memorable occasion. During Dad’s last days in hospital Dad enjoyed talking about the forthcoming wedding, although maybe deep down he knew that he might not live to attend it (but maybe not, given his facility for avoiding unwelcome truths). Although “*the event*” required hard work from both our families, it was well worth it as it was a wonderful wedding; the marriage in a pretty church near Emma’s home, and a host of friends and family present for a wedding breakfast, dancing and supper plus fireworks orchestrated by Leslie (almost ending in disaster when one misfired and the assembled company held collective breath as Leslie disappeared from view – luckily all was well and he emerged with just a slightly singed anorak).

After getting married, Gordon did a couple of accountancy jobs with PWC; one in Manchester and one in London. London meant that for a year we had the pleasure of him and Emma living nearby - the highlight being the birth of their first child, Archie John Maxwell, born at St Thomas’ Hospital in May 2015, in sight of the Houses of Parliament. Although Gordon loves Scotland, he is quite proud that Archie was born in England! However, Emma was keen to move back to Scotland to be near her family, so when a suitable job came up as a finance manager at Whyte & Mackay, they moved back up north – Leslie was pleased as it meant he had access to discounted malt whisky! Unfortunately for Leslie, Gordon later moved jobs, ending up working for the Weir Group, which as far as we know has no interests in whisky, gin or wine. But Gordon did manage to obtain several venerable bottles of the golden liquid before moving on to pastures new.

This move back north meant Gordon and Emma had another spell living in our Skelmorlie house (now called Ravensburn) while they looked for somewhere to live, initially renting, later buying. They have since spent several periods living at Ravensburn either between house lets, or while having building work done at their house in Hyndland; and most recently during lockdown, when they stayed there for several months with Archie, his younger sister Isobel and Saoirse their Labrador dog. It is lovely to have the house so extensively used by our northern family, and we hope they will continue to visit there, even though they have now purchased a place on Colonsay, where they plan to spend much of their free time.



Archie & Isobel on lawn at Ravensburn 2020



Ravensburn in snow December 2009



The lawn at Ravensburn where we had Gordon & Emma's wedding marquee



Leslie swimming in sea beside Ravensburn

25. Musical Recreation

As mentioned previously, my father Louis followed the artistic traditions of both his parents, but he enjoyed sketching and collecting art just as a hobby, whereas music was his passion – and in his case that meant almost exclusively classical. But although Dad was a professional violinist who adored music, he did not push Colin or me to become musicians – maybe because his own mother had been extremely pushy and he did not have a very warm relationship with her, even though he loved being a musician. Dad encouraged us to play an instrument, but he did not get involved much in our progress. I learnt piano, but only up to Grade 3. Colin started violin but had rows with Mother about practising so that did not last long. Then he took up the French Horn (at boarding school) but guitar prevailed when he decided he wanted to be a rock musician, much to Dad’s dismay.



Colin & Ally in Cornwall while I was singing at St Endellion – meeting at pub for lunch c.2004

Unfortunately, Dad was never really able to appreciate this lighter or more experimental music as he was so immersed in classical music, and he disliked hearing us play contemporary “pop” or “rock” music. He was happier when he saw me singing in choirs and doing classical repertoire. But both Colin and I loved the Beatles and bought their early records, along with other popular groups of the period. Pop music was also something that Kenny enjoyed, but he showed no interest in classical music, which meant a further gulf between him and Dad.

As well as adoring the Beatles, I had a guilty passion for the Monkees, especially Davy Jones, who was one of my first teenage “crushes”, along with Paul McCartney and David Cassidy. Not a very edgy palate! I did also like Paul Newman and Robert Redford after seeing them in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. And I went on to enjoy a fairly wide range of popular music from Pink Floyd and Fleetwood Mac *Rumours* to Coldplay, Elton John and Celtic folk music. Both Mike Oldfield’s *Tubular Bells* and Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* instantly evoke our university days where I first heard that music with Leslie. But later I learnt to appreciate classical music more fully, as well as “popular” and to enjoy singing all kinds of repertoire. I particularly love Baroque music – Bach, Handel, Vivaldi; but also, operas by Puccini, Verdi or Mozart; Cole Porter, Gershwin etc. Dad encouraged my singing when I was an adult, paying for some of my singing lessons, and enabling me to join the St Endellion Music Festival Chorus, which I love singing in even as I become increasingly fond of contemporary Celtic music.

In addition to playing chamber music all over Scotland, Dad’s main career was Head of Strings at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland), and then Principal of the Birmingham School of Music. Dad also took on a host of extra-curricular activities such as examining for the Associated Board (which involved a lot of travelling abroad that he loved), serving with the ISM and ESTA (European Strings Association), helping to establish the Benslow Instrument Loan Scheme, governor of the Elgar Music School and input to various Concert Clubs, and he continued teaching individual

pupils for many years. Plaudits that came from some of his ex-pupils after he died reveal that he was obviously a wonderful and inspiring teacher.

But one of Dad's most special and significant contributions was co-founding the St Endellion Music Festival in North Cornwall. This has grown over 60 years to become one of the most well-loved and well-respected music festivals (predominantly classical) in the UK, providing enjoyment for thousands of professional and amateur musicians and a host of supporters who help behind the scenes and/or come to the concerts. Dad's Rugby schoolfriend Roger Gaunt was a priest who first had the vision to hold a festival of music and arts in the beautiful setting of St Endellion Church. It was Dad as the professional violinist and teacher who was able to play and bring colleagues and students to provide the core of musicians, while Roger enjoyed conducting on an amateur basis.

Dad became leader of the first orchestra and when the scale of the festival had outgrown Roger's abilities, Dad found a young professional conductor to develop the festival – Richard Hickox. The rest, as they say, is history. Richard developed the festival and attracted top class soloists, while still maintaining the community ethos which meant nobody received payment for their services, and everybody takes part for love of music. (However eminent soloists do get a free holiday for themselves and their families; whereas the humble Chorus pay to take part.) Following Richard's death, several different brilliant conductors have shared the baton at Endellion and both Summer and Easter Festivals continue to thrive.

Around 1998 as the kids began reaching a more independent age, I began to enjoy some "me-time" holidays. Dad knew I sang in a local choir and had even started having sporadic singing lessons when Catriona was a toddler. As the children had grown up a bit, Dad encouraged me to join the Endellion Chorus when Richard Hickox was well established as Artistic Director and Conductor. 40 years after Dad and Roger started the Summer Festival, I was lucky enough to sing in the Chorus. On my first tentative foray into the Endellion Chorus Mother and Dad came down to Cornwall with me to look after the children (James, Gordon & Catriona), assisted by my brother Colin (Leslie being too busy with work – the lot of the self-employed man...). We stayed in a picturesque house in Port Isaac, and I attended rehearsals and sung in concerts, in between spending time with the family – a happy echo of some of the family holidays we had in Cornwall when Colin and I were children. Since then, I have been lucky enough to sing in the Chorus there for about 20 years, expanding my repertoire to sing at the Easter as well as Summer Festival, and have enjoyed many happy years being a songbird in beautiful Cornwall.

I tried the format of bringing the children a second time with just Uncle Colin, assisted by a kind family nearby who helped entertain Gordon & Catriona; James as a teenager was deemed old enough to look after himself back in London under Leslie's minimal supervision (*what was I thinking?!*) But although the children quite enjoyed Cornwall they found it frustrating not having me around full-time; Gordon found it particularly annoying and baffling "*You're going singing AGAIN!?*" (i.e. Why?) As my participation grew into a regular fixture, I managed to arrange for Gordon and Catriona to stay for a while with Leslie's mother at her thatched cottage in the New Forest. Leslie's father had only been able to tolerate grandchildren in small doses, but by now he had passed on to the great cottage in

the sky. I think Gordon and Catriona enjoyed spending time with Granny although it may have been a bit tiring for her – but she was very sweet with them.

As the children grew even older, they stayed home in London during my singing fortnight, with Leslie keeping a perfunctory eye on them while he worked from home, and they helped him order in pizza. We would head up to Colonsay on my return – or sometimes the family would set off a day or two before me. To begin with Leslie was not keen on me “abandoning” him to sing in Cornwall, but over the years he has become more tolerant of my musical jollies. Perhaps this was partly due to my pointing out that most of our family holidays (delightful as they were) were not a true vacation for me as I was still grocery shopping, cooking, washing dishes, doing laundry, housekeeping etc... and not many fellow holidaymakers on Colonsay gave him any sympathy, since most had a firm foot in either the feminist or the active co-parenting camp. It was also a nice opportunity to see my parents as they would often come down to attend some concerts, sometimes with my brother Colin, and we would enjoy a few pub lunches together. They stayed at either the Headlands Hotel or Port Gaverne Hotel – both close to my favourite place to swim in Port Gaverne. When I go there nowadays, I think of them – with extra poignancy as Headlands Hotel now lies deserted. Their ashes are buried outside St Endellion Church, so they are strongly present in my thoughts as I go in to sing.

Thus, I have been lucky enough to sing in the Endellion Chorus for over 20 years, giving me some amazing musical holidays, while enjoying spectacular Cornish coastal scenery, walking, swimming and of course eating cream teas. I probably won't be able to continue for much longer as there are many talented budding young singers jostling to join the Chorus ranks, and so more senior members are encouraged to step down (or “*be culled*” as Dad used to say), but I have had a great run. I keep telling Leslie that I'm about to be put out to pasture, and then another “*invitation to join the Chorus again*” pings in my In Box, and I can't resist saying yes – “*as it will probably be the last time*”. And of course, one day it will be.



Port Gaverne, Cornwall – my favourite swimming and walking spot, and showing the now deserted Headlands Hotel where Mother & Dad used to stay when coming to Endellion.

26. Ambitions & Achievements

Before going to university, I toyed with the idea of being a nurse (having kept my theatrical ambitions under wraps). I was told that as I was academic I ought to do science and study medicine, in order to become a doctor, if I wished to have a medical career. But I did not really like science, and it was nursing that interested me (I had probably read too many Nurse Sue Barton books.) I was going through a phase of thinking I ought to do something to “help people”. I ended up having such a brilliant time at university that I am immensely grateful to the family and teachers who persuaded me that I should go there. For me it was transformative, seminal and expanded my horizons. And, of course, university was where I met Leslie who has been the key person in my life ever since. I toyed with the idea of going into nursing after graduating, but my aunt who was a nurse advised me firmly that nursing training would not combine well with being newly married!

My main ambition when growing up had been to be an actress (and my aunt and others would no doubt have counselled that acting combined even less well with marriage than nursing). I also harboured ambitions to be a writer or an artist, but acting was my favourite thing, and I have sometimes thought rather longingly that I wish I’d tried to do it seriously. But when young I lacked the confidence to attempt it, and the pragmatic side of my nature told me it would be hard to succeed, and especially to combine it with being a wife and mother to which (dare I admit) I also aspired. Obviously there are actors who manage to combine performing with happy marriages and family life, but I suspect there are a large number where those aspects of life are damaged or compromised, and I can’t be sure whether I might not have been prey to some of the temptations and pitfalls along the way.

Anyway, because I wanted to get married to Leslie as soon as I left university, I decided to be practical, do something sensible and so I enrolled in secretarial training rather than trying to get a job in art history or history which I had studied (or to become a nurse or indeed even pursuing more creative interests such as painting, writing or acting). It is a little ironic since when I was younger, I had resolved the one thing I would not do would be to become a secretary, despite a certain fascination with experimenting with Mother’s typewriter. I could also have explored teaching, but my brief unhappy experience at overseeing form homework in Casterton School had left me feeling almost certain I could not manage to be a teacher – the idea of trying to instil classroom discipline filled me with terror!

In the event, secretarial training turned out to be extremely useful, leading me into several interesting and fulfilling jobs, and meaning I was always able to earn my living, right into my 60s. It makes me remember what Leslie’s father said about learning to type opening doors, as this has happened (though it has also meant I have ended up being Minutes Secretary on rather more occasions than I might wish whether at a church, playgroup committee, school or drama group!). Better or maybe worse still, having a facility for Maths as well as English has meant I’ve ended up doing quite a lot of book-keeping and finance work, as well as secretarial tasks, which I would never have chosen to do when dreaming of creative or caring professions in my youth, but I came to realise that such skills could open avenues into a variety of employment, and help charities or other worthwhile bodies. Mine

may be the last generation to undergo and employ secretarial training in the way I did, since nowadays most people, however high-powered, use their own computers or laptops or iPads etc to create their own letters and documents, and look after their own diaries etc – I imagine the PA is becoming an increasingly rare animal.

However, back in my youth there were still plenty of secretarial jobs. My first secretarial post was at the British Museum in the Department of Mediaeval & Later Antiquities – coincidentally working for one of my former History of Art tutors at Westfield College (Neil Stratford). The main work was typing out a big book about the Viking ship of Sutton Hoo (in the days before word processors so a lot of pages would get retyped!) I used to cycle into work, but I got nervous of negotiating Bayswater Road and Marble Arch heading into Bloomsbury, so I kept my eyes out for a local post in Kensington. About a year later I got a job at Queen Elizabeth College (part of London University) first in Admin; then as Departmental Secretary for the Physiology Department, working principally for an eccentric Chilean Professor David Yudilevich, but also all the other departmental staff. This meant I had the pleasure of walking to work through Holland Park.

Professor Yudilevich resembled Einstein with wild white flowing locks, and possibly cultivated the similarity, both looking and behaving like a mad professor. One lecturer kept snakes in his office (in locked cages) – rather alarming for me as someone with a snake phobia. Luckily, I didn't have to enter his office much and he was a nice man. There were other great characters in the research team such as a lively American postgraduate called Giovanni – he and Professor Y would have very animated discussions about their work. A nice Jewish chap called Jacob worked with them; he kindly invited Leslie and me to his wedding - our first experience of a Jewish marriage ceremony which was intriguing. Bryan also worked with them; he was sweet, and I had a slight crush on him from afar (a chaste one within the bounds of being happily married!) and I was slightly disconcerted to discover he was gay. Of course, as the years have gone by, I have found that many men who are lovely and gentle with warm, attractive and empathetic personalities are gay, with my own darling son James being the most wonderful example.

I remained at QEC for about 6 years, and I enjoyed the work and interaction with colleagues most of the time. However I was glad to stop when I got pregnant and I took time out from full-time employment for about 10 years, to concentrate on bringing up our three children James, Gordon and Catriona, and I was happy to be primarily a stay-at-home mum. But I kept my secretarial hand in, doing sundry freelance typing, and the inevitable Minutes, mainly for a charity that helped young single mums from difficult backgrounds (St Michael's Fellowship), plus miscellaneous jobs such as academic theses and books.

I went back into QEC to do work typing out a nutrition and diet book when James was small enough for me to keep him in the baby sling on my lap, and he was good-natured enough to let me type! That did not last long of course... Later, when James was at playgroup and subsequently nursery, my dear friend Vivienne would child-mind his baby brother Gordon, and subsequently baby sister Catriona, while I was out at the monthly St Michael's meetings. I was not desperate to work, but it seemed useful to keep my skills honed (or at least dusted), and it felt nice to have "pocket money" that I had earned rather than just the allowance Leslie gave me; and

it was a good cause. It was also a joy to spend time with Vivienne when I went to pick up children. She was someone like Rosamund in being a wonderful, compassionate person – but also with a wicked dry sense of humour.

When Catriona started primary school, this meant all our offspring were in full-time education and I had more time to work – and we probably needed the extra income with 3 growing children needing clothes, trainers, toys, computer equipment etc. I started doing what turned out to be one of my favourite jobs, Parish Administrator for our two churches and local community hall – doing secretarial work, organising hall and church bookings, book-keeping of hirings, and other accounts work, and generally helping to administer parish life in Notting Hill. This included working with two lovely vicars, Harold and Mark, as well as several other delightful colleagues, and interacting with a variety of people in the parish, based in a charmingly quirky office up in St Peter's Hall on Portobello Road. One colleague Andrew was a great character; he had been in the guards, then the wine trade, then a self-taught artist, and finally running a shop known as *Highland Store*, which began life in the Hall (initially called *Highland Fling*) and expanded further along Portobello Road. He ended up giving our kids part-time casual work in his shop.

Strangely, Leslie has been one of my “bosses” (arm's length) in my three main jobs, due to his propensity for doing charity work! When I was Parish Administrator Leslie was a member of the PCC, and a Church Warden some of the time, which meant he was one of my employers. When I went on to work at the primary school Leslie was a governor there, which again meant he was one of my employers. Later, when I went to work for two architectural conservation charities, including the Ancient Monuments Society, Leslie had been a trustee for the AMS for many years, so again technically my employer! Maybe the reason I tried to give up work was to stop having him as my boss... but I seem to be back in harness again...

However, I must admit that overall, Leslie makes a good boss (and the role was shared). Some problems did arise at the Parish, when unfortunately, he and my line manager, vicar Mark, had differing views over the right way to administer the St Peter's Hall Charity, which I worked for in addition to my work for the church. Ultimately this dispute left me caught in the middle wanting and trying to please both of them yet being increasingly torn apart by their differing views.

In the end, when a job opportunity at the local school arose, I decided I ought to leave the parish job, but it was a very painful departure for me, as I had been so happy there. I don't often burst into tears, but when leaving the office on my last day I could not help doing so – I felt almost as sad as later on when we left Hanover Lodge. I have been through other family traumas over the years where I've been even more upset initially, but the underlying sorrow has not always lasted so long.

The one consolation for me was that Leslie and Mark respected one another and eventually they resumed their friendship. Indeed, some years later when Gordon was getting married up in Scotland, he asked Mark to perform the marriage ceremony. Gordon and his wife Emma are not particularly religious, and it may have been their shared interest in football that prompted Gordon to invite Mark to officiate at the wedding; but whatever the reason I was delighted to have Mark there, with his lovely wife Laura, as well as being pleased that Gordon and Emma

decided to get married in a church. Mark and Laura had been involved in some key events in our lives, both happy and traumatic, and it was good to have their presence at such a rite of passage for one of our sons.

But long before the wedding, and after 9 years at the Parish Office, I left to become School Administrator at our local Primary School, which our 3 children had all attended. This was the most high-powered job I ever did, in charge of finance, a big budget, HR, general admin and site management, and it proved quite a challenge for me. The long job description was daunting. Initially I resisted, saying at interview that if someone else more suited wanted the job then they should be offered the position rather than me (much to Leslie's horror when he heard what I'd said - "*That's not what you say at an interview!*" he expostulated). However, the Head and Chair of Governors persisted in offering me the post and eventually I said yes.

I enjoyed the interaction with teachers, support staff and the children, and the feeling of being part of the school family, and the education system, but there were indeed some big challenges to tackle. It was difficult to feel on top of all the different aspects of the job without working many hours of overtime, and there were stresses caused by the responsibilities – especially overseeing Health and Safety of the site and having to manage an elusive part-time Assistant Site Manager (ASM). Cleaning up the loos of unpleasant deposits and climbing in a Euro-bin to extract general rubbish from recycling counted among some of the low points! But trying to manage the ASM was a worse stress and worrying about hazards in the building. Having attended various training courses, I became perhaps overly aware of potential dangers to children and staff, and terribly anxious about them.

I was glad I had stretched myself and proved I could cope with a more demanding job. It was a good challenge for 4 years, but I had a difficult boss who began to make life increasingly stressful for me and other staff members, probably partly due to trauma that had occurred in her own life. There was also a strained relationship between me and one other admin staff colleague. This was upsetting and frustrating as I had always got on well with previous work colleagues and bosses.

For much of my time at the school I was also suffering from clinical depression. This was due mainly to family stresses in my life centred on a chronic legal dispute with my brother, although the high-pressure job probably contributed as well, even though I managed not to take time off work. But increasingly I felt trapped in a trough of despond, at both work and at home. So, after 4 years, I was relieved to move to a less stressful job as Administrator/Membership Secretary/Bookkeeper and general factotum for two architectural conservation charities, the Ancient Monuments Society and Friends of Friendless Churches, where once again I got on well with all my work mates and felt appreciated. But I missed the school.

In some ways this job at the AMS and FoFC was returning to my art history roots, and I spent over 8 happy years there working with friendly colleagues and possibly the kindest and most appreciative boss in Britain, Matthew Saunders – while also being highly intelligent and efficient, a "*Grand Old Man*" of conservation work. The office was a peaceful backwater compared to the primary school, but the main drawback to this post was having to return to commuting, which I had avoided since my early days at the British Museum. The tube to the city could be horribly

crowded, but I could be reasonably flexible about my hours, which helped. The charities are based in the city in a quirky wee office at St Ann's Vestry Hall, tucked away in a narrow alley near St Paul's Cathedral. My desk was perched upstairs in a Dickensian style gallery looking down on overflowing shelves and stacks of books.

There was a lot of multi-tasking, serving trustees of two different charities, administering membership, general secretarial duties plus managing accounts and finance. Despite this, it was relaxing compared to my School Administrator work, though even in this tranquil office I suffered a brief recurrence of depression and anxiety, and a panic attack, following a period of hypomania. This decided me it was time to follow my doctor's advice to go on lithium, which has proved to be an amazingly effective mood stabiliser for many years now. Once established on that medication, I was able to work efficiently and productively during my time at the Vestry Hall, and to be active and creative in other aspects of my life.

I thought I had retired 3 years ago but I have had an unexpected reprise or "*last hurrah*" as Charity Administrator, providing maternity cover for my successor (after her scheduled replacement pulled out at the last minute). This also coincided with the extraordinary events of the Covid-19 pandemic – still raging in 2021 as I write these notes, so my work has meant I am being even slower at producing my memoirs than before. But Covid turned out to be good news for me regarding work, as the restrictions mean I work from home with the aid of an office laptop, phone calls diverted and post redirected to my home, without having to wrestle with rush hour tube travel; and it is surprising how effectively one can work remotely with the aid of modern technology. Zoom "virtual" meetings are sometimes trickier than face-to-face get-togethers, but luckily there aren't too many of those – and at least they tend to be shorter than actual meetings!

But, returning to my thespian ambitions; although I did not pursue acting professionally, I've been lucky enough to act in many amateur dramatic productions over 38 years, and even direct several plays, maybe not as exciting as doing it professionally, but you get to choose the plays and the roles (and probably get more satisfying parts than in much professional work) and there's no risk of getting bored with long runs! There's also more artistic freedom when you do all the directing and producing, even if it is more work. To date (as at 2021) I have acted in about 50 shows; 43 Ladbroke Player productions and 7 shows with other companies, though unfortunately this has all been put on hold during the Covid 19 crisis, along with so much theatrical and musical activity – a great sadness and frustration.

However, one of the things I am proudest of in my life is that I have directed and produced 12 plays, in which I also acted. Before I embarked on being a director and producer, I would never have dreamt I could accomplish that, particularly having gone through bouts of debilitating depression for about 4 years before I managed to bring my first production to completion. Apart from bringing my children up not to be hooligans, I feel that producing these plays has been one of my biggest achievements, and my pursuit of drama really warrants a separate chapter! *[Those with no interest in the theatre may prefer to omit the next lengthy chapter!]*

27. Dramatic Activities

Soon after moving to Notting Hill Leslie and I looked for a church to attend, and initially went to services at St John's, our local parish church. Later we also attended St Peter's as the two churches formed a joint parish under the leadership of Harold Stringer, a wonderful vicar there for about 25 years. As well as providing spiritual nourishment and stimulation, church was a good way to make friends, and it was not long before we became involved in some informal play readings. There were also entertainments where some of us performed a selection of songs and sketches, usually at something like a church party (whether pancakes or post May Fair party etc).



Me as Gwendolen in "Earnest" wearing one of the hats I made.

Several people at church who had been involved in drama in different ways provided a catalyst to develop our drama group. We became very friendly with Diana, who had been a professional actress but, as a single mum in straightened circumstances, was busy looking after her young daughter Emily, who eventually became an actress herself. Diana became one of our first directors and was seminal in establishing our group. Years later when I was toying tentatively with the idea of directing plays for our drama group, both she and Emily encouraged me. I enjoyed exchanging ideas for plays with Diana, who had moved out of London and was directing other groups, but still remembered many members of our group.

We also got to know a much older (but still elegant) lady Dorothy; she too had acted on the professional stage and gave us helpful advice. And there were two other key people – one a retired school master Anthony, who had put on plays at his school; the other a young man called Andrew who was keen on both Gilbert & Sullivan and Terence Rattigan and had directed some shows. These two were to be moving forces in marshalling our thespian abilities.

All these people encouraged the idea of a performing church and local community drama group, but it was Andrew who took the initiative in putting on a full-scale production. His first proposal was a rather strange play by James Bridie, called *Tobias and the Angel*. I think he felt it was suitable to perform in church because it was a biblical story. Anyway, we had fun doing it – I was some sort of singing or dancing girl doing a rather provocative song/dance and Leslie played a devil. I remember concocting a scarlet costume for him including red tights, a red and gold mask, red rubber gloves, and a curly tail made out of rubber hosing covered in scarlet material and dragon horns!

My brother Colin took part, playing the angel in a long white sheet and a terrible blond curly wig! Ryder played the old blind father Tobit. A friend of Andrew's, Quentin, braved the role of Tobias. The play was produced in a wintry February 1983, and there was a scene where poor Quentin had to stand almost naked in a tin tub and have water poured over him! Years later my son James underwent similar torture playing Ralph in *Accrington Pals*, but at least that was performed in May.

This play was put on in church, but later we did a lower-key double-act at nearby St Peter's church hall – a whimsical one act play by Noel Coward, directed by Diana, called *Family Album*, along with Coward's *Red Peppers*, directed by Andrew, both from the cycle *Tonight at 8.30*. Diana had acted with Noel Coward in an original production of *Family Album* when she was pregnant. Funnily enough I had also discovered I was pregnant, but that didn't stop me taking part either. However, by October the baby was due to arrive, so I had to forego acting in *A Man for All Seasons* which Anthony directed for us. In many ways this marked the official start of the Ladbroke Players, as it was the first play advertised under that name, and it was performed with a proper set and lighting – plus custom-made costumes for all the cast. Diana said our group really needed a name and suggested Ladbroke Players since most of us lived on or near the Ladbroke Estate, and we were performing there. It has proved to be a good name for us for 38 years now!

Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*, performed in St John's in November 1983 marked the debut of our multi-purpose flats – constructed by Joe, and used in countless productions since then with multifarious paint and fabric covers creating a range of sets. It nearly saw the end of our productions too when one flat toppled over almost concussing a lead actor! But before the days of assiduous Health & Safety... The play also marked the emergence of wonderful wardrobe mistress Elizabeth, who created and oversaw a whole gamut of Tudor costumes, and it marked the first of many on-stage partnerships of Ryder and Elizabeth, playing Sir Thomas More and wife Alice. Perfect casting for our wise and erudite President! Baby James was born a few weeks before the performance – Ryder recalls giving Leslie a rocket for being late at rehearsal (partly as he was so often late) – only to discover that he had been visiting me in hospital following the birth of our son!

My only contribution to this drama was sewing Leslie's costume (he was playing the Duke of Norfolk) and even that caused me angst as I was at that new mother stage of finding it almost impossible to get dressed, let alone shop, cook, wash up or sew because I seemed to be spending all my time looking after the baby! And James was a good-natured baby. My parents had stayed with us for the first few days to help, and Mother kindly returned a few weeks after to look after James so I could go see Leslie in the play. I recall how difficult I found it to express milk for Mother to give him a bottle; unfortunately, she had to put up with him crying. They seem to have better systems for milk expression nowadays, luckily.

We had a couple of years gap after that, and then Diana had the delightful idea of directing *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1985. I was thrilled that she asked me to play Gwendolen, and I loved working with her – and from then on, my passion to act was completely ignited. There were various difficulties to contend with performing *Earnest*, including acting in snowy February with the church heating on the blink – we had to source some big space heaters to stop the audience freezing, but audience and cast enjoyed it despite that! Some cast gave Diana a bit of trouble arguing over costumes, but as usual everything came together for the show. We hired most of the costumes, but I concocted two suitably frivolous hats for myself and I also enjoyed adorning my costumes with extra lace and ribbons – almost as much fun as the acting! Later these creative impulses would branch out into set design and adapting costumes for plays that I would produce.

Luisa was a delicious Cecily, with Eddie as a suitably cynical Algernon. Frank, who played Earnest, was the one who seemed least comfortable, though he looked the part. Elizabeth gave a splendidly regal performance as Lady Bracknell with Ryder as the unctuous Canon Chasuble, while Janet was a delightfully prissy Miss Prism. Janet only acted in a few of our productions before moving to Kew, but she was important for our group, partly because she hosted several play readings, but she also generously donated money to Ladbroke Players which formed the basis of our reserves – enabling us to commit to many more shows over the next 35 years.

Diana's next play for us was a complete contrast to Wilde's frothy comedy – Arthur Miller's searing play *The Crucible*, performed in May 1985. One of our most harrowing but powerful plays. I was disappointed not to have a part, but I found it fascinating working as Diana's Production Assistant and as there was almost always someone missing from rehearsals, I got to act bits of most of the different roles. Diana had the intriguing (if risky) idea of casting schoolgirls from local Holland Park School to play the girls – apart from lead Abigail. We had a well-cast actress for Abigail who was quite neurotic herself, but extremely charismatic in the role of the manipulative and fatally alluring girl, who leads John Proctor to his destruction.

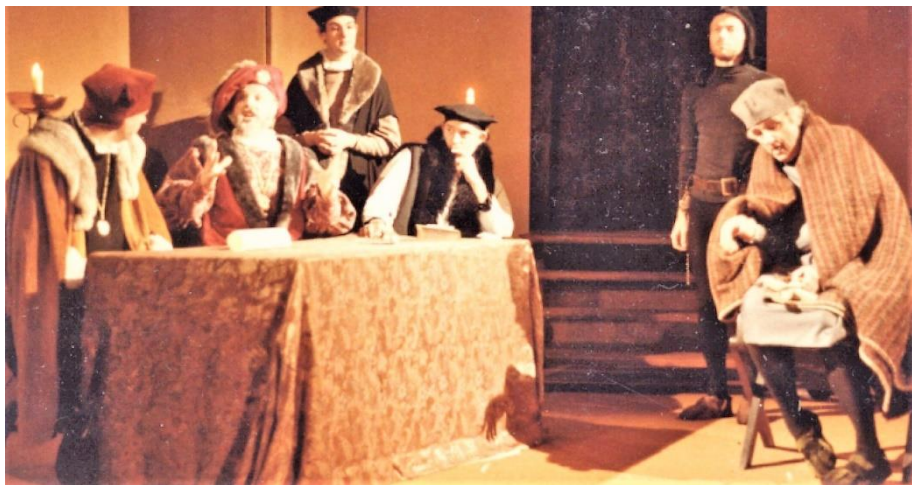
Diana asked my brother Colin to play Proctor – he had done quite a bit of acting at school and university, and was good in the role, but nearly drove Diana to distraction by taking so long to learn his lines – still clutching his book behind his back at the Dress Rehearsal. Leslie could be almost as bad at doing last-minute line learning – but he had a knack of putting the book down just before the crucial moment and convincing directors he knew his lines quite well! He played Danforth and was obviously convincing when he was cross-examining one of the girls in the trial as an old lady in the audience called out “*You leave her alone! Stop it!*”

Anthony did one more play in 1988, *She Stoops to Conquer*, our first LP production in St Peter's Church (in the joint parish with St John's). This was a good old-fashioned restoration comedy. It had a great set with a fireplace made by Leslie that appeared in several productions till someone borrowed it and we couldn't remember who it was! One small servant role was played by a young man from our church called Adam. I believe he suffered from schizophrenia, and he was a slightly tricky personality, but a gentle soul. However, he came from a family of professional actors, and was keen to act in our group, which worked out quite well.

Shockingly, soon after our production, Adam was out fishing on the Grand Union Canal when he was murdered – stabbed to death by a random attacker. Several Ladbroke Players attended the funeral. His family played Morricone's powerful music from the film “*The Mission*”; so, whenever Leslie and I hear that piece now we think about Adam. His family were afflicted by double tragedy. He had a brother Hugo who on the surface was much more capable and successful. He was a professional actor who also taught drama and married a delightful girl from our St Peter's congregation, and they had two children. Unknown to many of us, he suffered from depression and eventually committed suicide some 20 years later, which must have been devastating for his mother Beth as well as his other family. Beth had become a committed Christian after Adam's death and amazingly maintained her faith even after Hugo's death, doing missionary work, having retired from acting (although she had been a flamboyant character who loved performing).



A Man for All Seasons in St John's 1983, with Elizabeth, Luisa, Ryder & Joe – prison scene; Leslie as Duke of Norfolk holding forth in courtroom scene below with Ryder as Thomas More.



The Importance of Being Earnest 1985 – cast plus actor Joe's dog! Me as Gwendolen in orange costume with one of my rather ridiculous hats!



Gwendolen & Cecily compare diaries – my diary was my great-grandmother's, from 1895!



*Arthur Miller's **The Crucible** 1986 - with my brother Colin playing Proctor; Leslie as Danforth.*



She Stoops to Conquer 1988 – First of many LP plays in St Peter's Church, with fireplace made by

Before doing *She Stoops* many of our drama group, plus other congregation members at St John and St Peter's, took part in a more ambitious project, also performed in St Peter's, in the round, directed by the Curate's wife Siân, who was an English and Drama teacher. She decided to put on one of the Tony Harrison "Medieval Mystery Plays" and chose *The Passion*. This was a great community venture (like the original mystery cycle plays), involving people who would not have sought to be in "ordinary" drama, but who wanted to recreate the events around Jesus' death as a way of bringing the stories to life and bearing witness, and it incorporated live music. A shipwright in the congregation constructed a full-size wooden cross used very effectively in the production. I vividly recall the dramatic moment when the actor playing Jesus was tied to the cross and it was raised up as heavy bass guitar music played. The cross still hangs in the stairwell at St Peter's.

One significant consequence of *The Passion* was that it brought John C into our LP drama group. He was a local Notting Hill resident, a political biographer, who was friendly with Siân and, though not a churchgoer, he thought it would be interesting to take part as he loved the theatre. *The Passion* had been such a success that we performed it again the next Easter with just a few cast changes. John was intrigued to discover the Ladbroke Players and decided to get involved, which would prove to be key in keeping our group alive and developing it over the next 20 years.

Diana had hoped to do another production with us which John was due to be in, but she had to abandon this project. John was so disappointed about this and so keen that we should do something, that he decided he would have a go at directing himself! Or at least producing – he used to say we were all so unruly that it was like herding cats and his role was more of an enabler and organiser of practical details, rather than an artistic director. There was probably some truth in that, but it was amazing the results he managed to get, and I don't think our group would have survived without him – assisted by me, as he and I formed the pro-active core of the Ladbroke Players for the majority of productions, with vital input from Elizabeth.

It proved to be a case of fools rushing in where angels fear... Leslie had suggested we should do Tom Stoppard's comedy *The Real Inspector Hound*, but as it was only one-act we needed another one-act to accompany it. John decided Stoppard's *Albert's Bridge* would be interesting. It certainly was, but also ambitious! It was written as a radio play, but when performed on stage needed something to represent the bridge (a loosely disguised Forth Bridge), so John organised a scaffold tower. Leslie as the young obsessive painter Albert had to clamber up and down this like a monkey. Another case where Health & Safety might intervene nowadays!

Albert's Bridge was an example of serendipity where the perfect person for a role appeared - we had a lodger called Wendy from up north, who proved the ideal girl to play Albert's wife, even though she never performed with us again. Ironically, although Leslie had been keen for us to do *The Real Inspector Hound*, because he was cast as the main character in *Albert's Bridge*, he found himself consigned to playing the body in *Hound*, which entailed lying on the floor under the sofa for the entire play! The rest of us had great fun going over the top in Stoppard's clever pastiche of whodunnit plays – satirising Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* and other melodramatic thrillers. Leslie engineered a moment of glory standing up at the end of the run to answer the stage phone "*Sorry you've missed the last show.*"

The Stoppard plays were performed in St Peter's, using the conventional front nave/apse area. Far from being daunted by the challenges of putting on these plays, John could hardly wait to do another production! But for John's next play at St Peter's, his set designer Fiona had the brainwave of the play being performed sideways – real lateral thinking. This was facilitated by the fact that the pews had been unfixed and replaced by chairs – making the space much more flexible. The classical columns going down the side aisles conjured up the appearance of a proscenium arch, and for *The School for Scandal* Fiona painted some beautiful marbling on the (movable) altar platform, making an elegant focal point for the set.

We had also been able to buy some long gold curtains (later supplemented by black drapes) which created a uniform backdrop combined with the flats, and also formed a natural backstage area leading directly to the dressing room. This play was one when Leslie was still being cast as the young romantic hero. He was gratified to discover that a fellow actor called James knew a girl in the audience whose comment on Leslie's performance was "*pure sex on legs*"! However, it was difficult to be sure from James' demeanour whether this was entirely serious...

Although we occasionally reverted to the audience facing the apse or using the central space "in the round", the sideways set turned into our most frequent and popular set-up for plays. St Peter's also became our most regular venue as the layout and acoustics worked better for most plays than St John's, and was favoured by both John and me. However, there were still some shows that took place in St John's, usually with one of our two other directors who emerged over the years – Elizabeth and Marian, though they also directed in St Peter's. They had both been English teachers, but they first worked together on costumes and props, and then decided they would enjoy putting on plays together. Marian had also taught drama (in fact she taught James when he was in her drama group at primary school age).

John was itching to get back in the director's saddle, but he had to wait while Diana put on what was to be her last show for us - soon afterwards she moved out of London. It was an extraordinary production, with a similar breadth to *The Passion*, and a great range of parts. Diana wanted to involve people from the local community, and it brought several new recruits to the Ladbroke Players. These included the delightful Lynn who went on to play some bigger roles, culminating in Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* – after which she decided to stick to smaller roles or retreat to help backstage – not such a glutton for glory as some of us! She also took on the role of my brother's girlfriend for a few years, but as with so many of his female consorts, she eventually felt she had to move on to pastures new.

The play Diana chose was one of J.B. Priestley's most unusual works, *Johnson Over Jordan*. One could see why it is not performed more often, but it was a fascinating play to work on, and thought-provoking for the audience – examining and evaluating a life – what has been good or bad - with a supernatural/dream-like element and a poignant ending as Johnson crosses over in a blue light to a heavenly realm. It was a great challenge for Geoff, playing the central character of Johnson. Up to then he had played comic characters (and has been our regular Shakespearean clown), so this was one of the first "straight" roles he had done. He did it very well, bringing the pathos that some clown figures have, to the role of "everyman".

After this amazing show, we put on two more traditional plays in quick succession – but again aiming high in terms of literary content. John and I shared the view that there was no point in spending months working on a trivial play, and it was more satisfying for cast and audience to have a quality script with real “meat”, whether a drama or a comedy. In quick succession John produced Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Marriage of Figaro* (the Beaumarchais play, not Mozart’s opera!).

Figaro was notable for being our first play where an actor playing a principal role dropped out - only 10 days before opening night! Sadly he had suffered a nervous breakdown (nothing to do with acting with LP we hoped?!). Two of our actors were playing small roles, so Leslie handed his cameo over to Geoff and agreed to take on the major role of the Count. With barely 10 days to learn the part an unkind observer might have said “*that’s about the time he usually starts learning his lines isn’t it?*” That would be all in a day’s work to a professional actor, but humble amateurs must fit in everyday work and only have limited rehearsal time.

So, it was a big challenge and one which Leslie rose to well. But there was one fateful performance when Leslie dried on stage. We had a prompt off stage – but he had either fallen asleep or lost his place - he later said “*well the first half went so well I didn’t think I needed to worry too much...*” There was what felt like a horrendously long pause. Nigel, the actor playing Figaro, who was on stage with Leslie, said something to try and give Leslie a hint, and eventually they got back on track (with Leslie commenting in a wry aside to the audience “*this fellow even makes me forget my lines*” as Figaro was meant to be playing tricks on the Count). It has not often happened to Leslie and me, but that feeling of blanking on stage is a horrible one, and you wish the earth would swallow you up!

Although John had so much enthusiasm for doing plays, we did occasionally collaborate with others, sometimes in other venues. One production involving many Ladbroke Players, was *Crowds* – a fantastic musical pageant written by Betty Roe & Marian Lines – depicting some key events in the years between the First and Second World Wars. Marian was librettist for Betty, a prolific composer who also ran a choir in which I sang, and Betty gave singing lessons, of which I managed to avail myself occasionally. Thus, there were lots of artistic connections in the neighbourhood. As with many of their shows *Crowds* was written to involve adults and children and to use a choir – in this case members of Betty’s NorthKen Chorale formed the musical core, while Ladbroke Players provided most of the acting core.

We performed *Crowds* in St James Norland Church where Betty’s choir was based; it was also the church for our children’s primary school – and where James and Catriona took part in the W11 Children’s Opera. The action centred round the lives of a market stall family, similar to Portobello Road stallholders, and I was cast as Queenie, the “Matriarch” of the market. This meant I played Leslie’s mother (he was a policeman) and James’ grandma! James was only aged about 7 at the time, but he had already displayed enthusiasm for the thespian life. I enjoyed both acting and singing in this. It is one of Betty and Marian’s best shows – some of the music may be a little derivative, but that makes it more accessible than some of Betty’s spikier melodies. It has a wonderful range of tunes from the ebullient *Music Hall Song*, and *Derby Day*, to the haunting beauty of *Away from the Crowds* and the sombre hues of *Grandfather’s Funeral Song* heralding the death of King George V.

We went on to collaborate with Betty and Marian on more musical projects such as the pantomime *Dick Whittington* and *The Beggar's Opera*. *Dick Whittington* was perhaps our most popular show ever with audiences spilling up into the balconies! Betty and Marian wrote it with many of us in mind for specific roles, so of course Leslie was Cookie the Pantomime Dame! I remember trawling round M&S looking for the biggest possible bra to stuff with socks for his costume and concocting a giant spoon and whisk for his kitchen scene. I was Tiddles the Cat which was fun - although I didn't have many lines- was this a subtle hint!? However, I had a solo song and dance. I made myself a feline costume with a black leotard, black tights, black silk balaclava and black gloves; adorned with white furry anklets and wrists, a furry tail, and a mask with furry ears and green cellophane eyes (fortuitously I found an old white fur cape I could cut up to provide the furry embellishment).

This was the one show we did that all three of our children were in, which added to the fun. We had taken them to several Christmas pantos by then, so they knew the style of performance we were aiming at - nothing too subtle! James played Davy Jones, a cabin boy aboard Captain Bags I's ship heading off to Sirocco (via Neptune's lair with his mermaid Mermalades), to meet the Emperor and Empress of Sirocco played by Ryder and Elizabeth in wonderfully exotic garb. Gordon was Cookie's Kitchen Boy, and Catriona dressed up in a sparkly fairy outfit to play Bellina, Fairy Bowbells' assistant. Leslie and Gordon had a splendid scene trying to make a cake and chucking flour around - can't remember who the luckless Stage Manager was who had to sweep it all up! Perhaps it was Gordon?!

After the pantomime John C and Marian turned their hands to a joint effort, aiming high with Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. This was another occasion when we lost an actor due to sickness - Joe was laid low with diphtheria (his mother had not believed in vaccinations...). Luckily, he was not playing a huge part and John was able to take it over, leaving Marian holding the directorial reins. After this LP debut Marian went on to produce several plays for our group, mostly collaborating with Elizabeth. I played Jessica, Shylock's daughter so I grew my hair longer than it had been since I had James, and even turned it auburn with henna - the only time I have ever dyed my hair! Geoff turned his hand to another serious role, playing vengeful but ultimately pathetic Shylock, in a moving performance.

1996 was a prolific year, as after doing the pantomime and *Merchant of Venice*, we then did Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in November. One of John's favourite plays; initially I thought it gloomy but grew to love it. Partly because I was cast as Nora - my biggest acting challenge! I was on stage virtually all the time, and there was one moment when I was in danger of drying, but my fellow actor gave me a clue which got me back on track. I loved things like the costumes, the detailed domestic set - including a little Christmas tree which I had to decorate in the first scene; the naturalistic relationships between the characters - all quite intimate being a small cast in one set, and we had live keyboard music for me doing Nora's wild dance.

Leslie played my chauvinist husband (not typecast of course!). We also had daughter Catriona and her friend Oliver acting small parts as our children. They were only 7 at the time and poor Oliver got quite upset at one point because his father Joe was playing the doctor who died, and Oliver got worried that his real Daddy might be going to die. This was probably heightened because Joe had been

so ill when we did *The Merchant of Venice*. Perhaps the trauma was too much for Oliver because he has not acted with us again! However, his brother Mungo has taken several key roles, and in more recent years sister Amy has also trod the boards very effectively, while Catriona and James have also been “*frequent fliers*”. Other offspring and siblings (including a set of twins!) have appeared periodically, so the Ladbroke Players has become quite a family affair over the years.

John got a break after the intensity of 1996. We did another joint show with NorthKen Chorale at St Peter’s Church performing John Gay’s satirical musical play *The Beggar’s Opera*. This was possibly the scariest role for Leslie because he had to sing a solo song (which he found more unnerving than forgetting his lines). It also gave us the astounding sight of our senior lady actress and costume lady Elizabeth (usually looking very respectable and sensible) – dressed up in the shortest, skimpiest and shiniest turquoise skirt plus heels in her role as one of Macheath’s harlot ladies of ill repute! All the ladies had a grand time competing to be the most flamboyant looking, releasing our inner wantonness.

Having performed *The Beggar’s Opera*, it was almost inevitable that we should do Ayckbourn’s biting satire on amateur dramatics, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, where PALOS amdram group attempt to put on *The Beggar’s Opera* in the midst of business and romantic shenanigans. Hapless Guy is caught up unwittingly in the machinations and propelled to the leading role, played deftly by our unassuming lead actor Nigel, with Ryder as Welsh director Dafydd who doesn’t notice his wife pining after Guy. Playing sleazy Ian Hubbard was one of Leslie’s more memorable looks, bursting out of tight shirt and sporting a medallion on his bare chest, and slicked-back hair. I got to take part in a girl-fight, playing truculent barmaid Bridget, brawling on the floor with a girl I suspected of stealing my boyfriend.

One fun aspect of this show was that our flats got a make-over with the interior of different houses painted on them by a helpful volunteer enlisted by John. Those were the days when the galleries of St Peter’s were a bit like a junk yard and we were allowed to store the flats up there and to paint them, so we could do a lot of work on them before performance week. Sadly, by the time I came to put on plays, the church had been restored to such pristine beauty that we were no longer allowed to keep the flats upstairs, let alone paint them! It seemed a little hard when several of our productions had raised money for the restoration work, but *c’est la vie*.

After years of acting and co-ordinating costumes, Elizabeth decided she was ready to take on the director’s mantle. She loves Shakespeare, so has put on several plays by the bard, starting with *Twelfth Night* in 1998. She did an imaginative interpretation, setting Illyria and the costumes in an exotic Asian cum Arabian land. I had fun playing Olivia opposite a new recruit, Cornelius, who was cast as Sebastian, twin of heroine Viola, played by the lovely Alexandra. Alex is someone who grew from small to big roles, while also being hugely helpful behind the scenes with costumes or whatever needed doing. She is married to Joe and like Leslie and me they have been with the players from early days – indeed they conducted quite a bit of their courting behind the scenes on *The Importance of Being Earnest!*

This production marked another first in LP losing an actor literally on the last day of performance – luckily, one doing only a small part. John C’s son Paddy and

friend Simon were playing two attendants, but before the final performance Paddy was knocked out when playing rugby and concussed. So Elizabeth came out to announce to the audience in her best head-mistress voice “*I am sorry to say that Paddy C was injured on the ruggar field this afternoon, so he will be unable to play the role of Attendant 1. His part will be read by Simon H.*” It worked fine!

It was fortunate that Paddy was not badly hurt because a more major role was being played by his father, John C. Although John had played a supporting role in *The Merchant*, this was his first leading role, and marked another milestone for him. He suffers from a bad stammer, but it had always amazed us that when interviewed he manages not to stammer, and it was the same in play-readings. So, we were relieved but not entirely surprised that John was able to deliver Orsino with no stutters. I think John preferred his role as backstage director, but he sometimes felt a bit left out at performances, so he was glad to experience some shows on-stage.

After this we had another change of gear in 1999 doing Stoppard’s dual-time masterpiece *Arcadia*, with John directing again. Some people find this play too complex, but Leslie and I love it, finding it wonderfully multi-faceted, funny and clever, full of ideas but also of emotion, clever but poignant – and the only play we have done using an animatronic tortoise! John was able to hire one from the National Theatre hire department, along with a stuffed hare - another essential prop. We were lucky enough to have a principal role each, but with no interaction because Leslie as the tutor Septimus acted in one period “in the past” while I as Hannah the researcher was “in the present”. This probably marked the swansong of Leslie portraying the young romantic hero – and I seem to recall it involved the application of a hairpiece! Later he even resorted to hair-dye – funny for someone not vain about his appearance (just about his intellect and sporting prowess). The other main role of Bernard was played by Nigel W, who had proved his ability since *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. He was a nice chap although he seemed rather disconnected from the group, on a slightly different plane.

Most of our group are committed regulars and as we are quite a small band, we get the chance to appear in a lot of productions. Directors like John endeavour to choose a play that will suit our company. But occasionally we find ourselves having to look outside our group to fill a part, and with *Arcadia* we needed both a young man and two young females in addition to our regulars. Luckily, we found two delightful girls – Fabienne and Jane – to play two young women. Fabienne in particular was just perfect for the enchanting infant prodigy Thomasina.

For the part of Valentine, we found ourselves in the unusual position of having two young males wanting to audition, who were both good. As director, the decision was John’s, which was difficult, but we ended up with a perfect Valentine played by Peter. It was sad to have to disappoint Nick J – but we were able to offer him a good part in 2000 for our next play, *Hay Fever* playing frivolous son Simon. Nick went on to do other interesting parts with us, such as Sideway in *Our Country’s Good*, Doalty in *Translations* and dustman philosopher Doolittle in *Pygmalion*.

Hay Fever is another favourite play of mine – one of Noel Coward’s most sparkling comedies, and I had the joy of playing Judith Bliss, the ageing, flamboyant actress still trying to attract young men to visit her country residence, while also playing

the part of devoted mother to Simon and Sorel and loving wife to husband David – who have each arranged their own visitors for the weekend. One of John’s talents was choosing good plays, often thought-provoking or hilarious, which suited most of the available personnel of Ladbroke Players and this was a prime example.

In contrast to the frothy *Hay Fever*, Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *Our Country’s Good*, based on Thomas Keneally’s book *The Playmaker*, was a more serious play. Inspired by real events in Australia when First Fleet convicts put on a play, it demonstrates the transformative power of drama. Gareth (after an engaging debut with us in *The Winter’s Tale*) had the central role as Ralph, the young officer pursuing his vision to put on a play with the prisoners, while falling for the naïve convict Mary, but there were plenty of other meaty roles among convicts and soldiers. I did scary convict Liz Morden. Leslie played probably his nastiest role ever as the sadistic Major Ross, who delights in humiliating the prisoners, while observing ruefully that Gareth had fully usurped his role in LP as romantic hero!

This is probably one of the most challenging and powerful plays that we have performed. So many friends said they regretted not being able to see it in the summer of 2001, that we took the possibly risky decision to repeat the show in the autumn. When John suggested this, I was sceptical, but audience numbers justified his proposal, and it was certainly a play that was worth exploring further from the cast perspective. We even got ourselves a full-page article in the local neighbourhood magazine “*The Hill*” complete with photos of cast and director. I looked particularly grubby and rough in manacles, playing convict Liz Morden.

Although I appreciate the genius of Shakespeare, I have not felt a great desire to produce one; I find the language quite difficult and prefer 20th century plays. But several of our other directors have been inspired to produce the great bard. Marian and Elizabeth began the trend with *Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* – both brilliant productions. Elizabeth then revealed she was keen to put on *A Winter’s Tale* in 2000 – possibly a strange choice, but it provided Nigel W with a good platform to portray the obsessively jealous King Leontes. (Nigel really wanted to play Hamlet but I’m afraid we never gave him the chance.) It also let Geoff consolidate his clown persona following his performance in *Twelfth Night*.

Two years later in 2002 Marian put on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, giving me the opportunity to play Titania, with Catriona and friends as my attendant fairies. Leslie was inevitably cast as Bottom, the chief mechanical who wants to play all the parts and ends up wearing an ass’s head sleeping on Titania’s couch. Geoff made a wonderfully fantastical Oberon, and Marian’s protégé Caryn proved a suitably mischievous Puck. Caryn had already proved her worth in *Our Country’s Good*, where she played a charismatic Duckling, the convict caught in a love/hate relationship with Harry Brewer. Gareth and Cornelius made a likeable pair of lovers, if a little mature. The Mechanicals and Court also provided a selection of other parts for our even more mature actors, and Betty Roe wrote some magical music. As we had observed before, Shakespeare has the advantage of no performance rights being payable and large casts, which usually meant larger audiences – and Shakespeare always seemed popular with the punters. Later we would explore darker territory doing *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

But first, in the vein of *Our Country's Good*, the next thought-provoking play that we did was another project of Elizabeth's; *Translations* by Brian Friel. Elizabeth wanted to do this in St John's partly because she had the clever idea of using the area under the back gallery (complete with stairs) to create the intimate space of the living area of Hugh Mor O'Donnell and his school room in the Irish Hedge School where much of the action is set. This worked well, and we were able to build up seating on platforms to face this back alcove and rig lighting behind the seating.

Leslie was cast as scholarly but permanently drunk schoolmaster Hugh; John, in his biggest role yet, played his crippled son Manus, with Nigel as the sophisticated younger brother Owen, who brings the interloping English to the village setting in train tragic events. Gareth did a reprisal of his Ralph character in *Our Country's Good* playing Yolland, the idealistic soldier who falls for Maire, a girl from the other side of the tracks, again played by Alex! Although Alex is very sensible and capable, there is a sweetness about her demeanour that suits gentle female heroines. Whereas I seem doomed to be cast as a nagging harridan! So, Nick and I were a bit of a comedy duo as rough diamond peasants Doalty and Bridget. Caryn had the most challenging role as virtually mute Sarah, which she played convincingly. Ryder played the aged "*Infant Prodigy*", probably the only one who actually understood the Latin in the play (though Leslie would no doubt also claim to).

Translations explores different facets of language and ideas about how language can separate or bring us together, along with the tensions caused by English soldiers imposing their culture on the Irish. Like *Our Country's Good* it had some quite dark elements, but once again was shot through with humour in the characters and some of the situations. With both these plays I have to confess I did not really like them when we had a first read-through, but as we worked on each of them, I found there was so much in them that was profound and moving, which is what the best drama should be, broadening one's horizons. They were lessons to me that you need to become quite immersed in a play before you know whether it is good.

When it came to Marian and Elizabeth's next project, they decided that St John's would also work well for T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, which we put on in 2004. Ryder as our most senior member (and ordained priest and eminent actor) was the obvious choice to play Becket. They designed the play to use most of the church, moving up and down the central nave. The pews had been unfixed and could be pushed further back sideways to provide performing space. Ryder was able to "preach" from the real pulpit and to be attacked by the knights on the altar platform area. And once again Betty Roe wrote specially commissioned music which members of NorthKen Chorale performed from the gallery.

It was an obvious play to do in church, yet not an easy one to bring off, but Marian had the vision and ability to do it. In many ways she was perhaps our best and completest director. Having trained as an actress and then spent years teaching drama, directing children and young people in plays, she brought vast knowledge and experience as well as a warm and engaging personality, which brought out the best in her actors. And she was willing to work hard behind the scenes creating costumes, props and scenery. I have attempted to follow in her footsteps but, lacking her training, experience and personality, am but a pale shadow in her wake.



*Ally & Catriona, playing mother & daughter in **The Wild Duck** 2004 with Gareth as Dad Helmer*



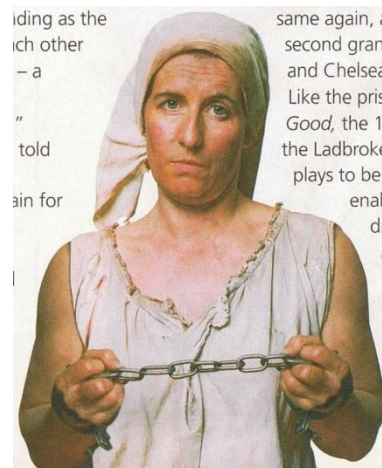
*Ally & Leslie - **Mr & Mrs Macbeth** 2010*



***King Lear** 2008; Ryder as Lear*



***King Lear** 2008; Leslie always wanted to do a play with a sword-fight. He enjoyed doing one in **Macbeth** even though he lost!*



*Me playing convict Liz Morden in **Our Country's Good** 2001(photo from **The Hill** magazine article*

As with *Translations*, another play which I had doubts about when we first read it was Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*. I feared it would be too depressing for the audience. It is one of John's favourite plays, but he had thought it would be too difficult to find a suitably talented teenage girl to play the key role of innocent young Hedwig. However, having seen our 15-year-old daughter Catriona act he felt he had found a perfect Hedwig, and the rest of us agreed to go ahead. I was able to appreciate that the blithe nature of Hedwig lights up the play despite the tragic ending, just as the happy personality of Anne Frank shines through her diary even though the reader knows there is a sad ending coming – and so the poignancy is heightened.

It was fun for me to play Catriona's mother (which I had already done in our other Ibsen production, *A Doll's House*, but Catriona did not have much to say in that). It was also a delight acting with Gareth, who played my husband Hjalmar, a rather less romantic character than his roles in *Our Country's Good* and *Translations*. This also marked the debut of Graham playing the sinister Gregers Werle with a slightly uncomfortable intensity.

Although directors may need to be reined in a bit occasionally, on the whole our LP philosophy has been that since our directors do the vast majority of the hard labour in mounting a production, they should have the artistic freedom to choose the plays they think will work and which they are keen to do. This philosophy has worked most of the time and included *The Wild Duck*. While some plays have worked better than others, I don't think we've ever had a real dud, and the fact that most of our punters keep coming back indicates that they enjoy the shows we put on.

The Wild Duck was performed in 2004 back in St Peter's, but for our next play we were forced to return to St John's. The play was Noel Coward's comedy *Blithe Spirit*, and when we outlined the séance plot to vicar Mark, he said apologetically that some key members of the congregation would not be happy to have a play involving spiritualism performed in the church. I tried saying it was presented in a very light-hearted way with Madam Arcati as the bumbling medium – however Mark said treating it light-heartedly might make it worse!

By now St John's and St Peter's were separate parishes, following the retirement of Harold, and the growth of congregations at both churches. The new vicar at St John's had no qualms about allowing us to perform *Blithe Spirit* in his church, so we went ahead there in 2006. We followed the *Translations* format of using the space under the back gallery to create a room, and this worked well, especially for the intimacy of the séance scene. I had fun playing Elvira, naughty ghost of Charles Condomine's first wife, while Alex was the outraged second wife Ruth, and Catriona played the small, but crucial role of the maid Edith. And Elizabeth made a splendid Madam Arcati – a variation on her performance as Lady Bracknell!

Either Leslie or Nigel might have seemed the obvious choice to play Charles, the vain womanising novelist, but in the event John cast newer recruit Graham D, who had played the murky Gregers in *The Wild Duck*. Graham was quite a good actor, who had trained at RADA, but he was not easy to work with. When I embarked on directing, I decided I would rather not wrestle with his difficult personality. I would have been happy to give a part to Nigel, but by then he had emigrated down to the West Country, with his long-term girlfriend and her daughter.

For a few years Nigel and Leslie were theoretically in competition for quite a few lead roles, as I suppose Alex and I were for some of the principal female parts – but there was never any real dispute. I think that we all got on well, and we accepted our director’s casting decisions without much complaint - a benevolent dictatorship prevailed in contrast to larger groups which operated a more formal, competitive audition process. And our directors tried to find plays with suitable parts for as many of us as possible. However, Leslie might have been slightly affronted that he was cast as Nigel’s father in *Translations* since they were really about the same age! As it turned out, this role of Owen O Donnell was probably the last part that Nigel played with us. I hope he was happy over the last 16 or so years, after his move, but we heard last year that he had committed suicide – another tortured soul struggling under a gentle, seemingly affable exterior, such a shame. Other members of the group have passed on from illness over the years (including Graham) – sad, but also a marker of the fact that we have been operating for 38 years.

It was a particular sorrow to learn that our director friend Marian was very ill with cancer, and we feared she might not be able to do another production with us. However, in true Marian fashion she rose energetically from her sick bed when in remission and put on her final production for us in 2007, the four-act version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. I confess I was disappointed not to be given the chance to play Lady Bracknell. Elizabeth had played the role when we first did the play in 1985 (when I played Gwendolen), but Marian was keen to give her the chance to do it again, especially as Elizabeth had been so helpful to her with costumes and general support in previous productions. I could understand that, and I dare say some audiences may have been quite pleased to see a play that I was not in, since I managed to infiltrate the stage in most of our productions! Leslie was also missing as he was attending a BLDSA dinner and getting a swimming trophy!

As usual I helped with the publicity and programmes, and also with front of house. I was sad not to get the chance to be directed again by Marian – but pleased that she survived a few more years, and could come see my first two productions, *Pygmalion* and *The Accrington Pals*. She was generously complimentary about them, which meant a lot to me; and having seen my James playing Ralph in *Accrington Pals* I remember she said he was a “revelation” which thrilled me, especially thinking back to his days as a shy little boy in her drama group!

Earnest 2 was followed by another hilarious comedy, J B Priestley’s *When We Are Married* in 2007. John had tried to get the rights for years, and almost given up hope, despite thinking the casting would be perfect for our group. But at long last we got permission. The cast featured me and Leslie as one rather self-important couple, Maria and Joe Helliwell; Lynn and Geoff as another, with Geoff as henpecked husband Herbert and Lynn the harridan Clara; and Alex and Joe as the third couple with Joe as overbearing husband Albert and Alex as much put-upon wife Annie. In some cases, the casting was almost too close to home...

There were also small parts for regulars Gareth, Elizabeth, Ryder, Julian, Cornelius and new recruits Aislinn, Gillian and Kirsty. Aislinn was not completely new as she had played Gwendolen in Marian’s *Earnest*. Gillian came from Lancashire, so she helped us with the northern accents, and was significant because she went on later to star in one of my early productions, *Accrington Pals*, proving to be perfect

casting as May. Kirsty was important too because she was John's new partner, eventually becoming his wife when they moved to Canterbury – ending John's fabulous era of producing plays for Ladbroke Players. But before they departed, Kirsty acted in *Crown Matrimonial*, directed by Andrew, who put on our very first play; while John had taken part in *King Lear* and directed an excellent production of *Macbeth*, in which Kirsty also acted. It was a joy for John to have a partner who took such a keen interest in his thespian hobby. His first wife had come to see our productions, but she did not get involved either on or off stage, and very much pursued her own separate interests - which eventually led to them living apart.

John's impending departure meant I began to think more seriously about the idea of trying to direct. Before I tackled directing however, came another triumph for Ryder in *King Lear*, directed by Elizabeth in 2008. I was a bit surprised that Shakespeare's popularity extended even to *Lear*, which I find a cruel and horrible play, but which Elizabeth wanted to put on. This was mainly because it gave Ryder the opportunity to play perhaps the stand-out role of his life as Lear – a huge achievement aged 80, maybe even outshining his first starring role as Sir Thomas More back in 1983 and winning him lots of plaudits.

It can be fun to play a villain, but Leslie's and my stomachs churned slightly when we performed as the wicked Regan and husband Cornwall who blind the hapless Duke of Gloucester. Although Leslie did take a naughty pleasure in throwing lychees into an audience of teenage girls at the end of the blinding scene! (Another advantage of doing Shakespeare is that with luck you can get a group booking from one or more schools.) But Leslie and I preferred playing Mr and Mrs Macbeth in *Macbeth*, even though we were then dyed in the wool murderers. For me *Macbeth* works better as a drama and is one of Shakespeare's most tautly written and intense tragedies, so I was happy that we performed it. This was to be the last play John directed for us – a worthy finale, and he was thrilled that his partner Kirsty was able to play one of the Three Witches along with Alex and Lynn.

John's era overlapped slightly with mine as I put on my first play in the Spring of 2010, just before we did *Macbeth*. I had made an abortive attempt at putting on a play in 2008 – *The Accrington Pals*, which LP had workshopped, and I thought it would make a fascinating production. But this was when I was in the throes of bipolar episodes, swinging from being wildly over-confident about what I could do and then plunging into uncertainty and anxiety. This was not helped by having agreed to work with an assistant who was herself quite flaky. She told me her son could play one of the key roles. It was only when we started rehearsing and he said he had to go at 9 pm before the end of the rehearsal that I discovered he was electronically tagged and on a curfew! As the play would not finish performing till about 10 pm and there would be several late rehearsals before that, this was obviously not going to work. When I queried her about this, she said she was "*hoping his probation officer would agree to him staying out late*".

But I was also being over-ambitious in trying to play a large role while making my first attempt at directing – thank goodness I had the sense to pull the plug on the production before too late. Leslie was very kind and didn't tell me I had been an idiot – he even asked if there was anything that he could do to help me carry on. I thought that might be the end of my directing ambitions, but after about a year when

I had been on mood stabiliser medication and was in a much better place mentally and psychologically, I began feeling the creative urge again. Rather than revisit *Accrington Pals* right away, I decided that an easier more “doable” play might be *Pygmalion*; it was a popular comedy drama and would not require so many young actors – which seemed to be becoming more of a challenge as the years went by.

I was keen to do *Pygmalion* because I like Bernard Shaw (despite his wordiness – but this is one of his shorter plays) and also because it was the first play that got me interested in drama as a child. Two big challenges were finding a good Higgins and Eliza. Higgins seemed relatively easy as I thought Leslie would be excellent in the role (though I didn’t realise how querulous he would be in rehearsal – never direct your husband!) – Eliza was more of a challenge. But again, serendipity brought just the right person along via a website entry – a gorgeous, vivacious young woman called Natasha who was perfect for Eliza, in looks, personality and acting ability.

There were one or two other casting problems to iron out (a dozen plays later and I don’t think I’ve ever done a play where there hasn’t been a casting problem to iron out at some point!), and we had to hire lots of costumes at the National Theatre (expensive, but gorgeous – if a bit threadbare). I had fun doing the minor role of house-keeper Mrs Pearce and was pleased at casting Alex as Mrs Higgins, Joe as Pickering and Nick as Doolittle the dustman – not to mention a friend Andrew who played Freddie. He was a bit old for the role but has a youthful innocent air which suited the character. A few more cameos gave other Ladbroke Players a chance to appear on stage. And both Leslie and Natasha gave brilliant performances as Higgins and Eliza. (Despite Leslie’s complaints – I tried to tell him most actors would kill to get a role like that while he just muttered that Shaw was too wordy.)

Apart from the casting my main challenge was the set. Most of the furniture came from either our house or Alex’s house, but I had to smarten up the flats which meant working in the crowded confines of our bedroom once I had extracted them from Ryder’s garage. Painting was not an option, so I tacked on pale gold satin material (thank you Shepherd’s Bush Market) to give a more opulent look. I also created an elaborate arrangement of grey sheets covering the flats in the first scene, meant to represent the scene out in the rain when the theatre goers are waiting for taxis and Eliza is trying to sell her flowers. These had to be hauled up by stage managers on step ladders behind the flats, and in retrospect were more trouble than they were worth! But one lives and learns. Considering it was my first proper attempt at directing I was amazed and relieved at how well the play worked.

During performance week in June 2010 my Dad came down from Glasgow to visit London. As I was so snowed under with play organisation, our kind friend Ryder agreed to have him stay with him. Dad used to enjoy coming to our productions although I guess he would have preferred to attend a concert – whereas I felt the reverse. Ryder brought him along to the Dress Rehearsal. I am glad he saw my first attempt at directing, though I am not sure what he made of it – by then he was in the early stages of dementia and was getting a bit confused. A year later and we were having to look for a Care Home up in Glasgow for him. This was probably his last visit to London, though he stayed with us up in Skelmorlie a few times later on.

After *Pygmalion* came John's *Macbeth*, but by 2011 I felt ready to attempt another production – and with John gone we were short of directorial personnel. So I decided to have another crack at Peter Whelan's moving World War I drama *The Accrington Pals* but adopting a more realistic approach to casting. I recognized that Gillian, who acted with us in *When We Are Married*, would be perfect for the principal role of May, partly since she actually came from Lancashire, but was also a jolly good actress, was young, yet a suitably mature manner, and available.

Some of my original cast were no longer free, but I managed to recruit several other younger actors – Alex's son Mungo to play dreamer Tom; talented newbie Elspeth as loyal Eva and my James was recast to play cheeky Ralph, which with Gillian gave an ideal young central quartet, plus a 13-year-old Anna K playing the naïve Bertha. Anna had the added advantage of her mother Irene who agreed to run Box Office – and has continued to do it for us! Alex and I played the more mature wives, Sarah and Annie, Joe old soldier Arthur, and we had another charismatic new recruit Kevin playing the crucial role of Sergeant Rivers; the soldier whose bark is worse than his bite and who promises May he will look after Tom.

Like *Our Country's Good*, this was a story inspired by real events – the Accrington Pals regiment from Lancashire were almost wiped out in the Battle of the Somme. It was probably one of my most ambitious plays, subtly heartrending. But as with other “sad” plays, this one did not focus on misery most of the time, but more on the everyday lives of the women left at home, their hopes and dreams, yet showing how the tragic events of the War impacted so poignantly on those left behind. The main casting problem for this show was finding a lad to play Annie's young son Reggie – I nearly had to use a girl; but through a contact in my local choir, Skolia, I found Jacob, who was perfect – a boy in his teens, but small and looking younger.

This is the only play that I have produced using the area facing the church apse, and in fact my aim was to perform “in the round” to some extent, with separate areas of the stage lit up at different times, because the action shifted so quickly between many contrasting scenes. There was May's kitchen indoors, May's fruit and veg stall outdoors, the army recruiting office, military camp, the Western Front and Sarah's backyard with washing. So quite a challenge! Once more I had to create my own set (based around the trusty flats with the plush *Pygmalion* material removed, and bare paintwork providing walls for May's kitchen). Limited resources and the scene shifting meant I had to keep things simple, but I created some props like a stove made from crates and black paper, and net curtain tacked on the flat for a window. The stall was a table covered in a grey blanket and boxes of fruit and veg, plus scales. The most ambitious item was where I strung together a pile of sandbags on a trestle table to create the effect of a trench where the soldiers crouched before rushing out to a final assault in a blaze of light and gunshot noise. I had to give in on the tin bath, hiring one from the National Theatre along with their stuffed hare, so James and Elspeth could do Ralph and Eva's bath scene – one of my most enduring memories from this play. James had to crouch almost naked in the tin bath while Elspeth as his girlfriend Eva poured cold water over him!

By now Gordon had formed a close relationship with his future wife Emma. They came down to see us in *Macbeth*, though I'm not sure how much they enjoyed it! I suspect they prefer films and music. However, I was very touched that Emma's

parents came all the way from Glasgow to London to see my production of *The Accrington Pals*, which included seeing me and James acting. Just a shame that Leslie wasn't acting as well (I think he was still recovering from his experience of me directing him as Higgins!) John and Agnes like going to the theatre, and we have been to see a couple of professional shows with them, which is a nice link.

I was able to draw breath a bit after *Accrington Pals*, as Andrew K (our first ever director) had returned to London, and he wanted to put on Royce Ryton's play *Crown Matrimonial*, set at the time of the abdication, focusing on the relationship between Queen Mary and son David (King Edward VIII). An interesting play if not action-packed, and Leslie and I were glad to sit back and do medium-sized roles. Graham played the role of David, with Elizabeth as Queen Mary – rehearsals were a bit fraught due to Elizabeth's increasing deafness and Graham's irritation with this (requiring kid glove handling); but despite this the play went well. It was good seeing Cornelius take a bigger role as Bertie (the future George VI) with Alex as his devoted but strong-willed wife Elizabeth (the future Queen Mother).

Following that royal interlude, in 2012 I turned to the man who is probably my most beloved playwright – Terence Rattigan – and one of my favourite plays: *Separate Tables*. I first saw this as a television dramatization when I was a teenager. I remember being so moved by the tale of tolerance and forgiveness of human frailty overcoming prejudice against sordid peccadillos. Having read the play several times I realised that it would be wonderful to perform, because it had a whole cast of realistic flawed human beings and was full of humour as well as subtle and heartrending pathos. The second half (*Table No. 7*) is more engaging and memorable, with its story of shifty Major Pollock being persecuted by battle-axe Mrs Railton-Bell, threatening the delicate friendship that her shy daughter Sybil has formed with him. But the first half (*Table by the Window*) is important too because it sets up the story of many of the subsidiary characters who come to the fore in the second half – as well as being another tale of potential redemption for an aggressive husband meeting his ex-wife after he has been in prison, angry at her deceptions, but realising she is as desperate as he is, and they may be able to help each other.

Separate Tables cast well for our group, as most characters were middle-aged or older. We managed to find three new young actors to play the younger parts. Unfortunately, one of these dropped out – a girl who disappeared after attending a few rehearsals (was I that horrible?) – so the customary casting crisis arose. This was awkward, but luckily with a bit of line juggling it proved possible for our other young woman to double up the parts! It also proved tricky finding an actress to do the repressed daughter Sybil, but luckily Anna persuaded her mother Irene to have a go at being on stage as well as running Box Office. She was perhaps a trifle old for the part – but the same could be said of many of us; and in other ways she was ideal at playing the role (though she has never wanted to venture on stage again!)

From a practical perspective there were just two sets – a dining room and living room; not too problematic, although it was a bit of a challenge to find the best and cheapest way of acquiring lots of small tables for the dining room scenes. Small folding desk tables with large round tin platters strapped on them and topped by long white tablecloth material proved an odd but economic solution. I wondered whether to attempt real food, but decided this would be too complicated, and better

just to have cutlery with blue willow china, which would be a busy enough design to help disguise the fact that there was no food?! Shepherd's Bush Market and Ebay provided rich pickings for most props. I enjoy some of these set challenges almost as much as rehearsing and acting in the play. And when it all comes together under the stage lights with costumes, it is amazing how good it can look.

Once again Alex proved an invaluable assistant, although she did not really enjoy playing the ghastly Mrs Railton-Bell (despite having previously said it was more fun to play a villain! But Mrs R-B was particularly unpleasant.) I suspect if someone else had been directing I would have been cast as Mrs R-B and Alex as the more sympathetic Pat Cooper (who ran the Beauregard Hotel) which was the role I played. However, although I was willing to do either role, Alex did not want to attend all the rehearsals, and Miss Cooper was in almost all the scenes, so it seemed easier for me to play her as I had to be at all the rehearsals anyway. It is a subtly touching role which I enjoyed exploring (a change from a harridan!): the woman who quietly provides sympathy and helpful advice for many of her guests who are lost souls, while trying to repress her own unrequited love for John Malcolm.

Leslie had the biggest challenge playing pathetic Major Pollock who turns out to be a fraud and a minor sexual pervert (no, NOT type casting!)– but Rattigan makes the audience feel compassion for his failings, in the same way that his fellow guests begin to accept him. Leslie played the role sympathetically, showing how Pollock's fear and timidity had forced him to hide behind a façade and distorted his sexual impulses. Rattigan's original version had Pollock as a homosexual, but I felt that ironically the revised version would have a more powerful impact nowadays.

I absolutely love Rattigan, as was probably obvious in the programme note I wrote. My last paragraph ended "*Rattigan's strength lies in his portrayal of characters, along with his creation of entertaining and heart-rending stories, and this is what makes his plays resonate with audiences. At their most moving they show the hope of redemption and forgiveness overcoming our faults and frailties. As Michael Billington observed 'Few dramatists of this century have written with more understanding of the human heart than Terence Rattigan'.*"

Talking of programmes, another aspect of plays that I enjoy is creating programmes – I have done most of them for the Ladbroke Players, often writing a note on the play and playwright, though other directors sometimes contribute. I encourage actors to produce short biographical notes (or I concoct one). Recent programmes have also included photos of cast and past performances and turned into miniature literary productions. But the plays lie at the heart of the enjoyment.

My two other favourite playwrights are Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward. They adopt a more artificial style than Rattigan, yet also show an "*understanding of the human heart*" hidden among their witty phrases. I have directed two Wilde productions – *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. I particularly enjoyed *Lady Windermere*, partly because I was playing mother to my daughter Catriona, who took the title role, and was wonderful. New recruit James S. made quite a good fist of Lord Darlington. I played enigmatic Mrs Erlynne; a fabulous role which I loved – she seems so bad as the woman with a past, who abandoned her child, now blackmailing the husband who wants to save his wife from scandal and

disappointment. Yet she shows her heart when she realises her daughter risks following the same fateful path that she took, and she cannot bear to see her fall into the same pit of despair. It is a wonderful play – witty, dramatic and deeply moving.

In 2013 I returned to Rattigan sooner than expected, as Andrew was keen to do *The Browning Version* (again, despite having done it twice with other groups!). As well as a part for James, Andrew cast my brother Colin - the first time he'd acted with us since 1993. Colin gave a good performance but unfortunately his line-learning and timekeeping had not improved, which nearly drove Andrew spare! Since TBV is a one-acter we needed another one-act play to give the audience their money's worth. Andrew suggested I direct *Harlequinade*, which was a Rattigan play unfamiliar to me. It is a little "twee" but also extremely funny, and audiences loved it. Punters were amused at the spectacle of me and Leslie playing two ageing actors trying to perform Romeo and Juliet while struggling with technical issues of lighting and stage-managing (close to home...). Like revisiting *A Chorus of Disapproval* in a more innocent era. The play is a comedy of errors culminating in would-be Romeo Arthur discovering that not only does he have a grown-up daughter but also a grandson! It marked the debut of Hannah as the daughter, Esop as Jack the Stage Manager (prophetic); blond bombshell friend Bella as Jack's fiancée and a small role of stagehand for Oliver (also appropriate). Both Oliver and Esop have been hugely helpful backstage in recent productions. *Harlequinade* had many amusing cameos, including old-stagers Ryder and Elizabeth as two even more ageing actors and some spear carriers. The play also provided a nice duologue for us to use as a party piece at events like the Serpentine Christmas Party entertainment.

I finally managed to take on Coward in 2014 when the rights to *Present Laughter* were released. We had seen it in the West End years ago and thought it would be a hilarious play to do, but it took a long time to get permission. Leslie and I indulged ourselves playing bickering husband and wife Garry and Liz Essendine. This was another mammoth role for Leslie, comparable to Higgins, though he was more good-humoured in this role! It had some apt resonances – the ageing matinee idol who still thinks all the ladies love him and complains about having to perform for his public and his entourage. Gareth was delighted to take on the comic role of eccentric Roland Maule as a change from many "straight" parts, and our two new recruits Hannah and Bella took on the roles of scheming Joanna and Daphne. Yet again there was a casting crisis for the role of Garry's deliciously waspish secretary Monica, but, as often proved to be the case, we ended up with a better cast in the rearranged version. Another newish recruit, Vivien, proved excellent as Monica.

I enjoyed assembling a range of elegant dressing gowns for Leslie to wear in the play, Noel Coward fashion. These also provided fun garments for the younger cast to dress up in at the cast party. Over the years we had hosted most of the cast parties at our house, following the set striking after the last show on Saturday evening, and carousing would often go on into the wee small hours. But this was the last cast party we would host, as within months we were moving from Notting Hill to Hammersmith. We have continued to do plays in Notting Hill, but of course our house is now not such a convenient location for post performing parties. However, we still hold video parties (whenever we manage to film our shows and put together a watchable tape – a source of some friction between me and Leslie...)



Pygmalion 2010; my first direction; Eliza & me as Mrs Pearce



Eliza after the ball Pygmalion



Pygmalion, Leslie as Henry Higgins with Alfred Doolittle



James & Elspeth in bath scene, Acc Pals



Joe as Arthur, Anna as Bertha & me as Annie (another harridan role!) The Accrington Pals



Gillian as May; Mungo as Tom: The Accrington Pals



*The Accrington Pals, 2011 (Peter Whelan)
Jacob playing Reggie, James as Ralph*



Separate Tables 2012 (Rattigan) Top: Gareth & me as John Malcolm & Pat Cooper;
centre Ryder & Leslie as Mr Fowler and Major Pollock; and below, *Curtain Call*:
Anna, Ryder, Mark, me, Gareth, Vix, Leslie, Irene, Alex, Paula, Vivien, Lynn



Catriona as Lady Windermere, with James S as Lord Darlington



Me as Mrs Erlynne



Alex as Duchess of Berwick & Anna as her daughter Agatha



Gareth as Lord Windermere



Catriona & me playing mother & daughter



2 glamorous guests – played by Bella & Oliver

Lady Windermere's Fan (Oscar Wilde) 2013; Costumes hired from the National Theatre (plus LP white tie outfits)

Present Laughter by Noel Coward, 2014



Garry negotiating the attention of the ladies Daphne & Joanna.



Gareth having fun playing the mad Roland Maule.



*Leslie & me as husband & wife
Garry & Liz Essendine*



Present Laughter (Noel Coward) 2014 – Cast photo showing one of the dressing gowns and other clothes bought in charity shops or assembled from our various wardrobes. I decided to give our flats a facelift tacking on dark green material I bought down Shepherd's Bush Market – combined with cream curtains and a sofa inherited from some of our tenants! Plus usual other motley selection of Du Cane furniture.

Undaunted by the distance between Hammersmith and Notting Hill, I embarked on a lesser-known drama in November 2014, *Hindle Wakes*, by Stanley Houghton. This choice also had roots in the past. Leslie and I had seen the play in Grasmere years before, when we were on one of our Lake District weekends. It was before I had seriously contemplated directing, but I remember starting to feel the bug as I began casting it among our group in my mind, before tucking it away for future reference. I liked the story of the feisty young northern girl Fanny, who defies convention, refusing to marry the man she has spent a weekend with – conveniently allowing him to return to his fiancée, much to his parents’ relief. Hannah was one of our new young actresses who had been an alluring vamp Joanna in *Present Laughter*, and now sparkled as the headstrong Fanny; I was back in my more customary harridan mode, playing Fanny’s mother, while Leslie was also in typical mode playing the blustering father of the hapless young man, with Vivien as his long-suffering wife (a little more subdued than when she played his ascerbic secretary Monica in *Present Laughter*). As with *When We Are Married* and *The Accrington Pals*, we had to brush up our northern accents – always a fun challenge.

At this stage we were still using St Clement & St James Primary School to rehearse (until the final week when we were allowed into the church) so Leslie and I would trek over by bus, and back again. But I had craftily cast friend Oliver in the play so he would sometimes kindly provide a taxi service home from rehearsal – and if it was a Friday night he and Leslie would unwind with a glass of wine and cheese. This was a bonus in addition to Oliver’s sterling help doing the “Get In” – an even bigger challenge now that we lived in Hammersmith but were still using a large quantity of our furniture and props.

It is incredible how much Oliver can fit in and on his car – tying a motley assortment of furniture onto the roof rack in a Heath Robinson arrangement after filling up the back of the car. Oliver’s visits also gave Leslie and me the entertainment of his stories of his early life, before he settled down with wife and kids. For someone so gentle and unassuming he has led a very adventurous career, including being a jackaroo in Australia and helping to sail tall ships round the world. Almost every time we have him in for a drink, he comes out with more amazing tales of life in the 4 corners of the globe!

After *Hindle Wakes* came my second Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*, 2015, introducing another talented new actress, Zoe; and then I had a wee break when Elizabeth revealed that she was keen to put on *Arms and the Man* in 2016. She was having increasing problems with deafness, but luckily Geoff, who had professional theatre experience (as well as being a good clown) was willing to assist with the directing and that worked well. I did not act in this production, but it brought in two great actors, one completely new, one a blast from the past. Dan was new to us, but an accomplished actor who played the ridiculous Saranoff. The blast from the past was Elspeth, whom we had not seen since she played Eva so beautifully in *Accrington Pals* back in 2010. She proved equally good at playing the headstrong Raina. Leslie and Alex resurrected one of their stage marriages. Leslie seems to alternate playing opposite 3 women on stage – Alex, Vivien or me. But sometimes I make him play a role with no lady partner just to stretch his acting toes a little!

After this, Rattigan called to me again in 2016 to do my other favourite play by him - *The Winslow Boy*. Here the main challenge was finding an actor to play the boy Ronnie, but Irene and Anna came up with the perfect solution, Misia, who was at school with Anna, and proved to be an excellent actor, as well as looking the part. I was able to cast Dan as barrister Robert Morton, Elspeth as the daughter Catherine, and Geoff as the father Arthur Winslow –virtually perfect casting! James played Dickie, frivolous brother of Catherine’s and Ronnie, and was charming in the role, including doing a wee dance! I did a cameo as the maid Violet and Leslie a supporting role as faithful family friend Desmond, nursing a hopeless love for Catherine – almost a return to his touching portrayal of Pollock in *Separate Tables*, minus peccadilloes. Alex made another endearing wife and mother – this time partnering Geoff, who has probably played her husband as often as Leslie has! I was delighted that the actors brought out the wry humour in the story as well as the subtle poignancy, both trademarks of Rattigan’s observant and sensitive writing.

It had become trickier and costlier to use the school for rehearsing, but I managed to find rehearsal rooms in Hammersmith, one in the Rivercourt Methodist Church and others at the picturesque wee Quaker Meeting House, very conveniently situated across the road from us (sadly now torn down for the Town Hall development).

Our next production in 2017 left behind subtlety and sensitivity in Arthur Ridley’s comedy *The Ghost Train*. Initially I had doubts as it seemed a superficial melodrama with rather 2-dimensional characters, but it turned out to be a popular production, and great fun – and gave our lighting man scope for some exciting lighting effects! The cast enjoyed doing it, though our lines were not easy to learn as so many were repetitive – mainly variations on “*We’ve got to get out of here!*” I had fun playing an eccentric spinster who inadvertently becomes so drunk that she spends half of the play comatose on the floor. The only drawback was I couldn’t go backstage to check if all was going well! It was reminiscent of Leslie playing the body in *The Real Inspector Hound* back in our early days of plays.

Perhaps the most unusual play I have put on is *Sheppey* (2018) by Somerset Maugham. This was not a play I knew until I saw it at the Orange Tree, performed simply in the round, despite the potential complexity of the two sets. The first set was a barber’s shop so I had to buy two barber chairs (luckily I was able to sell them again on Ebay) as well as acquire a range of accessories including cut-throat razors, trolleys filled with bottles and potions, capes and towels for the customers and white coats for the staff. It is a strange story, part comedy, part drama and part fantasy. It reminded me of *Johnson Over Jordan*, and appropriately Geoff was again playing the chief character, once more meeting Death, but more unaware of this as Sheppey the cheeky and cheerful barber, than when he was Johnson.

Although *Sheppey* is partly a play about a man who is dying, it is also a portrait of a happy and kind-hearted man, always looking out for other people. But as well it explores the moral dilemma of how much it is right to help strangers at the cost of helping your family; and whether your family has a right to expect such help, or to put limits on what is given to others who may be undeserving. In some ways it is a flawed play, yet entertaining, thought-provoking and touching, and I was delighted to have both James and Catriona acting in it as well as Leslie and myself. I’m not sure that will ever happen again! The ending was moving, especially as I chose to

have the song *Starlight* playing while Sheppey slips slowly away from this world in his armchair, and his daughter and fiancé dance together without realising. This was a song that was sung at my mother's funeral, one of her favourites, and the words seemed very appropriate "*You wandered down the lane and far away, leaving me a song that will not die... Though I dream in vain, in my heart it will remain, My stardust melody, the memory of love's refrain.*"

I had a rest after *Sheppey* when the new "terrific triumvirate" Geoff, Cornelius and Elizabeth got together to put on a Shakespeare extravaganza – *As You Like It* – this time performing in another local church, All Saints. As a high Gothic church, it would not suit the "drawing room" style plays that I have done, but for a Shakespeare, performed in the round with a minimal set, it provided an atmospheric and surprisingly intimate space. The best area was under the crossing with seating arranged in a rectangle on 4 sides, like a small tennis court. There were some problems with acoustics and where to site lighting, but otherwise it proved an imaginative and entertaining production. It also had the advantage of allowing us to rehearse in the performing space, unlike St Peter's which gets used by so many others - including busy baby groups, not to mention church activities like Alpha. One challenge of acting there has always been having to put away the set most nights, and rearrange chairs etc, and only being able to "get in" during the last 10 days. All Saints was straightforward by comparison, but Leslie and I did not have to do much anyway since we only had small roles and were not involved in the major production elements. However, Leslie provided amusement to the cast in his role as Old Shepherd Corin where he was dressed in a long smock shirt and bare legs with only boxer shorts on - ending up revealing more than he intended as he sat on a hay bale holding forth (luckily at dress rehearsal rather than performance).

The last play I have put on to date (who knows whether there will be another?) is *Hobson's Choice* by Harold Brigham, a good old-fashioned comedy romance – but also with a modern/feminist heroine, rather in the style of Fanny in *Hindle Wakes*. Brigham was in the same "Manchester School" of playwrights as Houghton, both writing in the early 20th century, and with surprisingly feminist sympathies. The play is also reminiscent of *When We Are Married*, not just because of being set up north, but in the robustly observant yet affectionate style of the comedy and characters. Our lodger Katie brought a genuine Northern accent to a cameo role.

In the absence of a more suitable candidate, I indulged myself in playing bossy Maggie, who runs the shop and also runs rings round her younger sisters and future husband Will Mossop, the hapless boot hand, not to mention her drunken father. James kindly stepped into the breach in a small role when one actor dropped out. Poor Leslie ended up playing my father Hobson – so I got my own back for being cast as his mother all those years ago in *Crowds!* But Maggie is quite a harridan too, although she has a kind heart, so in that sense I was following my typecasting by others, although I knew I was really too old for the role. But that line from *Our Country's Good* rang in my head – "*This is the theatre – we will believe you!*"

One bonus of *Hobson* was it brought in some new talent mainly via the internet, and in particular John M who, after doing *Hobson*, expressed a desire to direct – at last a new director in the house! We had doubts about his first idea, which was quite avant garde and were slightly relieved when he couldn't get permission for it, and

then quite surprised when he came up with the idea of an Agatha Christie! But we realised that should be a great crowd-pleaser and provided a good range of parts – though not many survive until the end since the play was *And Then There Were None!* I played a nasty spinster who ends up a murder victim, while Leslie had the fun of playing the judge who turns out to be the murderer! Although I love reading Agatha Christie and watching Poirot and Marple on tv, I had probably felt a little snobbish about her drama, but I had to admit this was a well-written and intriguing mystery – and the punters loved it. So maybe we'll do another one someday – that's if there are any more productions after Covid.

As well as having excellent directors and a happy crew of actors, we have been amazingly lucky in our backstage help, e.g. stage managing and costumes, but most supremely with lighting, which requires a real expert to set up even if a novice can run it! We had a mixture of people in the early years, and then the most marvellous person was Nigel, who lit our shows for 10 years, but unluckily has now been forced to retire through ill health. He was a true star. He coped cheerfully with all our demands, produced stunning lighting effects for a very reasonable cost and even played the piano to entertain us before the show started! I doubt I would even have contemplated trying to put on any plays if we had not had a lighting supremo like Nigel. I reckoned I could attempt most things like organising set, props, costumes, and rehearsing actors, but when it came to something as technical as lighting, I had no clue. And while it would be possible to perform without stage lighting, it would be a very dull show. Lighting is one of the most crucial things to bring magic to a stage production. Good acting helps too of course!

When doing productions I have been happy to multi-task in most areas – choosing a play, organising scripts, casting, planning a rehearsal schedule and booking rehearsal space, organising costumes – either hiring from somewhere like National Theatre or buying from charity shops and raiding Ladbroke Player supplies (nearly all located in the Du Cane house fortunately), sourcing and buying or making props, designing poster and programmes, sending out publicity, learning lines (as I have usually managed to find a part for myself in the production), planning and running rehearsals, liaising with stage management, prompt and lighting – the list goes on. Unlike in most professional production the amateur director usually has to be as much a producer and general dogsbody as the head honcho! Which would all be fine if I didn't have to fit in an everyday job as well! But at least the hours for that have become more flexible over recent years.

But I am not invincible of course, and for each production I have had to rely on at least one other person (plus a few Front of House helpers). For my first few shows Alex was my wonderful Production Assistant – particularly helpful in choosing and collecting costumes (her car was essential when fetching costumes and props from the National Theatre) – especially for *Pygmalion*, *Accrington Pals* (all those uniforms and tin bath!) and *Lady Windermere's Fan*. I was able to let Alex off the hook a bit later when, after a few years' break, dear Oliver came back to act with us.

Oliver is also an incredibly helpful person (with a car) and strong enough to help me move flats and furniture, which is one of the essential skills for putting on our shows! I have lost track of the times that Oliver has driven back and forth to our house, whether in Notting Hill or Hammersmith, collecting play paraphernalia, and

hauling flats out of Ryder's garage where they have had to be stored since being banished from the church; then turning up in church in the afternoon to help me set up before rehearsal and performances. Like Alex, Oliver is always incredibly cheerful and good-humoured about the whole process (which I fear would not be the case if I tried to involve my own dear husband too much...) The only tricky thing with Oliver is that his wife or sons occasionally require a bit of his time, so I have to give firm guidelines in explaining when I need him!

In fact, every show requires a team of helpers, so in addition to key helpers like Alex and Oliver, we have one kind person running Box Office, a few folk who coordinate front of house, another prompting. And all the cast lend a hand with striking set after shows, especially on the last night – it is very much a group enterprise, although I think there are a few of our actors who have no conception of how much work goes into the production behind the scenes! I appreciate that some of them just live too far away or work too long hours to get involved with anything apart from the acting, but it is very gratifying to discover a cast member who is willing and able to help. Leslie does occasionally fall into the helpful category but can be grumpy with it. The other person who deserves a special mention is Esop. He is young but just as helpful and cheerful as Oliver and Alex! The only problem is he is trying to pursue a “real” career as an actor, so in recent times has been less available, but if he can't help out with productions, he is often willing to cat-sit!

So far, I have managed to act in all the plays that I have directed and produced (just call me Ms Branagh!) – perhaps not always a wise move, but I love the acting so much that I figure if I am going to do all the work of a production then I should get some of the fun too. In the main it has worked ok, even if I have sometimes pushed the boundaries a little, and been a bit of a benevolent dictator (but not many people seem to be queuing up to take on the job instead of me)

Over the years it has not been completely undiluted Alison Du Cane shows or even Ladbroke Players shows. Leslie and I have sometimes ventured out of our comfort zones to act with other groups, developing our thespian skills. We acted a bit with another am dram group; now long gone – the Comedy Club – which we enjoyed. I have done a couple of plays with Tower Theatre including an unusual version of *The House of Bernarda Alba* and the classic screwball comedy *Harvey*. And I played Catherine Petkoff in a Sedos production of Shaw's *Arms and the Man* – great fun especially since I did not act in the Ladbroke Players version (and wonderful to act in a real theatre, even fringe). Luckily, I genuinely felt that the two Shaw plays were equally good interpretations of this classic romantic comedy!

For both Tower and Sedos I had to audition to get into the company and then audition for individual shows which was nerve-wracking, but I was glad to stretch myself. Up in Scotland it was a bit more relaxed – almost ever since we bought the house in Skelmorlie and discovered there was an am-dram group called the Attic Players we had gone to see most of their productions, and I had kept saying I would love to be in one. I finally got the chance a couple of years ago when I was able to spend quite a lot of time up there in the autumn– just doing a small role, but in *Blithe Spirit*, which is such a fun play and with a very nice group of people (and after all I'd had the chance to do a big role in it years ago with LP as Elvira) Staying

in Scotland for several weeks also meant I had the chance to take my darling grandson Archie out for a few trips, which was a real bonus.

I don't know what (if any) production will be done next, either by me or John M, or perhaps another Triumverate Triumph (not content with *Lear* and *Macbeth* there are plans afoot for *Hamlet!*). Or maybe I will subside into acting with other groups as long as I can insinuate myself into parts, and the Ladbroke Players may wind down. Writing in the middle of Covid lockdown, and with lots of changes afoot at St Peter's Notting Hill, which was the Ladbroke Players' main performance venue, it is hard to know what will happen? But even if there are no more shows, we have had a wonderful run and done some amazing productions.



Harlequinade (Terence Rattigan) 2013 Ally & Leslie playing Romeo & Juliet in Rattigan's comedy about ageing actors and all the technical hazards of a Dress Rehearsal.



And Then There Were None (Agatha Christie) Our last LP production (2020) to date, with a new director, John Montgomery, who gave the flats yet another facelift with pink wallpaper and restored the French Windows to their original white glory! I am on far left playing Emily Brent; Leslie centre in suit with Winchester tie



Hindle Wakes 2014: me, Hannah & Geoff (Eliza Doolittle's hat getting another outing!)



Hindle Wakes - Leslie & Vivien – either we hired trousers too long for Leslie or he'd forgotten his braces for the Dress Rehearsal! More Du Cane furniture playing a starring role again.



A Woman of No Importance (Oscar Wilde 2015) – I managed another variation of set putting lots of white net curtains over the flats and bringing in a different set of chairs from our new house!



Alex as Grace, Elspeth as Kate, Gareth as John, Geoff as Arthur



*The Winslow Boy 2016 (Rattigan) The French Windows that Andrew had made for **The Browning Version** came in handy for this production! Dan playing Sir Robert Morton and Misia as Ronnie Winslow*



Geoff & Elspeth playing Arthur & Kate Winslow



James playing Dickie Winslow.

Our furniture has appeared in more productions than some of our cast! Occasionally supplemented by TB items.



***The Ghost Train** (Arnold Ridley) 2017 I painted the French Windows brown and covered the bottom half of the doors which worked well for the Station Waiting Room, the Sheppey barber shop – and also the shoe shop in *Hobson's Choice*! Recycling Queen.*



*Me playing the drunken Miss Bourne in **The Ghost Train***



***Sheppey** 2018 Catriona & friend Bella playing barber shop assistants to Geoff (Sheppey) & Leslie. I had to buy special barber chairs for this show – but managed to sell them on Ebay afterwards.*



*Beatrice as Florrie & Vivien as her mum, Mrs Miller in **Sheppey** 2018*



*James playing Ernie; Beatrice Florrie & Cornelius Dr Jervis (typecasting? – he is a psychiatric doctor in real life!) in **Sheppey** (complete with hairdressing posters I got online)*



Hobson's Choice Still making use of the flats I covered in green cotton 5 years before.



Hobson's Choice with Leslie as Hobson, me as Maggie & James as Fred.



Hobson's Choice 2019 – the last play I've directed. Team photo of cast (plus our prompt/SM Esop at the back) Ali, Leslie, Zoe, Esop; Ally, Gareth, Laura, Amy, James, Chris; Oliver, John M & Katie Several stalwarts but also some new blood!

28. Friendships

While I have been lucky to maintain contact with my fantastic school-friends Kay and Elizabeth (though sadly Elizabeth has recently left this world), and Leslie and I have kept in touch with a few university friends, most of our other close friends have been made since Leslie and I got married, mainly via church, drama group, our children and holidays. Having children introduced Leslie and myself to several fellow parents who became some of our closest friends. We met when our children were babies or toddlers, at playgroup, garden squares and primary school, and we grew up together. Most of these parents lived in London, although some gradually moved out – and it was to our surprise that we found ourselves among those still living in London even after our children had grown up – somehow, we always thought we would move somewhere more rural, probably up north. But at least we now make regular visits up to Scotland and we own a Scottish house.

There were two special families we became friendly with in London when our children were little. I had met wonderful Vivienne (who sometimes looked after my children when I did part-time secretarial work) and another lovely friend Jo at NCT social meetings. As many will know, the NCT (National Childbirth Trust as opposed to National Churches Trust!) is a splendid organisation that supports expectant and new parents. However, I did not attend their ante-natal classes (partly because I worked till quite late on; also, it was hard enough for me to drag reluctant father Leslie along to even one solitary hospital class let alone anything extra).

But I found it helpful to attend NCT regular local post-natal social events - coffee mornings or teatime groups - for babies and parents (nearly all mothers in those days), another of their key activities – and probably more vital. Later I ran my own NCT teatime group for new mums and babies, and also found myself enlisted as membership secretary for the local group. Leslie and I seem magnetically drawn in to serve charitable groups – usually as treasurer and/or secretary, even though we don't set out to achieve such dubious glory. It may be partly due to our professional training, but we also find it hard to say “No”- which can be a fatal flaw!

Vivienne and Jo were fellow mums who had children of a similar age to mine, and we became good friends, initially with each other, and gradually our whole families became close. Mums and kids would have teatime dates, and then the dads became friendly. For many years we enjoyed sixsome dinners with Jo and her husband Graham, plus Vivienne and her husband Mac, and the six of us even made one memorable weekend trip to Paris, via Eurostar which was a joy. When Catriona was born, we asked Jo to be a Godmother to Catriona and Mac to be Godfather (with Vivienne very much sharing Godparent duties with Mac, especially when it came to getting presents!). They have been wonderful friends over the years.

We shared several delightful Christmases with Jo and Graham and their children, either at our house or theirs. We also instituted a tradition of mini-break swaps, whereby one couple would go away for 3 nights while the other couple looked after both trios of children, and then we would swap round, usually around the May half-term. This was mutually useful, since neither of us had parents living near enough to take on looking after 3 children (perhaps a deliberate policy on their part?)

Although my Aunt Christine would kindly babysit for us on periodic evenings, she could not have coped with looking after our lively brood for a whole weekend. Vivienne's Auntie, who lived nearby, was made of sterner stuff and she did a large amount of child-minding for them.

However, our swaps with Jo and Graham were not that arduous, since the children all got on well, and they would entertain each other when we did these extended playdates. The arrangement enabled Leslie and me to enjoy some glorious trips to the beautiful Lake District – a favourite place – particularly Grasmere, where we discovered a delightful B&B, and we went back for several happy trips, exploring, swimming in the different lakes and climbing several of the enticing hills, not to mention gorging on delicious food in local restaurants. Meanwhile Jo and Graham visited a great range of different places.

Before we made many of these trips, we did an expedition to Mac and Vivienne's remote Welsh cottage and enjoyed visits out to their house in Denham after they had moved out there from Westbourne Grove. When we owned the Greenacre in the New Forest, Jo and her family came to stay with us there, including a trip to the Isle of Wight. The Island has special memories for Leslie and me as we made trips there during our early courting days followed by outings with the children and Leslie's parents. And Graham was responsible for organising the amazing Millennium Ball held at our church and parish halls to celebrate the arrival of 2000. Following all this socialising, travelling and warm friendship it was a deep sorrow when Mac's wife Vivienne died, followed just a few years later by Jo's husband Graham, both after suffering with different forms of cancer. Our sixsome has been sadly diminished, but it is still a joy whenever we see either Mac or Jo.

Looking further back, soon after moving to Notting Hill and before having children, we became friendly with Diana, who was a professional actress, who helped us establish our drama group (see above). As a single mum she was quite preoccupied looking after her 7-year-old daughter Emily. Diana became one of our best friends, and we often had her and Emily round for meals or took Emily out swimming or on other trips. As Emily grew up and married, we felt she and her husband Tristan were as much our friends as Diana, and they shared Christmas and Easter with us on a couple of occasions. Now that they have all moved away from London, we don't see them regularly, but they still feel like an extended part of our family. Emily also became a professional actress and married an actor, and we enjoy following their careers, on television and stage, and love the fact that they remain such nice people despite their success, and they have three gorgeous children.

Another group of people who have become special friends are families we met during Colonsay trips. Many of us would arrange to holiday at the same time in mid-August; we became quite well-known with islanders as the biggest Colonsay gang – at its peak the number of people we connected with headed towards one hundred, including a fantastic group of teenagers plus younger children and parents, and provided a brilliant social hub for us all. Our Colonsay friends came from all over the UK and we mainly met up on holiday, but there was a smaller core group whom we saw at other times. We grew close, sharing joy and sorrow at weddings, parties and funerals, celebrating the birth of babies, and enjoying more casual social occasions. At one point we arranged a couple of "Northern Meets" staying with

friends in the north of England. This was in the Christmas holidays, coinciding twice with amazing snowy weather, so I have happy memories of us sledging and crunching our way through snowy woods. Another year we hosted a “Southern Meet” with families descending on our London home for a New Year party and teenagers sleeping dorm style – fun, if less scenic than Yorkshire and Derbyshire, and a good excuse for Leslie to offer round his malt whisky collection.

There is a poignancy in looking back on those island holidays and friends in the light of some later sad events – one girl has died, only in her 20s; one dad died also of illness; another couple have divorced; a baby has been lost, and some lives punctuated with other melancholy happenings. But on a more positive note, a new generation has come up with grown-up children taking partners and bairns there and carrying on the Colonsay traditions. As years go by inevitably tragedies and sorrows are mixed with joys, even though while we stay on the paradise island the tribulations of everyday life can seem suspended. But as Colonsay becomes a deeper part of our souls, then the pains of real life become more interwoven with that joy, and we can no longer leave sorrow and frustration behind, yet find solace as the Hebridean sea air washes over us, providing healing balm even as we weep.

Another friend with whom we’ve made many trips is Nick. We originally became friends at church and Nick also joined our drama group, but even after he moved from London and married, we kept in touch. We went to Canada twice with him and enjoyed other expeditions around the UK. Early on he and his wife-to-be came on one of our Colonsay holidays – they were less enamoured than we were, partly due to some disappointing weather, and Nick being unwell. Unfortunately, he and his wife have split up, so we don’t see so much of his children now, but we enjoy meeting them occasionally, and they have shared New Year with us, and we still see Nick quite often. His offspring are younger than our kids, but they will soon be leaving school; yet we can remember them as babies, which somehow makes us feel even older than watching our own children grow up – perhaps because that process has happened more gradually and organically.

One vivid memory for me is when we were on holiday in Canada the first time, with all Nick’s family, when their kids were only 5 and 3. I was in the throes of depression and anxiety, so despite glorious scenery and magical swims in lakes, I found it quite a stressful trip – especially being in restaurants with the children flinging tomato ketchup and cutlery on the floor or rushing to the chocolate fountain and then running round the room waving chocolaty hands at people! However, Nick’s wife had her own memories of our kids being a bit wild, especially our boys, running around firing toy bows and arrows, so I guess it depends on your perspective as to how nerve-wracking youthful joie de vivre can be!

Nick also lodged part-time with us for a while when he was working part-time in London after moving to Devon. Now he is in Bath that gives us further excuses to explore the West Country. Nick and Leslie share a passion for cricket and have attended a few test matches with our friend Ryder who is a member of Lords. After his marriage ended Nick also came to St Endellion Festival in Cornwall a couple of times working as a “helper” while I sang in the Chorus, and he loved going to the concerts and watching some rehearsals – but got a bit frustrated if he had to miss part of a concert if he was picking up a musician from the station or being a barista.

So the year after he decided to give “helping” a miss to be free for more walks and concerts, and he persuaded Leslie to accompany him for a few days. They both attended some of the concerts (rather more than I have ever induced Leslie to do over my Festival years!). When I was not busy rehearsing, I joined the boys for a few country-house visits and swims in the sea – and of course, cream teas!

I was staying in crowded Festival accommodation, packed with participants, while Nick had booked a room at a local B&B for him and Leslie to share on their mini break. They were both amused and taken aback to realise that their fellow guests and hosts had formed the impression that they were a gay couple! Nothing could be further from the truth for either of them (James and Wayne might observe that one look at their lack of fashion sense, would make their orientation obvious). Our platonic threesome friendship seems to work amazingly well, and it is a slight echo of a trio Leslie and I were in at university, when our closest friend apart from each other, was a girl called Helen (again this was a purely platonic relationship).

We went on many expeditions with Helen, and Leslie would have liked her to be his “*Best Woman*” rather than having a Best Man, but he was not unconventional (or brave) enough to suggest it. I think he feared his father’s reaction would not be positive, even though he liked Helen. Helen was the friend who had come down to Forest Cottage with us and Tony had put us all to work breaking up rocks to make a mini car park! Helen subsequently lodged with my parents for a year when she did a post-graduate music course in Birmingham, and I imagine she found her billet there less backbreaking. She and her future husband Graham spent some years living abroad, and we have not kept in close touch in recent years, but we shared many happy times at university.

Other close friends have been made through attending church in Notting Hill and Hammersmith, and involvement with our local drama group. Some have links with both and sometimes also with our children, as those lives are often woven together. One family we met first through church, then got to know in our drama group, and through our children together. Perhaps one reason we get on well, apart from the shared interests, is they are probably as idiosyncratic and eccentric as we are (or the husbands are!). The father is hot-tempered - reminiscent of Leslie’s father – a man of high principle, and warm affection, but also high rage. His wife Alex reminds us of Leslie’s mother as she has a wonderfully equable temperament and is a marvellous person. Many people think she is amazing to put up with Joe, but I believe he is devoted to her despite his outbursts, and she is also very fond of him.

We visited each other when our kids were small. Alex is bright and lively and would fire out scores of ideas for activities that we might do with the children, just as I would be thinking we could relax and enjoy a cup of tea while the children entertained themselves. We have shared many meals; Alex is a splendid cook and very hospitable – there is not much that she can’t do (though she is reticent about singing) but she is modest and down-to-earth despite being such a Superwoman. I guess real Superwomen are modest. We have enjoyed acting together (sometimes plus offspring). Joe has now retired to the audience and front of house, but the rest of us still enjoy performing – though I think Alex is less vain than Leslie and I are and seems equally happy helping behind the scenes. Although I am shy than Leslie in real life, I do love acting on stage. Through our amdram acting group we

have made other good friends – there is something about putting on a dramatic production together that engenders close friendships, especially for those of us who put in the most work and passion – a bit like a sports team or event, I guess.

Leslie and I also enjoy having people to lunch or dinner parties and occasionally we used to have bigger parties. In our Hanover Lodge days, we held an annual Mulled Wine and Mince Pies party soon after New Year (around Epiphany) which marked farewell to Christmas – our tree would still be up, I would make mince pies and Leslie would make mulled wine, each glass laced with a shot of brandy; so we tried mainly to invite local neighbours who could stagger home on foot.

It was one of the few times I managed to do quite a thorough tidy-up of the living room, so it was worthwhile just to achieve a yearly “Winter Clean”. The parties were fun, and the children have fond memories of them; but I really prefer entertaining a small number of people for a meal sitting down, talking in comfort and not rushing round having snatched conversations, with people standing in a crush. Leslie and I have groups of friends we enjoy having round for meals, from our Notting Hill days, drama groups, church or swimming friends, and for me that is a more relaxed way to entertain (if I can get the food prepared in time...). The only other large parties we’ve had were ceilidh parties, one for our Silver Wedding and one for Leslie’s 50th birthday – with proper food I’m glad to say! And we even managed to have a ceilidh party on Colonsay celebrating 25 years of visits there.

I have never been a fan of drinks parties and am only interested if proper food is on offer. The way our current rooms are organised on separate floors also makes it less easy to have one big party. So, I suspect the Mince Pie party will not return to River House. But the children have all enjoyed hosting adult birthday parties at River House, spilling out into the garden in summer – Catriona has turned it into a magical illuminated jardin with a host of lanterns dotted down the paths and fairy lights draped over the trees making it look enchanting.

Over the years we have developed our interest in open water/outdoor swimming – particularly Leslie, so that is another area where we have made friends. For a long time, we swam at the Serpentine, but since moving to Hammersmith it is more of an effort to get over there regularly. On the plus side we have become keen swimmers in the River Thames, and we can plunge in from steps just across the road from our front door! A little group of other outdoor swimmers join us periodically and so that has become another channel for forming friendships.

Having moved from Notting Hill it is inevitably difficult to keep in such close touch with all the friends we made there, but there are some we have managed to persuade to visit us in the wilds of Hammersmith – too many to name them all. As with most of our special friends, it does not really matter if we don’t see them for months or even years, when we do meet up it is still a joy, and we pick up the threads again. Meanwhile there is a further network of such friends up in Skelmorlie whom we see when we go up to Ravensburn – either at church, drama group or because they are near neighbours, and it is a further delight to have that extra social dimension up north. We are indeed fortunate to have such a company of chums old and new.

29. World Event Interaction

I did not pay much attention to news when I was at primary school, but I have a hazy memory of the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, with my mother watching the news reports on our little black & white TV and crying – probably the first time I saw my mother cry. Years later, shortly before my Dad died in 2012 – he talked about where he was at the time of JFK’s shooting, playing with the Scottish Trio at a chamber music concert in a country house (I think at Haddo House). Although having trouble with remembering current events due to his dementia, he had a clear memory of this shocking event nearly 50 years before. He said the concert was interrupted when somebody came in and announced to the audience and musicians that President Kennedy had been shot dead.

I have a very sad memory of the Aberfan tragedy when a whole school of primary children were killed by the collapse of this Welsh colliery spoil tip. This appalling disaster had more impact on me than the shooting of a foreign President. But only a few such world events penetrated my consciousness when I was a child, even though my parents took a daily newspaper (Telegraph and/or Glasgow Herald) and tuned in regularly to news and current affairs on radio and TV. I am afraid I was keener to watch Blue Peter or films, or to listen to pop music. But I have a clear memory of my parents listening to Alastair Cooke’s *“Letter from America”* – which was also a great favourite of Leslie’s parents. And my parents loved Radio 3– but Leslie’s favoured the “Home” service, being less keen on classical music!

Although I took no interest in football, the death of so many football fans (66) in Glasgow caused by crushing at Rangers Ibrox stadium in 1971 was profoundly shocking, especially as many children died. It was horrifying to have history repeating itself with a similar tragedy at the Hillsborough Football stadium in 1989, and 94 people dying. And the terrible fire at Bradford City Stadium in 1985 which killed 56 spectators and injured many more was also horrendous. Over the years there have also been a variety of terrorist atrocities that shock – partly because, like the football tragedies, such events have killed or maimed young people, enjoying an innocent leisure activity such as pop concerts, holiday or shopping. It is always dreadful when people die in accidents or worse, by murder, and the deaths are such a tragic waste - as well as destroying the families affected. We were horrified by the Omagh bombing in 1998 which killed nearly 30 people in Northern Ireland including children – the indiscriminate carnage was appalling. The bomb which killed Lord Mountbatten and several of his family earlier on in 1979 was also shocking – particularly to Leslie’s father who had worked for him during the War.

Individual murders are particularly scary and sad if it is some psychopath stranger stalking or killing at random rather than the more common domestic case where the assailant is known to the victim. Where an event is a massacre like Dunblane it seems incomprehensible that someone could go in and slaughter young children and is obviously even more heartbreaking and appalling.

Yet when preoccupied with the everyday details of looking after young children one tends not to pay prolonged attention to the world stage even if the news is horrendous, and even now I find it hard to attend closely because so much news is

shocking and depressing, and one feels helpless to do anything about the problems. Leslie was and is far better than I was or am at keeping in touch with current events and will listen daily to news on the radio, watch TV news bulletins and news analysis, which I regret to say I sometimes find either boring or too upsetting.

I tend to rely on Leslie to let me know if anything important or terrible is happening, but now the children are grown up I am glad to say they take an interest in current events. And even I can't ignore the most shocking or life-changing events. Of course, earth-shattering events are happening all the time in different places, but a few have stuck in my mind over the years. For instance, like most people we recall the death of Princess Diana in 1997, vividly – or at least the aftermath. It was so strange seeing the sea of flowers in the park outside Kensington Palace and people weeping in the streets – for someone they had never met but felt some sort of connection with. Equally intense on a global scale are tsunamis, floods and fires though they lack the personal resonance of a Diana death.

One strange aspect of family life is how some of the major world and national events appear on the news and may be cataclysmic yet become intertwined or fade into the background when mixed with the mundane minutiae of everyday life, even though everything may be suspended temporarily if it is a real disaster. I vividly recall all the TV coverage of 9/11 in 2001, which was such a cataclysmic event. Like most people I have an acute memory of the bombing of the twin towers and their collapse, and the bombing of the plane, being glued to the television watching the terrible drama unfold as soon as I got home, and I am sure our children do too. I was on my way home from a singing lesson after work when I bumped into a friend who told me what had happened, and it just seemed unreal as well as devastating. I remember all the family watching the TV feeling shocked and tearful, and everyday life stopped for a short time, yet it would not be long before it was back to the round of what to make for the children's tea, sorting out homework, doing laundry so the children had clean clothes for school and other such every-day activities.

9/11 also reminded me of the Lockerbie bombing back in 1988 when a plane was blown out of the sky killing many young American students who were flying home for Christmas. This was before we had Catriona and the boys were too little to understand what had happened. Leslie and I felt a personal connection to this tragedy, as some of the students were from Syracuse University, based in a building just opposite our church, and we had met some American students in church, as well as my feeling the connection of being half-American, and having a mother who flew to the USA regularly to visit my grandmother and uncle – and Lockerbie being a small town in the Scottish Borders, not far from where we used to go on trips to my parents' cottage in Moniaive.

Thank goodness there have also been a few uplifting occurrences. Among memorable events which impressed me when the kids were young is the Berlin Wall coming down in November 1989 which seemed an incredible move forward at the time, marking a thaw in the Cold War. I remember feeling quite overwhelmed as I saw the wall being dismantled on TV and people clambering over the rubble, even though most of my preoccupation at the time would have been with baby Catriona and the boys – Gordon at playgroup and James starting primary school.

Meanwhile I recall other amazing marches of progress taking place during the 90s, such as the gradual ending of apartheid in South Africa and the troubles in Ireland. With our London centred lives our awareness of this was also through TV coverage and newspapers/radio - again wonderful and almost unbelievable – although fearfully it seems like some of the troubles may be recurring. More recently in 2012 we had the bright spot of the UK Olympics, a stirring and heart-warming event, inspiring a feeling of collective good will, rather like Wimbledon on a grand scale. Leslie was lucky enough to attend a couple of events (thanks partly to Gordon having been efficient enough to apply for tickets unlike us!)

At the moment it seems like some of the most intractable problems in our society relate to Arab and Islamic terrorism; tensions between Jews and Palestinians; the threat of Islam and many difficulties over relations with the Arab nations, along with other major issues concerning racism and the horrors of war; and famine and disease in the poorest countries – but more recently now the catastrophes of Brexit, the Covid 19 pandemic, and the global environmental crisis facing the human race loom large. Such problems seem so intractable and insurmountable that it is tempting to end up being an ostrich with head in the sand, because everything feels so overwhelming and there seems no solution to the impending disasters.

Unhappily, it often feels like life is getting worse and more terrifying. Years ago, I talked to Leslie's mother about my fears of bringing children into such a broken world, when I think I was feeling especially anxious about the nuclear threat. But as Rosamund said to me so long ago, the world has always had many frightening issues to worry about. Go back centuries and there was plague, war, famine and persecution. Life must try to go on, and while of course we should not ignore local or global threats, sometimes it is the minutiae of daily life that keep us sane.

In the midst of cataclysmic happenings, my daily focus would move from creating hats for hat parades to making fancy cakes for birthday parties; wrestling with English and Maths PACT and IMPACT tasks (Parent and Child Together); helping create Project Scrapbooks and graduating to assisting with more sophisticated essays at secondary school. Even Leslie got involved with the projects (if they focused on history), and was helpful in providing maths tuition, when not too bogged down with his own "maths" doing tax and accounts work for clients.

But once the kids reached secondary school, I think those schools helped the children develop an interest in current events and politics, and they have all followed their father's footsteps in observing what is happening in the world. I must accept that this is more useful than my head in the sand attitude. Thus, I reckon Leslie has had some positive influence on their education, along with school. I admire this, while I remain the one who is least keen on watching Question Time.

More recently even I have become peripherally engaged in such painful traumas as the aftermath of the Grenfell fire in Notting Hill (volunteering to help serve food and sort clothes) – as the fire happened so closely to where we live it struck a particular chord, and James had taught one of the girls who died in the fire. At a more national level I seem to have signed endless petitions (it's almost too easy via Change.org) donated and sent letters to my MP on various issues, but particularly fighting the dreaded but inexorable Brexit; and, most recently, watching with

stunned disbelief the science fiction-like events of the world-wide Covid-19 pandemic unfolding. Meanwhile the longer-term threats of global warming and environmental pollution continue to lurk in the background.

On our own personal stage there have been a few more uplifting events such as Leslie and me attending a garden party at Buckingham Palace – twice! Both times were through the charity Ancient Monuments Society – Leslie as a long-serving trustee and treasurer and the second time me as an employee, getting an invitation because of Prince Charles being our Patron. On the first occasion it was just Leslie and me, but on the second in 2010 I was allowed to invite two young adult children as well as my partner! As we have 3 children this could have been awkward, but James was over the age limit, so the decision was made for us – Gordon and Catriona got to don the glad rags. It was fun to go as a family and wander round the gardens plus enjoying the delicious tea. We didn't bother with queuing up to meet any of the royals, but it was amusing eyeing them from afar, and intriguing to go to such an iconic place. The amount of charity work Leslie does ought to mean that one day he gets a gong, but I suspect the allocation of these is haphazard, so we won't hold our breath. Anyway, trophy-wise he's amassed quite a collection from his swimming races over the years and setting his sights on a few more!

All these activities provide a welcome distraction from the terrors and tragedies that lurk on the world stage. I lurch between wanting to do something, however small, mostly making paltry donations to sundry charities and appeals, but fearing that many situations are too intractable, and seeking oblivion in a romance or detective drama whether on screen or in a book or getting involved in theatrical endeavours. And one day when lockdown ends, and the Corona virus pandemic subsides, we may at last be able to start socialising with friends, extending our swimming activities, travelling, and seeing our gorgeous grandchildren. There may even be the hope of putting on some more plays, and for me it would be great to revive another favourite *Rattigan*, even if just to provide transitory relief from the problems on the world stage. Time will tell.



*Garden Party at Buckingham Palace
Catriona, Ally & Gordon 2010*

30. Happiness to Mania & Back - Swimmingly



Leslie diving in the Serpentine 2009

I don't think happiness is really an achievement – it's more a state of mind and I've been lucky enough to be someone who feels happy and positive most of the time - setting aside the glitch of a few years of depression... I suppose this is partly because I have had a secure home life and mainly happy experiences with family and friends, and I have enjoyed mostly good health. I was happy growing up, but perhaps even happier at university, getting to know Leslie, my future husband. I blossomed there as a person, shedding some of my shyness and insecurities, and Leslie and other friends enabled me to become my own person, building on the foundations laid by loving parents and other family and friends.

It was a joyous time when the children were young, perhaps especially when they were in the cocoon of primary school. In terms of work, I don't feel I've achieved anything extraordinary or earth-shattering –but I've managed to earn my own living for most of my life, including doing some fulfilling and quietly useful jobs. My greatest achievement (apart from putting on a dozen plays!) is probably having had a long and happy marriage, being blessed with three wonderful children – and managing to bring them up well enough that they have not turned into criminals, and they all still seem to like spending time with me and their Dad.

Having children and bringing them up was far more than “*taking time out*” from employment – parenthood has been the most significant and fulfilling part of my life, and my three children along with husband Leslie are the most important people in my life, and they have brought me so much joy. Now that circle has expanded to include our children's partners and grandchildren – an extra blessing. When I gave birth to my first child James it was one of the most magical experiences of my life (despite the labour pains) and I loved those special times soon after the birth of each of my children, getting to know each new baby and then watching each child grow up – so precious and fulfilling, and creating so many happy memories.

That is true even though our offspring might sometimes feel that my theatrical or singing endeavours have taken precedence over domestic and family duties! Whereas with Leslie it might be architecture, local history, genealogy or outdoor swimming (or even the dreaded meetings!) – depending on what is the current foremost obsession. There may have been exasperations - some of which can seem

major at the time – broken nights and children not sleeping for years; struggling with toilet-training; children fighting or having tantrums; husband not getting certain tasks done because he is too busy and missing holidays; unintentional but painful rows with older children - yet it is amazing how these things which can be exhausting, maddening or upsetting, fade into insignificance, and the joy remains.

As they grow up there have been many special moments both joyful and sad, often marking milestones, for one or all of our children. Watching each of them in their respective school nativity plays was one of the first. Another classic event was seeing the children learn to ride their bikes – reminiscent of that take-off moment in the film *Kramer vs Kramer*. Watching James – and later Catriona – take the lead in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicoloured Dreamcoat* in the Year 6 leavers show, while Gordon in madcap mode did the *Jerry Springer* show with his Year 6 was a delight! Seeing each of them at their respective Year 6 leaving services preparing to move from primary to secondary school was always a bittersweet moment...

Other memorable things – so many ... Gordon's passion for football and the enterprising way he became a Junior Gunner and organised me into trying to get tickets for him as well as playing in his own matches. Watching James compete in national trampoline competitions in Birmingham and Crystal Palace. Seeing James off on the ferry on Colonsay when he was going for a first holiday abroad without us – and me bursting into tears on the pier much to James' embarrassment. Me taking James to see his favourite singer Whitney Houston in concert at Wembley Arena – both of us dancing in the aisles! Memories keep crowding in.

Saying goodbye to Gordon as he headed off to Glasgow University and me crying after he'd left. Seeing Catriona off on Eurostar to be an au pair in Paris in 2010 – and me bursting into tears again – this time James was there to comfort me while Leslie seemed to be the one who was embarrassed. - Watching Gordon row at Glasgow University and going to a dinner with him when he was captain of the team. - Witnessing Gordon graduate with a First Class Degree (with my Dad). At the ceremony most parents restricted themselves to clapping but Leslie gave a great cheer from the balcony when Gordon passed by – so this time it was Leslie doing the embarrassing! Once again, I was fighting back tears. Then just a few years later watching Catriona graduate from Leeds University – another tearful moment... And I'm the girl who never used to cry about anything when I was a teenager.

Gordon and Emma getting married was another highlight; then a few years later the arrival of their new baby darling Archie – followed by littlest angel Isobel and observing how delighted Gordon is to be a Dad – more happy tears. Amazed and awed by Catriona's enterprise organising her British Council TEFL placement on La Reunion and finding work and accommodation there for two more years. Catriona organising James to visit her in La Reunion and him having a fantastic holiday there with her. Catriona training as a teacher and writing amazing reports. I look back to the days when she was at secondary school when I would be up all night through the dawn chorus, helping her with essays – not needed now. Also being super impressed at the way James does his teaching work including so much teacher cover work, even though he hasn't technically managed to get his teaching qualification yet – if only it could be awarded for his experience and ability.

I am in awe of James and Catriona for the challenging work they do as teachers, which would terrify me; and am also awe-struck by Gordon having gone so far in his financial career while juggling the challenges of marriage, parenthood and building work on two houses and being such a wonderful husband and father. Spending time with our lively grandchildren is so precious. It is also a delight to see the look of joy on James' face when he sets out on the water in a kayak or cuddles his dog Micah. Seeing how close Catriona and James are and the times they spend together, often joined by partners Edward and Wayne, doing simple activities like cooking or playing games. All these things make my heart sing.

Whenever I feel any minor (or even major) irritation with Leslie (which does occasionally happen - astounding!) I remind myself that he is the father of my children and that we are inextricably linked because of that – not just because of the biological connection, but because of the years of being parents together, sharing so many hopes, dreams, concerns and efforts for our family – not always getting it right, but, like most parents, loving our children more than we could express and being bonded to them in so many ways – going back to the idea of the family tree; our branches joined together, and now with achingly adorable grandchildren added to the leafy profusion. Of course, I understand some people feel like that about their children, yet have irreconcilable differences with partners, so they can no longer stay together, whatever the reason. It is sad when young children are involved, but I realise there may be complicated insoluble factors, and nobody should judge from the outside. But for me Leslie is a vital part of the family equation.

Leslie and I are thankful that for the most part we are compatible and happy together. There is a deep bond and comfort in having known each other since we were teenagers and having (to some degree) grown up together. We have been fortunate in how our lives have worked out. There has been passion and love, but I do not think that those factors alone are enough for a relationship to survive long-term. There have been some blissful times, but we have also had to work at it, to compromise, to provide mutual support at difficult times, and to look for the best in our partners rather than focusing on what is less appealing or downright infuriating.

It has been a joy (most of the time...) being married to Leslie and it is a pleasure to see the lovely people our trio have become. We are so lucky that, even now our children are adults with their own different views and life choices, we continue to have a close bond with them, regardless of the odd storm to weather. It is a cliché to say that our family is the most important thing, but like so many clichés this is a deep truth for us as for so many others. But however important our family life is, Leslie and I both believe it is important to have other interests, and ultimately those experiences should enrich our family life and relationships and stop us becoming overly dependent on either each other or our children. We have some interests that we share and others that we pursue independently. I have had fun singing in choirs and individually for most of my adult life. However, acting has remained my favourite activity and my passion. Some of my most fulfilling times have been performing in plays and directing them; Leslie also enjoys acting but is less obsessed by the theatre than I am.

Like me, Leslie has appeared in most of the plays that Ladbroke Players have performed, making it a great shared activity for us. But Leslie has not felt the same

desire to branch out into other groups as I have done, acting with the *Attic Players* in Skelmorlie; *Tower* and *Sedos* groups in other parts of London. Being so busy with Huguenot charity work and genealogical research, he would not really have time for more acting – it is hard enough sometimes getting him to attend Ladbroke Player rehearsals and spend time learning lines, even though he enjoys audience adulation once he is on stage! And now that he has returned to his outdoor swimming with renewed enthusiasm that also takes up a lot of his time.

Leslie's latest aquatic aim seems to be to get in the river every day of the year and swim (when not prevented by awkward tide times or sewage discharge!). He continues to exemplify the maxim quoted in the Scottish comedy film *Gregory's Girl*. "*Why are boys obsessed with numbers?*" For the past year Leslie has taken the water temperature most days and kept a record of how far he has swum, setting new targets as his mileage increases and weather improves. In the first months this exercise meant he also started shedding some weight, so initially he also weighed himself regularly, carefully clocking the weight loss. Bordering on obsession perhaps, but good for him. I join in the swimming during warmer weather.

There is a small band of other keen swimmers who join Leslie from time to time which increases the social congeniality and the sense of competition. I suppose it is akin to the core group who swim in an equally dedicated manner most days at the Serpentine, Hampstead Ponds and other outdoor swimming spots. For a few years Leslie swam regularly at the Serpentine when we lived near Hyde Park. This resulted in a brief period of fame thanks to his diving skills. Back in 2009 James was travelling on the tube one day and saw a big poster advertising *The Times* newspaper with a photo of a man diving into the Serpentine (proclaiming how early in the morning the paper was delivered just as swimmers entered the Serpentine). As James gazed at the picture, he thought the body outline looked strangely familiar and began thinking "*Is that Dad?*" It transpired that *The Times* had indeed sent a photographer to the Serpentine a while before and taken pictures of swimmers there (with permission and including Leslie). Leslie was thrilled and rang up the paper to order a few copies of the photo which now adorn our house.

I enjoy open water swimming too, but my system can't cope with very cold weather, so I wait for April or May before I venture in – and then wrapped up in neoprene gloves and booties and possibly a shorty wetsuit till summer arrives. But Leslie scorns all such accessories. His one concession to winter weather is to put a woolly hat on top of his swimming cap! However, he has invested in a waterproof camera which provides another outlet for his creative energies (and helps him record the water temperature). He has taken some beautiful shots of the water and sky, especially early morning and evening when the light is evanescent. This has led to him entering the world of social media (late in the day - apart from previous occasional spying on my Facebook account!) He has joined Instagram so he can post photos and look at other people's masterpieces. Once again, the numbers obsession reared its head while he spent several weeks counting how many followers he had acquired! The pictures are beautiful, but I am more likely to use social media to keep track of drama groups and theatre, keeping an eye out for productions I want to see (when we are allowed back in the theatre) or plays that might be possibilities for putting on, or keeping in touch with far flung friends.

Our own drama group has brought us several close friends – working creatively on a production engenders a great team spirit, and a special fellowship and camaraderie develops with the core members who work the hardest together on a project. Another happy dimension to our amdram has been having our children take part. Gordon was not a hugely keen performer –acting in our panto *Dick Whittington* was the extent of his onstage participation, though he did once operate the lighting for a show and would quite often watch us from the audience – however in his younger years this sometimes ended in him falling asleep! James and Catriona have been more active participants, sharing our interest in the theatre, and both doing drama A level at school. They have been loyal audience members and performed in several of our plays from an early age until recently. James appeared in quite a few early shows, before turning his energies to trampolining. More recently it has been a joy to have James back acting in several of my productions, but with the current Covid 19 crisis who knows whether our group will manage to put on another play or not? The last play that Ladbroke Players performed, a week before lockdown, was titled, perhaps prophetically, *And Then There Were None*. We shall see...

Leslie's genealogical research and open water swimming interrupt his acting sometimes, and are where much of his passion is directed, along with architecture and local history. Unlike Leslie I've no desire to aim for competitive long-distance swimming targets (I'm too slow and get too cold) but we both enjoy swimming for fun on holiday, and so many of our holidays and expeditions we have had together have been highlights in our lives – walking, cycling and swimming outdoors, whether in lakes, lochs, sea or river. And like Leslie, I find that swimming clears my head and washes away every-day cares. Our cycle tours in Scotland and hill walks in the Lake District have also been brilliant – along with many glorious family holidays on Colonsay, and my solo trips to Cornwall singing at Endellion and coastal walking. All these activities and people have brought great happiness.

But nobody can be happy all the time and every life will have its share of pain, whether because of illness, accidents, personal challenges, or other traumatic circumstances. Apart from a period of clinical depression, I have tried most of my life to face difficult times with equanimity and optimism – even if I've expressed occasional doubts to my long-suffering husband (prompting him to accuse me of Eeyore-like tendencies). Whereas my view is that anticipating possible problems is a form of optimism – you won't be disappointed if you prepare for things not working out! I would say I am either a hopeless or hopeful optimist as deep down I hope and feel that most things will work out, at least on a personal level – but then I have not had to cope with real catastrophes.

Looking at global problems one can hardly avoid feeling despair and frustration at the scale and complexities of the challenges facing the world. But even that lacks the personal element that must strike grief and horror into hearts when random tragedies like murder, accidents, sudden death or debilitating illness occur.

I don't really believe in astrology; however, my mother was intrigued by star signs and would sometimes read horoscopes for fun. We recognised there might be a few traits that seemed to relate to particular signs, while realising there was also a lot of hocus pocus. Nancy was a Sagittarius and felt that one reason she got on well with grandson Gordon was that he was a fellow Sagittarius! I am a Gemini and don't

know if I'm typical – but there are certainly two sides to my personality, one that is introvert and quiet, retiring, steady - the other more extrovert, exhibitionist and impulsive. Catriona is also Gemini but right on the cusp, being born on 21 June, Midsummers Day, and I would say she is more strongly extrovert and passionate. But while she can be spontaneous, volatile and whirlwind there is a side to her nature that is more methodical and organised, embracing structure – verging on obsessive - both sides probably help her in her teaching career, not to mention her “hard stare” that can terrify all of us!

To use an analogy from a book by one of my favourite authors, Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, I would say in general I am more of an Elinor than a Marianne, but I have elements of Marianne, whereas Catriona is the other way round, and comes across as a more exciting and dramatic personality. In fact, she is quite similar to her father in some ways! However, as I try to point out to such overtly passionate people who express all their feelings (like my dear daughter) if they accuse me of being boring or too restrained – Elinor was not boring, and she felt things deeply underneath her calm and ostensibly sensible exterior. With me, the contrasting sides of my personality may be what draws me to acting; but may also relate to my having developed what was diagnosed as (probably mild) bipolarity.

When I went through episodes when I was quite “*high*”, punctuating long low periods, which my doctor decided must be due to bipolarity (known in more alarming terminology as manic depression), I became more open about expressing my feelings and ideas – perhaps to an embarrassing or inappropriate degree if I was in a manic phase – while in periods of depression I became withdrawn and “shut down”, retreating to my bedroom to read books, or curled up watching TV, usually endless repeats of detective series like Taggart, Morse and Poirot, where I could just escape from the world, feeling unable to face seeing even friends I was fond of, and being paralysed by anxiety and indecision, and trapped in a dark fog.

But this phase was only to afflict and overwhelm me for a few years in middle age, as I approached and passed 50. My doctor said it was relatively unusual for someone to develop this type of mental illness so late on, but not impossible. I think in my case it was triggered by specific factors and maybe the seeds had been lying dormant while everything else in the garden was relatively lovely.

This trauma was possibly related to hormonal issues with the menopause, maybe also to sadness over my mother's death ; but I think most overwhelmingly it was due to a horrendous and stressful dispute with my brother over legal and property issues, which lasted several years and left me feeling paralysed by depression, inaction and anxiety about most of my life, partly because the situation seemed so intractable for a protracted period – although thank goodness the trickiest elements were eventually resolved to a large extent. My brother and I have a relationship now that is amicable; but there is a slight wariness still and a feeling that some issues lurk in the background that could rear their ugly head again.

It was particularly painful because a relationship was poisoned with someone in my family of whom I had been very fond. Also, in some ways it felt like I was caught in the middle of a dispute with husband on one side and a brother on the other, trying and failing to please either of them, and feeling increasingly upset and

bewildered by my brother's behaviour. This was compounded by stressful aspects of my School Administrator job. I was fortunate that I had a supportive family, caring friends – both at church and in other areas of my life - and a wonderful doctor who provided me with the right treatment over the years when things were particularly difficult. Primarily Leslie and my children provided huge support and encouragement, on an emotional and practical level.

The situation was hard to comprehend since for most of my life I was regarded by myself and others as a calm, well-balanced person who would be a steadying influence on my husband and other people, even if I might succumb occasionally to a little ditzy behaviour. Most friends and relations would have said that if anyone was a bit mad in our family it would be Leslie! So, it was hard for me and Leslie to countenance the idea that I might be suffering from a mental illness, but eventually I accepted that I was, and acknowledged that I needed help to get through the tunnel.

Most of the time I was able to give quite an objective view of how I was feeling either to doctors or friends, and I could appreciate that on a logical level I was a fortunate person with many blessings – but that did not stop me suffering terrible anxiety and insomnia – and for a while I was on a terrifying cocktail of HRT, antidepressants and sleeping pills! I never felt tempted to commit suicide or to harm anyone else (always two of the unnerving questions asked by psychiatrists), but I did wish that I would not wake up in the morning because I didn't think I could cope, and I felt trapped in a black cloud and could not see a way out. But when on anti-depressant medication I also got high with buzzing periods of hyperactivity when I would imagine I could take on ridiculous challenges and projects, and feel intensely productive, or behave in an embarrassing manner.

Of course, nowadays many people are described as bipolar and are willing to admit to this; thank goodness the stigma of mental illness has hugely decreased, although I think it is still hard for people who have not experienced that trauma really to be sympathetic. It seems almost incredible to me now, looking back on that dark and unsettling period, having returned to being a positive and mostly calm person. This is thanks to the support I have had, to effective on-going medication, and to most of the stressful situations being resolved. But it was as though something in me had been triggered and might not be completely reversed – which is why I have felt reluctant to give up the lithium that has helped to keep me on an even keel for ten years. It even feels worth putting on the extra weight that it may have exacerbated! Although it is frustrating not being able to squeeze into favourite items in the wardrobe which I can't quite bring myself to dispose of. More ill-founded optimism? I guess I need to acquire some resolve to cut down on the calories...

Leslie's view is I just need to do lots more open water swimming like he does, and he may be right. I do attempt some, but I can't manage his distances, even knowing that cold-water swimming is increasingly recommended nowadays to combat depression as well as for losing weight, and general well-being. Leslie's regular swimming recently has helped him acquire a slimmer-line body profile; however, he is yet to shed all his spare flesh (but of course he needs to keep some to maintain his inbuilt wetsuit for long-distance swimming). I have also tried to explain that in addition to exercise, serious weight loss requires cutting down on calorific items like tubs of ice cream, biscuits, crisps and doughnuts as well as alcohol, but the

Homer Simpson part of Leslie's brain is reluctant to accept this. Like Winnie-the-Pooh he often thinks it is "*time for a little something*" (or several somethings).

Of course, for many people, an escape from stress at work or just everyday life is alcohol. Leslie enjoys his gin and tonic and wine; occasionally cider or whisky; and our younger generation possibly drink even more (some of them would probably blame the stress of being teachers!). They don't really drink excessively – it's just I drink so little. Those who know me well know I have no interest in alcohol and hardly ever drink it. I drank a bit at university, wine and the odd gin and tonic, and can remember feeling quite worse for wear after too much wine at one or two parties. But I soon decided that it was a terrible waste of money to buy alcohol and I wasn't keen on killing off my brain cells (don't think I can afford to lose many of those). I observed that plain tonic water was a lot cheaper than gin and tonic and tasted virtually the same. I also didn't like getting sick or feeling out of control.

Having suffered periodically from some bad headaches or migraines I don't want to risk doing anything to bring one on. I find it hard to understand the attraction of drinking too much, particularly after witnessing stupid, embarrassing or aggressive behaviour of drunk people. Maybe I'm a grumpy killjoy or a prig, but when you see or hear the misery caused by alcoholism I don't think so. I'm happy if people drink in moderation, but not to excess. Perhaps I should confess at this stage that the night Leslie and I got engaged, I almost broke off the engagement when he got drunk and was sick all over the mattress in my university room! The perils of a free wine and cheese party combined with Leslie turning 21 and getting engaged. I forgave him – and I don't think he's ever got quite that drunk again... (He didn't have a stag party luckily so that reduced the likelihood of excessive imbibing.)

Neither have I felt any serious desire to experiment with smoking cigarettes or other drugs; tobacco seems a stupid, dangerous habit that is a waste of money, creates an unpleasant and unhealthy atmosphere for other people, is bad for your skin, makes your clothes smell horrible, and long-term is hugely dangerous for your health – just one look at a picture showing a tartar-covered lung is enough to put me off. And being quite literal and safety-conscious, means I've only got to read one story of someone dying after taking an Ecstasy pill or injecting heroin to reinforce my belief that most recreational drugs are a bad idea physically, mentally and financially. I don't think I could face watching *Trainspotting* however good a film it is.

However, this cautious (some might say anal) viewpoint didn't stop me laughing at Brenda Blethyn smoking a cannabis cigarette in the film *Saving Grace*, and thinking maybe it could be quite fun just once... I also accept that cannabis may have beneficial medical effects (yet can trigger psychotic behaviour in others...) Leslie had a brief phase of smoking Sobranie cigarettes in his youth, and has occasionally tried a cigar, but otherwise he's been almost as abstemious as me in tobacco consumption. Leslie sometimes wishes he had the abandon to try smoking a bit of weed – but I suspect we've both left it too late for such illicit experiments. We will need to seek our thrills in outdoor swimming escapades or elsewhere!

All this moderation may make me seem like a repellent goody-two-shoes, but my self-control goes out the window when it comes to food. (I guess we've all got a weak spot.) I enjoy cooking, but I don't like to spend too much time on it apart

from special occasions, tending to stick to tried and tested recipes unless I feel a sudden urge to experiment. I love going out for meals – especially French or Italian, though I am just as happy going for a cheese and tomato toastie at a café as having a fancy dinner (preferably followed by an Italian ice-cream sundae...longing to get back to Nardini's ...). If my Scots blood didn't tell me it was a waste of money, I would happily eat out every week. Steak, lamb chops, burger & chips – yum. I try to fix vegetarian food for us sometimes, but don't have the willpower to give up meat altogether. I would find it difficult to give up food I love, and that should give me an understanding of what it's like to be addicted to alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. But I fear I have too risk-free a mindset to sympathise much with what seems like self-induced folly. (Maybe I have Puritan ancestors?)

Yet addiction to drink, drugs or gambling is as much a mental illness as bipolarity or compulsions like OCD and eating disorders, so I ought to be sympathetic. One possible downside of recovering from something like that is it may make one less accepting of frailty, like the zeal of the religious convert or the smoker who has given up and can't understand why others don't follow suit. However, as with many difficulties in life, there is also a good side to my bipolar experiences, in that I think they have made me more sympathetic to those suffering mental health issues. I always had sympathy for those who had a physical or mental handicap, like my older brother Kenny with his autism, but I tended to dismiss those with other forms of mental illness, thinking inwardly *"they should just pull themselves together"*. Now I know it is not that simple, even if I am still on a learning curve as to what constitutes mental illness, and how much it can be combated by one's own efforts.

I have been fortunate in that improved circumstances, family, friends and doctor and effective medication have combined to make me feel so much better, as if I am now sailing in calmer waters, but also filled with renewed energy for life. This may have also taken some effort and discernment from me as to where to steer my ship of life, but much of it feels like a blessing I could not earn. There have been some painful and difficult episodes along the way, but nothing compared to the heartache and horror that some people have to contend with. My heart goes out to those who are not so blessed, and I try not to take my happiness for granted – and to keep on with the acting and the swimming – and maybe a few grandparent duties! So, as many of our Serps friend sign off – yours swimmingly!



Leslie & Alison 2019