

My Introduction

“Push! Push harder, girl! Really try now, NOW!!!!” It's no good, sir –she's got nothing left...” “ it's well and truly stuck, isn't it?.....” “Forceps, please, Nurse” “...Oh dear me, what a difficulty...” “Sir, the mother,s not doing too well.....” The familiar, calm voice of the obstetrician cut through all the other clamorous cacophony of the operating room, ‘Nancy, Nurse Millar, can you hear me, my dear? We have a serious problem with this baby of yours – the head is wedged so firmly, that unless we crush the skull with forceps, you are BOTH going to die...I'm so sorry.....’ “NOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!” The scream of agony ripped through the room like a sawblade ‘You are NOT to do that – Kill me if you must...but let this baby live!!’” At the moment the surgeon's hands hovered in indecision, with one final burst of energy from God only knows what source, my mother heaved convulsively, and I was propelled into the world, gasping for life, and covered in blood.....how extraordinary, that first experience of my life has so many points of similarity with the turning point of being born again,...Someone willing to die for me.....to give me life.....covered with Blood....if only I had had the wit to realise this earlier on!!

But then this story would not have been written; and , may it please God, perhaps there is something that can be learned by others from my journey through this vale of tears, this pilgrim's progress. Which has been lit up from time to time along the way with meetings with remarkable people ,in extraordinary places, and always with ,as the sweet psalmist of Israel said, 'songs in the night'

Music is still a passion with me, and has been very important in shaping my life – it's force of influence is so strong, that it can be frightening to look back and see the power it has wielded over my mind, my emotions, my behaviour - the very paths that I took..... it has the power to exalt or debase, enhance or annihilate – you think I am exaggerating? – Read on.....

Early years

It was, apparently only the first in what was to become a series of dramatic encounters with death in my life...

At only a few months old, I managed to turn on my front on a sheepskin rug and proceeded to choke on the wool; inhaling this made me unable to breathe, and it was only the timely intervention of my parents, who were mercifully medically trained for such an emergency, that prevented my choking to death . I cannot say that I remember this happening, but it left me with a legacy of terrifying night terrors that seriously disturbed my ability to sleep peacefully for many years. I would wake up with the most powerful fears and physical sensations of choking...smothering...and terrifying claustrophobia which in an instant would change to a feeling of falling into a dark pit...I found it impossible even to go to bed without a nightlight, and more often than not would wake so frightened that I had to spend the rest of the night in my

parent's bed – poor darlings, their love life must have been totally disrupted by my antics..

I think they hoped that matters would improve when we finally moved into our own house. We had lived for nearly two years in a number of boarding houses all over England, while my father searched for and finally secured a medical partnership to join. This had been a long search; as a newly-qualified G.P. he was of unproven value to a medical practice.

I was constantly told that I would “grow out of it” – but it was unfortunately not going to be that easy...

Some Musical Memories

I suppose that it was around the time I was two that I can begin to really remember things as they happened, not just the stories I have been told about those early days. I remember my mother singing to me at bedtime, sometimes for hours, to try and calm me enough to go to sleep. She had been raised in the West Indies as a child; and as was the custom of the day in the Colonies, had a native nurse who spent a great deal of the time with her. This good woman was obviously a fount of musical traditions herself; native songs of Africa, bewildering dramatic tales of slavery, and a rich source of what were called Negro Spirituals. These were my first musical memories; rich and powerful words and strange melodies were the songs of my childhood, all very emotionally charged and very different from everyday England.....

“Swing low, Sweet chariot...comin’ for to carry me home....”.

I wondered, in my innocence, why the thought of being somewhere else was so very important to the people who sang these songs; and I would look at my mother's face and wonder if she sometimes wasn't longing for some sweet other place....

..unexplained tears would softly fall down her cheeks, as she rocked me in her arms and tried to chase my fears away.

My mother had a beautiful singing voice, which she used all the day long, singing show tunes from the films that she and my father had seen, or hymns or nursery rhymes. But at night her voice would take on a special resonance and beauty, as she sang of long ago or a longing for this place called Home. What or where was this mysterious place that evoked such feeling, such longing, expressed in these songs that I heard, and derived comfort from every night of my young life? I only knew that they chased the shadows away and kept the nightmares from overwhelming my chance of a peaceful night's sleep. Good enough for me, then.....

So I grew up in an atmosphere filled with music, and love....my parents adored each other; they had met and fallen in love on a troop ship going to India at the start of World War Two, and I believe had only had eyes for one another ever since; and so it continued, for the rest of their lives. There was an unusual and touching devotion that was plain to see, and an inspiration to us, their children, and to their many friends and family members who they also loved fervently and practically; our house was always filled with people just ‘dropping in’ to visit us. Their hospitality was renowned and quite extraordinary, given the demands on their time and energy; with health, wealth and job challenges always at the fore, They always seemed to put others first, and we learned from an early age just how real those sacrifices were,

when we were challenged each Christmas to give away our favourite toy to Dr. Barnardo's (a charity for orphans.) That's where the rubber hits the road, believe me! And even then, I knew there was to be NO CHEATING, for our mother had told us that God and Jesus would know if we chose a toy that was unimportant to us...!!!

Christmas Carols

Still, that was just a part of the most wonderful, magical, part of the year for us..I loved Christmas so much, it had so many ingredients of excitement and pleasure, it was almost unbearable...from the writing of lists of presents longed for, and despatched to this benevolent Santa Claus;[though we knew he was really Dad dressed up] ;through the ritual of dressing the tree with treasured ornaments brought out every year(to be artistically bestowed in a new way, of course!).

Every year we would have a Carol Singing party, where Mamma would make us and our friends dress up in red crepe paper cloaks and bonnets, and give us lanterns on bamboo sticks; and take us out to sing Christmas songs to the people in our neighbourhood . There was of course, the irresistible lure of her home cooked party food when we returned, ravenous . Our mother was an amazing and imaginative cook. Her recipes were a fusion of Indian, Caribbean, and very poor English food; not poor in quality, but we were very fiscally challenged in those days...not that you would have noticed, her feats of feasts were legendary!

There was an extraordinary feeling of comfort and joy at Christmas, only rivalled by the incredible mounting excitement of us three children anticipating the arrival of Santa Claus and his reindeer on our rooftop...we always tried to stay awake, hearing fantasy hoofbeats every minute....I cannot remember when I finally realised that this person we were waiting for was not a real, big ,fat and furry being decked in red who would creep down our chimney and into our bedrooms!! I think I would have preferred a reindeer, actually....