

Chapter 12

My youth is disappearing fast and my younger years have gone.

My mother, surprisingly, although I did not consider it at the time, went back to Mauritius with my father. I was not to know it but I was not to see Mauritius for another forty six years.

We must have been to Canterbury previously to buy all the clothing needed for school. We wore white shirts, stiff wing collars, black jackets and pin stripe trousers and a blue and straw boater when going out. There was also all the sports wear. The fees must have been enormous but the school was intended to give me a good education. Consider what my parents could do for the best. They could have taken me back to Mauritius where the political situation was difficult if not precarious. I could have gone to South Africa which I was not familiar with, or I could stay in England. All in all England with "good educational facilities", arrangements for holidays fixed with my Godmother, Ninette, seemed the very best option. David Stevenson would be at the same school.

Would I cooperate? Would I settle? Did these considerations come into play? Would they have known what to do if they didn't?

The upshot was that I should go to King's Canterbury and we set off from Buxted, David and I, and we were left at this strange place in Canterbury.

David went to "The Grange" and I don't think I saw him to speak to again in all our school days. The house I was allocated to was "Linacre" which was not ready for us. I stayed for a term in each of "Lardergate" and then "Lattergate" before going to Linacre where my House-master was Humphrey Osmond. I kindly man but rather insignificant as far as I remember.

One has to go there to appreciate the historic aspect of our surroundings in the precincts of the Cathedral. It was a truly magnificent place to be.

I was shy, different to others, and not happy. I wished to belong but it was not my scene and I think I was resentful. I was not a good pupil. French was a doddle and I lacked interest, when Latin came along they did it all with an English pronunciation whereas I had a French slant on it. History was all note-taking and anyway why should I be interested in English history? At one time I was interested in maths but this faded quickly. Later I had to choose between classics and "science", I chose the latter. By this time I was not too interested in any schooling and rather gave up, did the minimum possible and faded fast.

My music career was non-existent. Sports were anathema to me, the cold of Kent winds of the North Sea kept me from enjoying any field sport. I was not really interested in "fives" and the gym was just about Ok. Gymnastics and athletics I could take as it was a summer activity. Cricket did not interest me. I wonder what did; I had no enthusiasm for anything it seems to me.

The 1950's was an interesting time to live and perhaps the 1960's even more so. The war was only five years away and some rationing was still in force until about 1953. We certainly had sweet rationing when I was at King's and this was the last to be lifted.

Lardergate is situated on the Green Court. I remember someone practicing the clarinet close-by, a haunting sound. Is that why I enjoy Aka Bilk? In Mauritius long trousers were not needed, here they were necessary. Chilblains were a constant source of irritation, the cold dreadful. Traditions such as Guy Fawkes had to be explained to me, I had never heard of these things. I just went along with what came my way. I do not

remember making any friends in these early days. I wrote to my parents in Mauritius from time to time, I think my spelling was awful; phonetics did not work well because of the French pronunciation. I spoke English; however I had a definite accent or lilt which lasted for years as far as I know.

The Christmas was spent; I am sure, with the Little family in Puttenham near Guildford. Ninette>Eveline>Auguste was my Godmother who was married to George Little. Because that family is important to my life I will say something about them here.

I knew Ninette from our time in Brighton (1947?) I know that Marilyn visited and stayed with us there. She remembers that I misbehaved in some way (did I pee over the balcony?). I will have to ask her about it. I also remember that during that time they lived at Midhurst, George was a TB doctor at the hospital on the hill. It was winter because there is a photo of us in the snow overlooking the stands of Goodwood racecourse. There was a feast at the Sanatorium with food that was rarely seen; TB patients were well cared for and had special foods. Refrigerators were not common and they had a "larder" consisting of a latticed metal box which hung outside to keep the dairy products cool.

Much later George had a job in Hascombe at Charles V Hospital. The house in Puttenham, known as "Birdshanger" was bought at auction by Ninette, it was wooden with a thatched roof and quite cold. Marilyn had two brothers, Julian and Nicholas known as Nicky. I felt at home here, Ninette treated everyone with kindness and dignity, there were outhouses and grounds in which to play and the room I was allocated was "my room". The living room was usually cosy and the clean smell of wood smoke, food and polish predominated. Mrs Crouch came to clean and help out once or twice weekly.

Ninette was New Church and lived all her life keeping to those precepts. She encouraged the young in a religious life so we had the New Church Pastor visit from time to time. Her efforts at getting us/me to do twenty minutes of homework every day was doomed to failure. Ninette was very good at organising our social life and teas on the lawn, picnics in the garden and other such activities were always anticipated with a sense of joy. There were frequent guests; it was a real privilege for me to be with them. I remember rotovating the tennis court which became much used and a focus of activity. There were two brothers who came to tend the vegetable garden on Saturday mornings. They were Surrey born and bred and had rich deep voices with a real Surrey accent.

After a year in Lardergate I went to Lattergate. There was a table tennis table in the hall and I played a bit but there was no instruction or guidance, I think that I could have been interested in enhancing my meagre skills in this sport. I don't think we recognised it as a sport, just a pastime. My desk was next to that of Gillett, I think his father was a famous opera singer. I remember nobody there.

I think it must have been Easter 1953 or 1954 when I was in Puttenham. Marilyn, Julian and I took bicycles up to Puttenham Common; we asked Ninette's permission and went off with three rather decrepit bicycles. The Common is set on a hill and has many ups and downs, quite short but fun to rush down and walk up. On the first of these I fell at the bottom, on soft ground, I believe over a mole-hill. My side ached and I was unable to walk as I was in some pain, I thought I had broken a rib. Marilyn, who must have been about ten or eleven, had to go to the nearest house to seek help. I don't know how I got to Birdshanger but remember lying on the drawing room sofa.

Ninette had the difficult task of advising everyone and deciding what to do. I think she rang George who was a TB specialist then working at King George V Hospital near Hydestile, it is to his credit that he immediately diagnosed a ruptured spleen. I was taken to the part of that hospital that was an annex to St Thomas' hospital and at two in the morning they operated on me. The hospital was essentially a double row of Nissan huts with 20 patients in each hut, ten on each side. I remember my stay there very well. Next to me was a man who had hiccoughs for three days and then died; I woke one morning to find him gone. My religion was noted as Swedenborgian and a Swedish nurse thought I was Swedish, there were not many foreigners in England at the time. For a while I had a wheel chair, I fell out once and there was a panic that I may have injured myself again. I kept a "lucky" Mauritian rupee in my pyjamas pocket; one day it fell into the lavatory pan and I had to fish it out. That coin is still somewhere in my possession; is that why I am still very fortunate? There were several policemen having an operation on their nose, this was in anticipation of them taking on the role of traffic cops on motorbikes. Why they needed this operation before they were injured I am not clear. I was unable to go to the top of Hydon's Ball and don't remember doing so until about 1979 when on a run with Michel, of whom more later, when I relate my sporting life; which started after the age of forty.

Ninette of course advised my parents by telegram of my accident, telephone communication was possible I think, but complicated and expensive. My mother one day turned up at the hospital, I was not there! I had gone with several other convalescent patients to the cinema in Godalming. It was an undoubted surprise to see my mother but I did not realise that she had returned for good. My convalescence lasted several weeks and I was missing school. We stayed in Puttenham and I think it was at this time when she introduced me to golf on Puttenham golf course. It was a week or two after discharge from hospital that she told me that she would not be returning to Mauritius.

When I got back to school I had missed several weeks. We had to do scouts or "corps" once a week; due to the convalescence I did not do anything too strenuous and did a "cardre course", I think it was map reading and such like.

My father returned to England in 1953 and took me for a holiday to the South of France where we stayed in the servants' quarters of a flat on the front belonging to Frank and Ivy Wilson, lifelong friends of my father. We were in the crowd at Princess Grace's marriage to the Prince of Monaco and I got a good photo of her in her car. We also attended the famous "Battle of Flowers" at the Cannes Film Festival. Celebrities in those days really were famous the world over, we saw many; it was before the age of television. I was lonely, we did things during the day but my father needed time to himself and went to the casino in the evenings.

On the way down to the South we stayed at The Mazerieux household in Poitiers. One of the Mazerieux had married a very nice man, Jean Buzenac. My aunt Emma with whom we had travelled from Mauritius in 1945 lived with them. As it happened my Uncle Dick arranged to be there on the same evening. It was a very pleasant time the brothers and sister had together.

We travelled in a new car my father had bought; it was a white Ford Zephyr,