

Memoirs of Mair Morris

My name is Mair Teresa Mabel Morris. I was born on 23 July 1946, the fourth daughter of Ryle and Alicemargit Morris, and I wrote my memoirs from around 2020.

Christmas at Bryn Myrddin

Advent was really the beginning of the Christmas season. It was very like Lent in that we usually gave things up — sweets etc. — and there were fast days. To go to Holy Communion in those days meant no food or drink except water before Mass which meant no breakfast until we got home. Late in November and early in December we began to think of Christmas presents to make for members of the family. Usually something small that was sewn or knitted or embroidered. We used to buy presents in Carmarthen for the maids and Jones and families. Often there were stormy nights in November with power cuts and we would work by hurricane lamp or candlelight and make toast on the drawing room fire.



December 6th was the Feast of St. Nicholas and was always an exciting day. We would put out our shoes in front of the fire and await Fr. Nicolo's bounty. We could never work out how the shoes were filled. When I was a bit older I would follow Mummy round and see how it was achieved but never succeeded in unearthing the magic. Every time I checked the shoes would be empty. We would often have been out in the car and arrive back in the dark to find that Fr. Nicolo had been! We were given a tangerine, some nuts and maybe some Christmas labels or cards to colour etc., only very small and useful presents, but the excitement was wonderful. We had all been told by Mummy how this was celebrated in Austria. The father of the family would dress up as Bishop Nicholas and another member of the family would dress up as the "crampus" or devil. He would chase the

children and make them all squeal with what Mummy would call “fearful joy”. He would then be sent away by Nicholas. Once Uncle Balthy did not warrant any presents in his shoes because he had misbehaved with his tutor and after several warnings had earned only a rotten potato in his shoes!

Christmas cooking was a full-time occupation in November and December. Mincemeat, Christmas cakes and puddings were all made from scratch down to the skinning of almonds in boiling water and soaking and chopping of candied orange peel, currants, sultanas and cherries. Enough was usually made to store until Easter as well as consume over the Christmas season. The Aga was a godsend and the big old kitchen was generally a hive of activity. No child under 14 was allowed to help decorate the Christmas tree but we were allowed to go with Mummy, Daddy and Jones to choose a tree from the plantation of about 12 trees behind the pond and walled garden. Once selected and cut down it would be brought into the drawing room where it stood in the right-hand window stretching up to the ceiling (it would have been about 15 ft high). From then on, the drawing room was out of bounds until Christmas Eve evening. The shutters were kept closed so there was no peeping! Decorating the house was allowed, however, and we used holly, ivy and fir behind pictures and tied to the bannisters with red crepe paper bows.

Once I was 14 I was allowed to help decorate the tree which was a lovely experience. The Austrian decorations were very beautiful – many made of glass. Angels were made of spun silk, and there were toadstools, bells, balls, birds and animals. Lighting was with real candles clipped to the fir branches with metal clips. A bucket of water and a sponge tied to a long bamboo stick was kept behind the tree in case of fire. For the last three days before Christmas we would find angel hair (tinsel) outside our bedrooms and down the stairs to the drawing room door to add to the expectation. I have still done this with our children and squeals of “The Angels have been!” were part of the magic leading up to Christmas.

On Christmas Eve we would prepare the buffet for the staff in the kitchen with trifles, meringues, cake and a large spread helped by Sandy, Mrs James, Mrs Howells, Beatrice and Maggie. The Mari Llwyd would be part of the fun for the staff party when one of the men would be dressed in the horse’s head and try and gain entry to the house. There would be lots of shrieking and squealing as he chased the women round the kitchen. Then he would be given some festive fare and things would calm down again!

We would dress up for the evening. Mummy always put on a long velvet blue dress and wore a beautiful moonstone necklace. I remember wearing a red velvet dress when I was about 4. I had whooping cough and was sick down it which meant I could go back to wearing my beloved green corduroy trousers! When everyone was ready we assembled outside the drawing room door. The youngest person would knock on the door and wait to hear the tinkle of the bell telling us that the angels had finished decorating the tree. We would all file in to behold the tree alight with candlelight. It was a truly magical sight. We would sing “O Tannenbaum” and “Stille Nacht” around it. Then all the candles would have to be extinguished and the lights switched on. We could see our presents on the piano laid out on a white sheet divided by ribbons with our names on them, but we couldn’t touch them. This was torture!! First we would all have to do a turn. Some would sing, others recite poems or play an instrument, including all the guests from the surrounding cottages. Geraint, Jones’s son, could whistle beautifully and Melvin, Beatrice’s son, could play the mouth organ. Then our guests were given their presents and they went home. I remember Ieuan Jones’s beautiful tenor

voice. He sang Myfanwy and Calon Lan outside the drawing room window at Christmas or New Year.

Only after all the guests had opened their presents, we were allowed to open ours. I don't remember much about the actual presents but do remember that we always had Turkish delight, Newberry fruits, Chinese figs, dates, marzipan and nuts to crack. After our "bescherung" (German for present giving at Christmas) I would be sent to bed and then woken up at about 11 pm to go to Midnight Mass. I would feel very sleepy. Church was absolutely packed to the rafters. Sometimes there would be a couple of tramps asleep and snoring on the back seats! Everyone wished each other Happy Christmas. The nuns used to give our family a present. We would get home by about 2 am. Everyone would be quite tired except for me. I was wide awake by then and very lively!

Next day was Christmas Day. It was a lovely morning without the tension of waiting for presents. We would all gather to read Milton's "Ode on Christ's Nativity". The sun would often be streaming across a frosty lawn and would catch glints on the tree decorations. I would be at leisure to look at or play with my presents, or read. We would of course have had to feed all the animals before starting to celebrate the day. For Mummy, I think Christmas Day was pretty stressful having to cook lunch for quite a few people. We were often given a goose or a turkey by one of the tenant farmers. Mummy would put the stuffed bird (which would have been plucked the day before) into the Aga at about 7 am and it would cook for several hours and be ready at about 1 pm. We would sometimes have someone who lived alone for dinner and we used to plate up a whole meal to take up to Mrs Howells at the cottages. After washing up it would be time to listen to the King's or Queen's Speech on the radio. Then it would be time to feed the animals again before it got too dark. The evening was spent playing games and cracking nuts. We would also help Mummy to open any family presents she had not had time to open and make a list of all the people we would need to thank. Over the festive period we would often sing carols round the piano.

Boxing Day was a completely different kind of day. There was usually a Hunt where I would be riding. Mummy and Daddy would often follow part of the way in the car. The Meets were real Welsh social occasions with crowds jostling and talking and laughing in both Welsh and English. Various Masters of Hounds would be known to become pretty jovial on the often rather strong stirrup cup that was handed round to all the riders. Many of the local farmers would not be formally dressed but have bits of string tied round their waists and be wearing old jackets, while the county set and their horses would be turned out beautifully. It was pretty hard work to get the pony ready and to reach the meet by 10.30 am and I think Mummy got quite exhausted driving the horse box and helping me. There were several meets through the Christmas holidays with the Carmarthenshire or the Llandeilo Hounds. We met at Coombe Cheshire Home, Hafodneddyn, Meidrim, Guildhall Square etc. I had a very bad fall one time and got a really painful ankle. My pony Daylight had slipped on the icy road and my foot was underneath her. She ran off and put her hoof through my riding hat which had fallen off! Mummy made a structure to hold the blankets off my foot because I couldn't stand the pain of any weight on it for a few nights.

New Year was a time when we played games in the evening, charades etc. It was also when we did melted wax fortunes. If Grandmama [Ilona Hoyos] was with us she would be the one to "read" the wax. To tell fortunes in this way, melted candle wax is dropped into cold water by each person. The shape of the solidified wax is used to predict the future, for example, a shape like a baby means that you might have a baby. Grandmama also used the shape of tea-leaves in the bottom of a cup to tell

fortunes. She would also do the Schattentheater (shadow theatre) which we all found hilarious. She had a real gift for telling stories and creating comedic characters. By January 6th, The Feast of the Epiphany, we took down all the decorations and had a lovely meal with trifle and used up lots of Christmas food.



In many ways my Christmas memories were not unlike Dylan Thomas' descriptions in "A child's Christmas in Wales" with uncles and aunts and grandparents and adult visitors falling asleep. There was often snow and ice. Skating on the Bishop's Pond was an annual pastime. We always waited for Daniel Jones, from the bus station, to test the strength of the ice. Once he deemed it safe we would be allowed on and I would join several of the skaters from Abergwili. It was quite deep and would begin to thaw at the edges and I can remember some boys falling in. Tobogganing in the pond field was fun and skiing on Mummy's huge old fashioned Austrian wooden skis. It all seems a lifetime away now but I know these happy times stayed in the memory of all the surrounding neighbours as well as in our own family.



Ice skating on Bishop's Pond, 1963. Ieuan Jones on the left, me third from left.

Other memories

I was born in 1946 and lived at Bryn Myrddin until my marriage in 1970 (boarding school and university apart). Looking back over a unique period it seemed that the 1950s was a time of stability and almost changeless from a child's point of view. There was a certain feudal timelessness about life at Bryn Myrddin, although I became conscious that the 1960s meant huge cultural upheaval in the outside world both morally and materially. My earliest memory was while I was in my pram at the top of the drive by the wall nearest the house having an afternoon rest. Jones was leading Puss the carthorse with Mary Ag very nervously riding bareback on him. He had a really wide back and Mary Ag nearly fell off!!

I had three older sisters. Elaine was 15 years older than me and was at Oxford by the time I was 3. Mummy made an amazing replica cake of her college to take up to Oxford for her 21st. I remember Elaine best when she was first going out with Michael. I was often sent out with them as a chaperone!! He had a green Jowitt Jupiter sports car which I would be squashed into behind the only two front seats. He was a very fast walker and I had difficulty keeping up. I worked out a strategy of running ahead so that I could rest for a few seconds till he and Elaine caught up. They got married in 1956 in Barmouth, mid Wales. I was a bridesmaid with Mary Ag. Plans for a large wedding at Bryn Myrddin had been ongoing until Elaine decided to call it off. There was to have been a big tenants' lunch and many wedding presents had already arrived. In the end there was a small but happily resolved family occasion.

My second sister, Margie, went to school at St. Leonards and I remember crying every time she left to go to school. She met Richard at a young age. I clearly remember them walking hand in hand up Merlin's Hill to watch birds. Margie became the first sister to get married in 1955. It was a very exciting occasion. Elaine, Mary Ag and I were bridesmaids along with several others including French cousins. An incredible sugar-crafter came to ice the tiered wedding cake. He took up residence in the old kitchen for about three weeks doing lattice-work icing. Every stage had to dry before the next one could be done. It got knocked a few times by us and he had to mend it invisibly. Mary Ag got married in 1959. I was a bridesmaid again!! Bryn Myrddin was in the process of being made into flats so the wedding was a smaller family occasion. I remember Ray being very nervous. Mary Ag joined the Wrens [WRNS, Women's Royal Naval Service] when I was about 9 years old. Mary Ag and I were bridesmaids once more to a Carmelite nun whom Mummy knew at the Convent in Llandovery.

My dear sisters used to hide on the landing on the shelf near the hot cupboard and torment me when I jumped down the steps near there. They used to leap out at me and tickle me to death!! We had lots of fun playing hide and seek round the house and sliding down the wonderful bannisters, riding a huge rocking horse and playing bagatelle, although most of our time was spent doing jobs from our daily lists of tasks. Our lives were very educational in many ways. The old schoolroom was a fascinating place with an octagonal table with many drawers all containing interesting objects from many countries around the globe. There were cases of birds of paradise and boxes full of butterflies and moths collected by various members of the family during the previous century. My father used to tie fishing flies in the schoolroom. He was always a keen fisherman. We used to take him down to the River Cothi or the Towy and leave him there for a few hours. He seldom caught much and got very annoyed when Mummy and I went to fetch him and caught a few trout on the evening waters! I was usually given a fishing licence as an annual birthday present so that I could accompany Dad. I

loved being with him but was never really very keen on fishing as a pastime. Dad was an invalid because of his arthritis (also because he had been shot in the head in the first world war), so it was important to be able to help him. My job most days was to help him put on his shoes or fetch his walking sticks.

My parents worked hard in many ways keeping on top of the extensive grounds and walled gardens at Bryn Myrddin. Beef cattle were kept for fattening. A herd of goats was reared for milk, butter and cheese, mainly British Sarnens and Swiss Toggenburg (I learnt to milk them). Assorted ducks, chickens, pigs, cats, dogs, ferrets, ponies and Puss the carthorse all had their various uses. We were lucky to have a wonderful community of people living in the surrounding cottages and helping with the general daily running of Bryn Myrddin. In my time, Mrs Sanderson (Sandy) was our most regular helper. She lived in a one-bedroom house near the shop in Abergwili with her husband and children John and Renee. John was a typical boy and spent much of his time blocking drains at Bryn Myrddin much to Daddy's and Jones's irritation! Renee was a regular playmate and we were sent on errands picking nettles for soup and acorns for the pigs, but played a lot in the huge rhododendron bush at the top of the lawn. I was very fond of Sandy and she would always answer my childish and, later, teenage questions. Mrs James used to come with her on some days mainly to clean. I used to be very annoying, riding on her back while she was scrubbing floors, but both she and Sandy were so patient and good natured. Mr James helped me to pass my driving test by correcting my reversing and hill starts. I passed my test at 17 at the second attempt. Living in the country meant that being able to drive really changed my social life. Beatrice Evans used to come one day a week. She was a good cook and I still remember the cheesy potato croquettes she used to make for me. She lived with her husband Selwyn and son Melfin at Rose Cottage, the first cottage across the back lane. Mrs Howells was a wonderful lady who lived next door in Myrtle Cottage. She used to help in the old kitchen and churn butter in turn with Daddy. I remember when she slipped in the scullery and broke her leg. Her son Gerald gave me a radiogram to go to University with, very kindly.

When I was quite young Mrs Thomas, who lived in Abergwili, used to look after me. She used to spend ages putting my hair into ringlets which I hated, and I got very impatient. Once when Mummy was going to London I didn't want Mrs Thomas to do my hair so Mummy tried cutting it. She kept cutting one side shorter than the other. In the end she took me to Mr Dark [hairdresser in Carmarthen] who said the only remedy was to cut it like a boy! Anything was better than ringlets!! Mrs Thomas used to accompany me on holiday to New Quay where we would stay at the post office with a kind couple who I remember gave me Heinz tomato soup for the first time! We also used to get mackerel from the fishermen on the beach and they would be cooked for our evening meal. Mrs Thomas was a dainty bird-like lady with metal rimmed glasses. She patiently sat with me on the beach while I paddled and dug sandcastles. We were in New Quay for about a week during one or two summers until Mummy came to fetch us. Maggie Lloyd used to come to Bryn Myrddin as well, and she helped Aunt Mary [Mary Edith Morris, 1887-1974] upstairs on different days. She lived at the cottage beyond Myrtle Cottage with her husband Gwyn and two daughters, Anona and Marian. Both Maggie and Beatrice eventually moved house to Abergwili. Mrs Evans moved into Maggie's house and helped a couple of days a week in the later years.

Harry Jones was my father and mother's right-hand man. He lived higher up the back lane at Pencader with his wife Sally and son Geraint. Pencader was bought by Mr Richards of Alltyfyrddin (now farmed by his son and where you now find "the Merlin Experience" [in 2025, the farm is a

shop, heritage centre and guest house “Merlin’s Hill Centre”, <https://merlinshill.com/>) when Jones moved to the village after his wife died. Jones kept half a dozen cattle of his own that he used to milk in the cowshed above the outer garden. He always wore his flat cap backwards while he was milking! He came nearly every day to discuss jobs for the day, seeing Dad in his bedroom then sorting out things with Mum. He was an absolute stalwart who had a brilliant mind but very little formal education. He could tot up maths and measurements in his head absolutely brilliantly. I remember Geraint and Melvin playing rugby in the Saddle Field throwing each other Gary Owens (high balls) to catch. Tish and Daniel Davies moved into Rose Cottage when Beatrice moved to Abergwili. In recent years Tish became Mummy’s sole helper and when Mum left Bryn Myrddin she still cleaned after people had used the flat and kept the key etc. She is still there now, although her husband, Daniel, died a few years ago. He kept an immaculate garden. My daughter Bron, grandson Jude and I called on her on our visit to Bryn Myrddin in July 2019 and she hadn’t changed at all. I visited again with my daughter Lis and granddaughter Rose in 2023, and on my own in 2024.

Living in our house as a paying guest for a peppercorn rent was Miss Annie Sprake Jones. She was a great artistic influence on our lives. She lived in separate rooms in the east corner of the house where she could entertain her friends. Miss Jones came to lunch with us most days, as did Aunt Mary when she moved back to live in the front flat with the bow window (the room where I was born) after giving up her house in FFynonddrain on the outskirts of Carmarthen. Aunt Mary was always a night owl and invariably late for lunch which drove Dad mad! She taught me to read while eating her porridge at the dining room table. We read Beatrix Potter and she pinched my arm every time I got a word wrong! She used to wake us up in the middle of the night to go and pick up something we had left on the lawn or to put something away that we had left in the wrong place. She was very strict but she was a really interesting person and taught us a great deal. One thing I was very unhappy about was that she used to whip our collie Tinker because he used to tear the washing when it blew in the wind. Sadly Tinker was run over by a train at Ferryside when we went there to the beach one day. I have always felt it was in part my fault because I begged Mummy to let him come with us. I must have gone on a bit because she finally gave in and said yes. Poor Mary Ag was sent by Aunt Mary to identify him after the police phoned up with the news. We had had to come home without him after he had failed to appear when we called him and hunted for him.

As the youngest daughter, I grew up in an essentially adult world and I have many memories of people who came on a regular basis with skills which are now sadly dying out but which made my childhood an ever-exciting one. There was Mr Field, the mole trapper, who came two or three times a year. He used to hang his catches on a high wire fence outside the back door where they remained as a gruesome reminder to future unsuspecting moles! I used to sit beside him in the gun room and watch him clean and oil his and my father’s guns. I recall the chase-work designs on some beautiful pistols which Dad later sold at Sotheby’s for £16. The police used to call once a year to check on our dog and gun licences.

Then there was the blacksmith who came regularly to shoe Auntie Mary’s carriage pony, Bessie, Puss the carthorse and in later years Daylight, my first pony and then Sambo, the horse of my teenage years. If the blacksmith was too busy to come to Bryn Myrddin I would ride up the back lane to Brechfa to the smithy where the ponies would be shod while we waited. The smell of the farrier still brings back evocative memories. I had two memories of Daylight. The first was one day when there was a terrible thunderstorm. I went to catch her to put her in her stable but she got her halter round

her neck and caught on the telegraph pole near the paddock gate. Every time I got near her she reared up and the halter tightened and choked her. I eventually got her calmed down and into the stable but we were both soaked to the skin. I have never been too keen on thunderstorms ever since. The second sad memory was when Daylight got laminitis and had to be put down. I held her by the yew tree while the vet shot her in the head. I remember asking Mummy whether she would be in heaven if and when I died. Mum had an unfortunate accident with our Pembroke corgi Patsy. She was lying on the sweep outside the front door when Mum reversed the car over her without realising she was there. We called the vet and he came but she died three days later. I was sad but Mum was really upset. We had several cats, at one time as many as 17. One of them got under the horse box. The ramp used to fall off when Daylight kicked up about getting into the box and on one occasion it fell on top of a cat which got squashed. There was a favourite tortoiseshell cat called White Tip which used to be a really good ratter. She would lay out her catches every morning on the duck-house wall and wait till we came to admire them. There are always rats on farms and we used to have a couple of days a year when Jones would bring someone along with terriers. They would be shut into the hay barn and left to reduce the population. There were incredible squeals while this was happening! In that stable there was a knife sharpening machine which was fun to operate. The gipsies used to come every year and mend pots and pans and sharpen tools etc. They camped on the drive. The mother used to give Mum tips such as the famous swede with brown sugar which was supposed to help coughs. When the group left we were always one or two chickens down! We think they reckoned they were taken in payment for their services! An Irishman called Carol lived in a hut in the outer garden and we found him incredibly exciting and interesting. My parents let him live there for several years. We used to visit him and he would tell us stories. It was my job on a Sunday morning to go and tell him that we were ready to drive to Mass in Carmarthen. He would occasionally come with us but more often he would not be up after probably having consumed a fair amount of alcohol.

The cattle dealer called most weeks to look at the beef cattle (Welsh Black breed). When any bullocks were chosen to go to mart we would all have the exciting job of catching and driving them into the waiting cattle truck—often losing one or two up or down the back lane where they would have escaped past the lorry. Vets were regular visitors, usually dealt with by Aunt Mary, who was very knowledgeable about animals, particularly goats. She became a British Goat Society judge and donned her white coat for her duties at Carmarthen Agricultural Show for many years. The vet put down Aunt Mary's billy goat and various sick animals. There was a nasty vet who took great delight in putting down kittens in the back of his van and watching them thrash about in the box until the gas kicked in. Luckily nowadays things are much more humane. Mr Daniel Jones, the carpenter, was constantly working around the house and grounds. He wore dungarees and always had a pencil behind his ear. The painting of the outside windows was rather like the Forth Bridge [i.e. as soon as the job was completed, it was time to start again]! There was always repair work to be done, broken window sashes, pictures to hang, shelves to put up, gates to be mended etc.

Ieuan Jones was remembered for his beautiful tenor voice. He would sing Myfanwy and Calon Lan outside the drawing room window at Christmas or New Year. He ran a petrol station further along the A40 with a café attached called the High Noon. We occasionally went there for a meal. His daughter, Jean, played hockey for Wales and he was immensely proud of her achievement. He built his own house Merestead, below Bryn Myrddin along Hannah's Lane, using lots of building materials that he acquired from Bryn Myrddin. Ieuan was the builder who did the alterations to Bryn Myrddin

in 1958 – 1959, turning the house into seven flats. Six of them were let, while we retained the bottom front part of the house. There had been a couple of attempts to sell Bryn Myrddin as a school or hotel but none of these ideas materialised so the flats were decided upon. Mary Ag and Ray got married in 1959. The builders were still working then. I climbed on the roof to wave a flag to Mary Ag and Ray as they were leaving the wedding breakfast. I spent many hours on the roof climbing and sunbathing often with Philippa, my friend. Mummy used to have kittens about me being up there but the design meant that it was quite safe as there were flat duck-boards between the roof ridges. Jones used to get cross though because he thought I might dislodge the slates. To access the roof you had to go through the attic which was an exciting place full of interesting old boxes. Another regular visitor was Henry Marshall who became Mummy and Daddy's agent when things got too complicated for them to deal with. He advised on tenants' situations, rents, oversaw sales of farms and dealt with all the paperwork. He became a family friend and his help was invaluable.

Mum was very inventive and made several things herself, go-karts out of old prams, a toboggan out of two skis, bows and arrows, catapults etc. and various inventions which she thought up to help Dad, who was an invalid suffering from arthritis virtually for all the time I can remember him, such as a pulley to help get in and out of bed and to get in and out of the car etc. I have a faint memory of watching him ride a bike down the drive with Elaine. For most of my childhood he was in a lot of pain and could hardly walk from the dining room door to the table. We were always aware of the sound of his walking sticks as he limped down the long passages and always terrified that he would fall which he often did. I remember a day when Dad tried out an invalid car along the path above the lawn. He wasn't very good at technology and decided he couldn't cope with it. Things were to improve slowly as he began to visit Dr Gordon Latto in Reading. He was a pioneer Doctor in the orthopaedic world. He put Dad on various horrible diets such as liquid veg. drinks only for three days followed by two days of dry toast, dandelion coffee, no acidic fruit etc which Dad faithfully undertook in an amused and cheerful fashion. He finally had a hip replacement at the Nuffield Hospital in Oxford. He sustained a hairline fracture during the operation not picked up until two or three weeks after the op. He was in agony during physio until they realised. He made a slow recovery and then began to walk every day and tried to keep up a routine of walking a mile a day for the rest of his life. He died a year after our wedding in May 1971 of a chronic chest infection, so regretfully never saw our children.

My mother was nearly 40 when she had me and had gained in confidence with her own ideas about childcare and education. She decided to dispense with nurses and nannies who had attended my older sisters and bring me up herself. She embarked on a Parents' National Educational Union course for my early years and we awaited the monthly postal education pack which was both exciting and ahead of general nursery/primary school thinking. I did have a governess for a short time: Miss McCreath, who was very amiable but suffered from terrible nightmares in her bedroom, often carrying her mattress out on to the landing saying there were lions and tigers in her room! (Mary Ag has since suggested this was due to drink!!) She decided she could no longer continue in her role. For an even shorter time we had a French au pair, called Nicole. She was asked to leave when she sunbathed on the lawn in her bikini...not quite the done thing in Wales in the 1950s and it certainly got Jones talking!! When I was about four I started to learn the piano with Mrs Arthur Jones. She would come to teach Margie and Mary Ag and then I would have a lesson after them. She would stay for tea but didn't like it with our goats' milk which is rather an acquired taste! She was the first

person who I had ever heard of who preferred margarine to butter! Maybe that was said to avoid being given the goats' butter as well!

During the 1940s and early 1950s I have some memories of the prisoners of war who Jones used to set to work each day in the fields. There was a Polish young man called Saub who used to give Mary Ag and I chewing gum. In those days, the yard by the house was completely enclosed by a high wall (the wall was partly knocked down in 1959 to make car parking and rear entrance to the flats). Auntie Mary oversaw the reception of a large family of evacuees who were housed in the old brewing kitchen. She made them stand out in the yard and strip and get into tin baths to wash. Then they were sprayed with Flit and DDT to get rid of nits and fleas etc. Another annual use for the yard was the killing of the pig. Sandy, Mrs James and Mrs Howells were on hand to salt the bacon and make sausages. The bacon flitches were hung from the ceiling on meat hooks in the old kitchen. The pig being slaughtered was a rather horrible experience and the squeals were very upsetting. On the right-hand side of the yard there was a chute where coal was delivered into the larger of the two cellars. The smaller cellar nearer the old kitchen was where Mum tried to grow mushrooms with mixed success.

I attended the Roman Catholic primary school in Union St. Carmarthen for two or three years, where I was taught by Miss Eileen Jones, before going to boarding school at St. Leonards in Sussex. Things were very primitive at the primary school which was run by the Breton White Sisters (who Auntie Ai [Alice Abadam] had been instrumental in bringing over from France) and I have memories of the freezing cold outside toilets. The boys' and girls' concrete toilet block was divided by a wall, and the boys often climbed up the wall to look over! The loos were never too clean either. My mother once sent me to school in trousers as there was thick snow and I remember the humiliation of having to sit in the infant class in my liberty bodice until my parents were contacted to come and remove me from school. Trousers were not considered suitable school wear for girls. I remember having my knuckles rapped with a ruler quite often for being late or talking in class. The worst punishment, also quite frequent, was to stand on our desks with our hands on our heads until such time as the headmistress came into the classroom. Sometimes it could be a very long time and arms were aching by the time she came. On one occasion we were doing Physical Education outside and I slipped while walking along a balance beam with one leg on either side of the beam... most painful. I did not enjoy primary school there at all and always felt an outsider. One day we were taken to see a nun who had died in the convent next door to say a prayer by her bedside. She was dressed in her habit and looked very peaceful and was holding a lily. Her face was as white as a sheet. The second time I saw someone dead was when we found the driver of a cattle lorry by the back gate and I remember Mummy climbing into the lorry to close his eyes. He must have had a heart attack.

My mother, being Austrian, was a Catholic, and my father followed in the footsteps of his aunt, Alice Abadam and his sisters Mary and Vida and converted to Catholicism. It was very much a minority religion in Wales. It was a hard decision for him as he was a sidesman at Abergwili Church which was Church of Wales. My mother worked tirelessly for both the Catholic Church and Ecumenism in Wales throughout her life. She acted voluntarily as Bishop's secretary for the Diocese of Menevia (the whole of Wales) and took the Polish community under her wing, feeling an affinity with their European origins. She was part of a team which manned an ecumenical stand at the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells for many years. We all helped her to make posters and think of themes each year. She received a Benemerenti Papal Medal for her life's work, of which we were all very proud

and which she, in typical fashion, felt that she didn't deserve. St Mary's church in Union Street, Carmarthen, was a big part of our lives and we went to Mass many days a week. Mummy and I would ski to Mass on snowy days, starting out from Bryn Myrddin in pristine white snow only to get as far as the outskirts of town to meet dirty grey slush. It was very embarrassing to have to carry the skis or try to keep swishing along the pavements!! We used to have seats fairly near the front in church. Aunt Mary would be on the opposite side of the aisle and often brought her dog Ollie with her. Aunt Mary would fall asleep and Ollie would lie in the middle of the aisle! No-one ever told her off! Margie, Mary Ag and I were all married in that church and made our first Communions there too.

Mum was a leading light in the Women's Institute, responsible for setting up WI markets in Wales. She became President of Abergwili WI and a County Representative for Carmarthenshire. Every year she would go to Denman College near Oxford for a week's course, which she always really enjoyed. It was the headquarters of the WI. The WI stall on Carmarthen Market became part of our lives and I helped whenever needed. We used to send produce from the garden most weeks all picked, wrapped, tied and labelled the night before. The WI had stringent regulations for packaging and labelling. WI meetings were often held in our old stone-flagged kitchen around the Aga stove, and we often travelled to other institutes around the county. My mother often gave talks to other institutes, a popular one being about her life in Austria for which she used a beautiful carved wooden Tyrolean chalet as a prop to illustrate her talks. The roof could be lifted off to show the layout of the interior of the house. The people were always very interested in the Austrian Christmas customs. Mummy was also involved with the Rangers (a bit like girl guides) and they used to have meetings round a camp fire in the Dell (between the lawn and the east field known as the Thistles). I loved these meetings as we had toasted marshmallows and baked beans and sing-songs, and I was allowed to stay up later than usual.

Despite her Austrian background, Mum always felt that it was important to learn Welsh herself and to teach it to me. I had lessons with the Welsh Baptist Minister's son John Daniel from Abergwili often sitting on the lawn in idyllic surroundings. My father never really mastered Welsh and I have now lived in England for 50 years so could not hold a conversation but remember many words from my early years (I am surprised how many I can remember now that we often watch Welsh programmes with subtitles). My mother was interviewed by Franklin Engelman on "On Down Your Way" on Radio 4 and managed to speak a few sentences in Welsh on the airwaves albeit with an almost imperceptible Austrian accent.

My maternal grandmother Ilona [Countess Ilona (Helene Georgine Eugenie Maria Theresia) Hoyos, née Kinsky von Wchinitz und Tettau, 12 August 1879 – 23 March 1968] and grandfather Eddie [Count Edgar Viktor John Robert Anton Georg Hoyos, 7 February 1875 – 18 June 1952] used to come and stay at Bryn Myrddin every winter when I was very young. Grandmama continued this alone for the rest of her life after Grandpapa died when I was five. Grandpapa was a lovely man and always had cotton wool in his ears! My mother adored her father and they had a lovely relationship. When Grandpapa died we got a black-edged letter from Austria telling us the sad news. Mum read it out in the kitchen and burst into tears. I said in my childish innocence that maybe Grandmama was only joking at which I was promptly hustled out of the kitchen by one of the maids. Grandmama was an immense influence on our lives, being a vibrant, flirtatious, cultured lady who spoke several languages (she tried to teach me French without much success!). She had studied sculpture under

Rodin and she was highly fashionable. She was an accomplished milliner making her own hats. There was a full-length portrait of her hanging in Bryn Myrddin in the hall in ball dress. She was part of Viennese social life during the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, and had many interesting stories to tell. She died in Bryn Myrddin aged 89 years. She was a great card player and taught us to play canasta, bridge and whist, skills I have mostly forgotten but which filled the gap filled nowadays by television. Her schattentheater (shadow theatre, now in Margie's daughter Clare's safe-keeping) was a wonderful excitement. She told stories using the puppets and used to make us laugh with her amazing imaginative scripts and voices. My favourite was the man who was fed sausages.



I also remember helping her to make Christmas tree decorations. She would wrap coconut mushrooms in frilled tissue paper to hang on the tree. She also told fortunes in the melted wax at New Year. She slept in a downstairs room at Bryn Myrddin near the front door and was very worried by a tall Wellingtonia tree which creaked and swayed in the wind. I remember very clearly this tree being cut down, so cleverly, to fall perfectly down the drive. A skilled timber-felling team indeed. Everyone had been concerned that it might have fallen on to the house. To a small child the crash was memorably spectacular!

Occasionally our Austrian uncles and aunts would come and stay; Uncle Balthy [Franz Josef Balthasar Hoyos, born 10 December 1904] was the most regular. When Uncle Balthy's wife Franzi [Francisca von Seckendorf] died Mummy and Daddy helped out by having one of his children, Charlotte to live with us during several school holidays. She was quite a handful and often got me into trouble! Looking back over time I think it must have been a very sad time for her to have lost her mother. Uncle Georry [or George, 1902-1976] and Auntie Francis would come with Ernest and Nicky on their way to and from Ireland. Uncle Cocco died under Nazi occupation [Zdenko Alexander Anton, born 1903, killed in the Nazis' Aktion T4 at Schloss Hartheim, Austria in 1941]. Auntie Inez and Uncle Adam came rarely but Mummy was always so delighted to see her brothers and sister. Her other sister Auntie Cajetana [Marie Cajetana Leopoldine Franziska Robertine Hoyos, 1909 – 1948] had died

young and her husband John Bowman had married his cousin Frances Whitehead. They also used to visit with [Cajetana's children] Rachel and David. David contracted polio while in Africa and became an invalid for the rest of his life. Sue Ackerman taught at Oakham School and left to become his carer for several years. We often visited Uncle John and Aunt Frances at their home in Dorset. Dad's sister Aunt Vida [Vida Emily Morris, 1890 – 1986] came to stay most years too. There were many social visits from people, cousins, priests and friends who would turn up for afternoon tea or be invited to stay for lunch. We rarely had people for evening meals unless they were actually staying.

My mother had always said that she wouldn't have TV until it was in colour. We hired one for the coronation [of Queen Elizabeth, June 1953] and everyone came to watch from surrounding cottages. I remember being in Abergwili for the coronation celebrations when all the children were presented with a neck pocket containing a crown [the first commemorative coin issued in the UK]. There was an enormous tea and various sports and entertainment. Later on when I was a Brownie attached to the pack that met at the Bishop's Palace I had to wait outside while the Our Father was said in the Anglican version: Our Father "which" art in heaven. Very embarrassing. We used to have our nails inspected at each meeting and woe betide any Brownie that had grubby nails! Our pack joined several others from across the county in Llanelli when the Queen made a Royal visit. Having to line the streets for several hours it was hard to keep still. We were told not to touch the ropes along the pavement. I, of course, swung on them and slipped on my back on to the kerb. I still have a scar from that painful reminder of my disobedience! So when the Queen finally came I was trying to hold back my tears. In those days, the Royal train was white and we used to watch it going under the tunnel near the Bishop's Palace or at Carmarthen station and wave flags. I think there were several royal visits in those days. Another pastime was watching the army on the move from the bottom of the drive. They were regularly moved from Sennybridge to Pembrokeshire. The soldiers would sit in the back of the trucks and wave at us. The Automobile Association man was a regular too on his motorbike. He would always salute and stop and talk to Mummy who he knew quite well. In the 1950s, telegrams would be delivered by motor bike and the boy would often wait for a reply from us. The postmen used to collect our written letters and take them to the post for us too.

Outdoor life was the order of the day at Bryn Myrddin, and wildlife in that part of Wales was abundant. Badgers had a sett on the top of Merlin's Hill above the Llethyr field. They used to come out and play in the moonlight. They were much more easily visible in the 1950s and 1960s, as there were not so many trees (it has since been planted up by the Woodland Trust). On one occasion I counted 55 badgers frolicking and gambolling and making strange noises that could almost be described as singing. Foxes were regular visitors to our chicken run and on one occasion a fox (chased by the hunt) ran into the old kitchen round mummy's legs while she was making bread. For some time after that I imagined there was a fox behind every bush. The publican at the pub in White Mill once had a fox cub and a badger cub which he kept together and we would go and see them. A very unusual combination. Rabbits were a pest and myxomatosed rabbits [with the *Myxoma* virus] a very sad sight. Our family walked on pilgrimage to the chapel of Our Lady of the Taper near Cardigan one year, and every step along the road we had to avoid treading on rabbit bodies in various degrees of pain or decomposition from the disease. We used to regularly shoot rabbits in the Thistles Field. Dad would sit on the wall by the ash pit (where we burned rubbish) and skin the rabbits ready for the pot. Red squirrels were common in the oak trees on the drive and the beech trees near the lawn. Later when grey squirrels were introduced there was a price on their heads of 5 shillings if caught as they were a pest and were overtaking the red squirrels in numbers. Another slight fear, apart from

the fox, was being told by Sandy and Mrs James that the “Goody Whoo” (the owl!) will get you if you go down the drive by yourself!!

Snakes and slow worms often rustled through the lawn mowings or hatched in the compost heaps. Harry Jones who helped us on a daily basis (as well as milking his own cows) used to park the old Fergie tractor in the Dell every day and come in for elevenses. When he went back there was often a grass snake curled up on the warm metal tractor seat. He hated them and would come and find me to remove them. I must have been braver then as I hate them now. Once I was sent to pick raspberries in the walled garden when there was a snake just near my feet. I stuck a fork through it which was very silly as it wriggled. I dropped it and ran off. Another time I was riding on the drive on Daylight when one crawled out of some grass cuttings which spooked the pony and we galloped all the way down the drive. She once galloped straight down Merlin’s Hill towards Alltyfyrdin farm with me just managing to hang on. Stoats and weasels were often sighted and a polecat used to come to the east door where we had some young baby chickens so that we could keep an eye on them. Buzzards wheeled above Merlin’s Hill and tried their luck too. Jays and woodpeckers were regularly seen and Mum was always pleased to find a jay’s feather to put in her hat!



When I was aged 7—11 we often had visitors staying in the summer, either friends of my sisters or relatives. I would be allowed to sleep in the hammock (not very comfortable!) or in a tent on the east lawn, so that my bedroom could be used for visitors. Dad got annoyed because my dog Patsy (a corgi) would wake up at 3.30 am and bark as soon as the rabbits in the Thistles Field woke up. As I loved sleeping out there I used to tie Patsy’s lead to my foot and sleep in a half-awake state with my hand on her nose so that she wouldn’t be heard by Daddy whose room was on the ground floor. That love of wild life has remained with me ever since and although I live in Rutland, a beautiful part of England, the modern methods of farming and less vegetation in the eastern part of the country means there is less variety of animal and plant life readily accessible than there was in west Wales. I am sorry that I have not been able to pass on much of my idyllic childhood to my children. They have happy memories of holidays in Bryn Myrddin (and at Bee Stone, Farndale and Beblowe, Holy Island, thanks to Margie’s kindness), but I do not feel as attached to Bryn Myrddin as I used to be. Last time I returned I realised that the tenants living in the flats had lived there longer than I had and had

more claim to the memories than those engraved on my mind. I have such clear memories and could still walk around the grounds with my eyes shut.

The fields round Bryn Myrddin all have old names that I think it is nice to remember. We used to take the goats each day along the East Walk, an avenue lined with beech trees to Lower Parc Gwyn ('White Field' in English) as far as the LLethyr ('the Slope') where they would graze till 4 pm each day before being fetched for milking. Above lower Parc Gwyn was Upper Parc Gwyn just near Porth Cottage (home of Basil Davies, the auctioneer). There was a little stream running along the top of the field below the cottage where water cress grew in sparkling clear water. Mummy always picked a bit whenever we were there. Next to these fields were the Upper and Lower Pond Fields. These were very poor, badly drained fields but useful for the beef cattle to graze. It was on their slopes that we used Mummy's home-made toboggan whenever there was enough snow. To the left of these was the Hay Field (also called Pencader Field), a place of great memories, for making hay stooks, loading the gambo (a big trailer with high sides behind the tractor) and for watching the threshing machine nearby. There was always a big harvest picnic or lunch for everyone who came to help. We also grew black beans and it would be my job to pod them sitting on the east doorstep. I still enjoy podding beans so it didn't put me off!! On the east side of the house was the Thistles Field. There were always large clumps of thistles where rabbits used to hide. When Mr Field came to reduce the rabbit population, Patsy the dog would flush out the rabbits for him. Below the house were Bwlch Bach Fields and to the left of the stables was the Paddock. Aunty Mary's horse Pembroke was buried here, near the top gate under a big rock. Beyond the Paddock was the Saddle Field, and James's Garden where we grew potatoes each year. There was a machine which you sat on behind the tractor and dropped a potato into the drill every time a little bell rang, ensuring that the right distance for planting was maintained. Jones used to plough there with Puss the cart horse. Near the back lane was the outer garden, leading to the big walled garden which contained a greenhouse and a fruit cage, several fruit trees and vegetables to supply the house. We used to pick flowers on Good Fridays in silence for the Easter market. Once when weeding in the walled garden I stabbed Aunty Mary's leg with a fork and felt very guilty. Mummy treated the open wound with homeopathic Calendula. Near the garden door on the right was quite a large pond. I once caught some eels in there which Mum cooked. They tasted absolutely awful and extremely muddy. On the left side opposite the pond was the area near the chicken houses which Aunty Mary used as her own vegetable garden. Between the drive and the track leading to the stables was a large area known as the Island, with several bamboo bushes and the big yew tree where we would often find eggs laid by stray hens. Below the sweep (parking area in front of the house) next to the drive was the croquet lawn which was later turned into a second vegetable garden. Turning left down the drive there were some large oak trees where there used to be red squirrels. Further down the drive on the right was a lovely wood (called Penrallt, meaning High Above in English) with a path which led to Mr and Mrs Tom Jones' house. They were a lovely old couple who we always stopped to talk to. My second earliest memory was going in the pony and trap with runners on the wheels in deep snow to fetch Mr and Mr Tom Jones for the Christmas Eve gathering which we always had for all the nearby cottage neighbours. I must have been very small and I remember Mummy wrapping a rug round me as it was very cold and dark. The lawn was a wonderful place for rolling down the bank, riding on the go cart, swinging on the swing, climbing the beech tree, learning to ride a bike, or playing tennis or croquet. Mummy also made a clock golf course on the east lawn. As I was the youngest I was often going to bed when Elaine, Margie and Mary Ag had friends to play tennis. When they had finished

their games they often drove off to the beach at Llanstephan. I was very envious as I watched out of the window.

Perhaps the most memorable times of our Bryn Myrddin childhood were the Christmas and Easter celebrations. There was one old wassailing Welsh custom which was important. At the staff party on Christmas Eve a man would dress up in the Mari Lwyd costume consisting of a horse's head with a long cape. This custom was a bit like the Padstow Hobby Horse. A song would be sung in Welsh, asking to be admitted to the house. The householders would sing back denying entry. Finally, Mari Lwyd would be admitted and given food and drink. It was quite terrifying and the women used to shriek and scream with what my mother would call "fearful joy!" Our costume is now in the Museum at the Bishop's Palace below Bryn Myrddin in Abergwili.

Choosing what to write and what to leave out has been very difficult as there are so many aspects one could concentrate on. Carmarthen was an exciting place when I was young. People thought nothing of stopping in their cars in the middle of King Street and holding up the traffic for a chat. Avoiding the cattle being moved through the street to the mart was an art of timing. Aunt Mary used to combine it with trips to the slaughter-house, as she liked to oversee that there was no unnecessary cruelty going on — they must have dreaded seeing her on the warpath! Another of her missions was leaping out of the car to pull up any ragwort she saw growing on the roadsides (the plant is poisonous to cattle). The market was a bustling place with people coming into town from far and wide to the various stalls and the latest gossip. The market hall was also the venue for important boxing matches. We shopped regularly for groceries at the Waverley stores. Mr Rees would take our list while we sat and waited for him to collect the items of our order. Brian the butcher was next door. I think he was the inspiration for Butcher Beynon in Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. He regularly teased the women saying he had put corgi in the sausages and mince and they would squeal with laughter! He always put a couple of sausages in for me which I much appreciated as Mum and Dad were pretty well vegetarian for health reasons (arthritis and migraines), hopefully without the dreaded corgi! Nearby there was a sweet shop where I could spend my sweet ration each week. I had to choose between a bar of milk chocolate for 6d or a bag of sweets at 4 for 1p, very good for mental arithmetic. Opposite the Waverley stores was T. P. Hughes, a department store much like Fords of Oakham. They had a shuttle where you put your payment and it would whizz upstairs on a wire and come back down with the receipt and correct change, always fascinating to a child. We bought petrol from Lowndes' garage where there was a beautiful pure white Alsatian that used to sit outside the opposite newsagent. He was wonderful with children and used to sway his head in time to music. Animal feed was bought regularly from the Farmers' Co-op near the bridge over the River Towy. The sacks were moved around on pulleys and trolleys, fun to watch. We took surplus eggs to the egg grading station in Blue Street and watched the eggs rolling into rows depending on their sizes and being stamped with the lion mark. Bowen the Bon was where I would be kitted out with riding clothes when I used to hunt with the Carmarthenshire or Llandeilo hunt or show in the local agricultural shows. Dad used to get hats and jackets etc. there too. At the Coffee Pot on the corner of Guildhall Square and Blue St., there was a large coffee pot hanging above which remained long after the café closed. We fetched our newspapers from Jackson's Lane, very occasionally got wine from Brigstocks for a dinner party, bought fish from Molly the Fish in Queen Street, went to the National Provincial Bank and the post office, got our hair cut at Louis Dark, had a quick chat at the Old Curiosity Shop (an amazing antique shop), or dropped something off at the Carmarthen Journal offices and looked at the beautiful coloured glass bottles in King Morgan the

Chemist's window near St. Peters Church at the end of King Street. We would get advice from Mr Morgan, who was a very knowledgeable pharmacist, about herbal cures and medicinal properties. I think we even got strychnine and rat poison from there for use on the farm. Then it would be back home to write down every penny we had spent and woe betide us if the accounts did not tally at the end of the day.

Dances were held at the Territorial Army Hall at the top end of Carmarthen and the Carmarthen Amateur Operatic Society (second to none) put on their productions there. Wonderful evenings of light opera such as *The Merry Widow*, *White Horse Inn*, *The Student Prince* and *Gilbert & Sullivan*. Dad absolutely loved those evenings and of course Mum did as they reminded her of Austrian music. Another venue was the Lyric Cinema where I went with primary school to see my first film "The Robe", a 1953 biblical epic. I have never forgotten the slave being squashed when pulling the pyramid. The Lyric was also the venue for regular concerts with the best Welsh soloists and performers. There were also cymanfa ganu which were Welsh singing evenings, very rousing. The concerts were truly first class and played to such appreciative Welsh audiences, usually with several encores. We were also taken to operas and pantomimes at the Grand Theatre in Swansea. I was only about 6 or 7 and we usually had a box for the opera and I remember falling asleep. I had got to know the pantomime organist, Meurig, who I persuaded to play at our wedding. Dances were also held in St. Peter's Hall in Nott Square which I was allowed to go to when I was about 17. They were led by showbands and crooners and were pretty rough! Occasionally we went to watch the annual tennis tournaments at Stradey Park, Llanelli and when I was a teenager went to the ten-pin bowling alley there too. In those days bowling was a new sport (in Wales anyway!) and seemed very thrilling.



Age 17 in 1963

I belonged to the Young Farmers' club and joined in their car rallies and treasure hunts. That meant hurtling round the countryside, picking up clues and dashing off again, quite impossible with today's traffic! I was also a member of Llandeilo Pony Club. Their meetings were held at Tregib and I remember doing my standards on a borrowed pony as I think I was between Daylight and Sambo.

Tregib was a place where priests lived and we went there for catechism rallies. Mummy was a catechist and I passed an exam to be able to help her. We also went to St. David's on annual pilgrimage by bus with Carmarthen parish and on summer catechism camp. We had open air Mass and then went swimming at Carfai Bay down a long steep coastal path. It was quite a trek back up to St. Non's, the catholic monastery where we were staying. I remember having a sports day at Tregib where I came last in a sack race! Whenever we went to Tregib it usually meant a trip to Carreg

Cennen Castle with tea at the farmhouse. I loved the castle and used to go right down to the end of the cave. I hate caves and potholes now but I found it very exciting then. Everything about Merlin and Castles was always a great trigger for imagination and I still love anything about King Arthur. Not sure about the modern touristic versions in Carmarthen though! When Mary Stewart wrote the Crystal Cave she came to Bryn Myrddin and I showed her the wishing well on Merlin's Hill. She was gathering background information for the book. She thanked Mum and Dad in the acknowledgements.

One bad memory was coming home for Christmas from school thinking I might be being given a pony. I sneaked a look in the stable before being actually given him. My parents were very disappointed because I didn't look suitably excited or surprised! Maybe that's why I have never liked surprises! I prefer to look forward to something than be taken unawares. I rode regularly in the fields and lanes around Bryn Myrddin and entered several gymkhanas, hunter trials and horse shows. I hunted with the Llandeilo and Carmarthenshire Foxhounds. I also used to go to riding lessons with Miss Frances Griffiths at Towy Castle, a large castellated country house on the way to Llanstephan. One of my best childhood friends, Philippa Andrews, was her niece. Philippa's parents were in the army so she spent her holidays at Towy Castle. We spent hours on the phone much to our parents' amusement. Colonel Jack Jordan who had been in the army and trained polo ponies sometimes came to teach me when I was practising dressage and showing. He was Pearl Jordan's brother. She was Liz Knight's godmother and lived at Nantgaredig and we often visited her for tea. When Jack had died Pearl gave back the horse whip to Liz to give to me. It now hangs in our hall. Dad had given it to Jack as a present. My other best childhood friend was Anne Williams our solicitor's only daughter. She wasn't allowed to ride as her parents were very worried that she might fall or get hurt. Every year her father would hire a motor-boat at Milford Haven and they would take me and a couple of other children on an outing. The skipper would let us drive the boat and we did mackerel fishing. I loved these outings and going out anywhere with Mrs Williams in a huge leather upholstered car. Anne and I used to play pretend games in the back seat on the folding armrests with little teddies and a running commentary which used to make Mrs Williams laugh. She always had a large bag of sweets for the journey.

When I was in my late teens I became great friends with Roddy Brinson and used to go up to his family a great deal. Mr and Mrs Brinson, Judith, Liz, Rod and Tom were so welcoming and always asked me to stay for meals or to play games at the kitchen table. We went to Young Farmers' dos a lot...car treasure hunts etc. Rod and I took another friend, Merula Chaldecott, to the cinema on one occasion. Merula's father, Colonel Chaldecott, was rather a stickler about his daughter. We arrived back a bit late and he got out his gun and aimed at Roddy really telling him off for bringing his daughter back late!! When I was 16 I was desperate to be able to drive. You were not allowed to drive a car until you were 17. I had already driven the car on quiet roads in Ireland and driven the tractor for several years. Mummy agreed that I could try a scooter that a boy called Tony Baker (from church and a friend from primary school) would bring to Bryn Myrddin. I drove it straight into a rhododendron bush and owed Tony £60 for the repairs. I got myself a job picking apples in Wisbech for two weeks to repay the damage. I played brag with some of my fellow workers and lost my wages but the person I had lost to gave them back to me. I had learnt my lesson though. Apple picking was very hard work. We started at 5am each morning and our arms and sleeves got soaked in the morning dew.

I went to boarding school in 1955 [aged 9] to St. Leonards in Sussex. I used to travel by train to Paddington and be met by Miss Barbara Witty who was a Universal Aunt known to my parents. She would take me by taxi to Peter Jones Store to buy uniform, take me for tea then put me on the school train at Victoria. Victoria Station full of girls surrounded by their school trunks was a bit like Hogwarts Express!! On my first day the school got a phone call to say that a neighbour's child at Bryn Myrddin had developed measles so I was moved to the infirmary for three weeks' quarantine but didn't get measles then. However I was a bit isolated as everyone had got settled and made friends by the time I got back into normal school. The nuns were very kind and brought my meals and homework and took me for walks around the playing fields but I had no contact with pupils. I remember listening to children wheezing with asthma and crying in the dormitories when I eventually got back to the main school. I did have measles when I was 11 at home, it developed one awful day of hail and snow when I was out hunting. I was quite ill with it and went back to school at the end of January. When I got back I had pneumonia at school. I was in the infirmary when the nuns had gone off duty and I started to be unable to breathe. I got out of bed and went down a long flight of stairs and through the sports hall all in pitch darkness and got to the staff room door and knocked on it and collapsed on the floor. The doctor came and I was given penicillin jabs. I was allergic to them and only got better when Mum got Dr Blackie to post some homeopathic pills for me to take. They seemed to help and I made a slow recovery. I missed a term of schooling but managed to catch up fairly well, though I think my maths and sciences suffered at that stage of my education and I never really recouped the lost knowledge. I did get a school prize for perseverance at the end of the year! I remember another time in the infirmary when several of us had mumps. Mum sent us some strawberries which I shared with my fellow invalids but they were disastrous as they made our mumps glands really hard and painful because of the acid in the fruit! Another foray into the infirmary was when I unknowingly had chicken pox. We were sitting in a maths lesson when the teacher noticed the child in front was coming out in spots so they checked us all and I was found to have two or three spots so I had given it to the whole school!! I was sent to the infirmary but was out again after two days as I wasn't ill enough. The Irish matron wore a full uniform with a kind of butterfly headgear and was quite ruthless and tough! I have very happy memories of the nuns reading the Narnia books at bedtime while we were in our pyjamas. They always stopped at a really exciting bit and I couldn't wait till the next night. Hallowe'en was another good memory when the nuns read ghost stories to us and we had roasted chestnuts handed round. The older children used to pretend to be ghosts dressed in sheets and appeared on a balcony above us and we all screamed! On weekends we played jacks, table tennis and Mahjong, visited the village sweet shop and post office and were sometimes taken out by parents for cream teas. I lived a long way from school so got taken by friends' parents sometimes which was kind. One half term I was invited to stay with a girl called Caroline Cliff who lived in a cottage in the New Forest. Her mother was lovely to me and I remember having my first taste of Sugar Puffs with fridge-cold milk (at that time we hadn't yet got a fridge at Bryn Myrddin).

We went on to Mayfield at the age of 13. Up until then St. Leonards was the only through school. We were the first year to become St. Leonards Mayfield School. Mayfield was the mother house of the order of the Society of the Child Jesus. Sadly our year was split and half the year remained at St. Leonards for another year. I adored Mayfield, it was a beautiful place which had been the Old Palace belonging to the Archbishop of Canterbury in medieval times. The school was split into boarding houses. I lived in a beautiful house called Aylwins which meant a lovely walk round the playing fields

and past a lake. We used to be ravenous when we got back there at 5 pm and used to fall on our evening meal like a pack of hounds! I remember when Uncle Ray first met me he told Mary Ag that I had very bad table manners, probably as a result of school meals! In the 6th form I was also very lucky to share a room above the main entrance to Mayfield in the Gatehouse. Below my room was the domestic science classroom. This was one of my favourite lessons and I am still in touch with my teacher Mother Ruth who is now in the retirement home for the nuns in Harrogate. I loved watching the outside world from my gatehouse window. It was opposite the Middle House pub. Every year we did a live crib in the village of Mayfield and the final tableau was under the arch of the gate. The pub was the Inn where Mary and Joseph knocked. There was always a donkey. I would be in the choir behind the nativity scene. I was in a special choir called schola and we sang at most of the major feasts in the beautiful medieval church. On one occasion I started the candlelit carol concert by singing a solo of the first verse of Once in Royal David's City. Music was one of my school achievements and I played the piano in Tunbridge Wells music festivals.

I won a school cup one year but knew that another girl deserved to win much more than I did so never felt it was a correct decision. I have not used my musical talent well and am rather hopeless at the piano now. However I have enjoyed singing in Oakham School choir over the years. My husband Jim can't read music but is far more musical than I am. We love our evenings listening to classical music but also have a wide range of many other types of music which we enjoy. Jim's mother and my Grandfather Eddie Hoyos both could play by ear. My son Daniel has inherited that skill which gives us a lot of pleasure. My daughter Bron learnt the flute and her sister Lissie played the clarinet for a while at school. All our family have music as our main love.

Sport was another of my achievements. We played matches against several schools in Kent and Sussex - Roedean, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge etc. I was in the first eleven hockey team and played netball and tennis and did gymnastics. We went to Wembley for the inter-schools southern hockey competition one year and came second. We were also chosen to be ball boys at Wimbledon one year. I loved roller skating in our free time at school and there was a special flat roof where we were allowed to skate at weekends. I gave a solo performance once to the music of Stranger on the Shore by Acker Bilk. I think I was probably a bit of a show-off, although outside of school I was always quite shy. Weekends were memorable at Mayfield. On Saturday evenings we went to the school hall and watched Juke Box Jury followed by a film. A Tale of Two Cities starring Dirk Bogarde made half the school descend into uncontrollable tears. We saw the news about John F. Kennedy's assassination in there [November 1963] and I remember a girl from Baltimore being inconsolable. In the 6th form we went to Rome at Easter and had a meeting with Pope John XXIII. He was very frail and was carried in on a chair. There were only about 50 people allowed into St. Peters for the special Mass. Rome at Easter was the most glorious climate especially in the evenings. We visited Villa D'este and the Pope's summer residence at Castell Gandolfo. One of the loveliest places we visited was St. John Lateran church. The cloisters there were one of the most peaceful places I have ever been to. The food was very delicious too. We travelled from England by train and were supposed to be given food at various stations, but as it was Easter time every single place gave us eggs and we were heartily sick of them after three days journey! When I was 14 [1960] I went by train from school to Mary Ag and Ray's to be Fran's godmother. A few years later, Elaine's baby girl died just after birth and Mummy decided it might be helpful if I went to Shilton for Christmas. Michael was so wonderful with Elaine and it must have been heart-breaking for them. I remember he gave her an enormous

Christmas box full of every possible cosmetic and bathroom gift, make up etc., to try and cheer up. I felt very grown up that year.

Holidays were not very common in the 1950s and living on a farm meant the animals had to be cared for so it was rare for us to go away. However when I was 11 and 12 my parents booked me on a riding course in Charmouth, Dorset. The owners were the Bullen family, famous in the horse world. Jenny, their daughter, was junior British champion. They had a beautiful winning palomino stallion called Bubbles. Mum and Dad went to stay with Aunt Frances and Uncle John while I was there. The first year we took Daylight with us and stayed at the New Inn in Gloucester where an ostler stabled her for the night while we stayed in the pub. It is a lovely old inn with a balcony above the outside area of the pub. I enjoyed watching the people drinking and joking below me. The second year I borrowed one of the Bullen's horses. We were in separate dormitories of boys and girls. The boys caught a bat and sent it in to our dorm where it went mad flying about and got caught in my hair!

The following two years I went with Mum and Dad to Cahirciveen, near Waterville, County Kerry, Ireland. Dad went fishing in a boat with a ghillie while Mum did some painting and sketching. We were able to go the Butlers Arms Hotel and join in the social life there. I learnt to play a brilliant game called 'roll the red' which was played for money. On the ferry to Cork we watched cars and boats being loaded on to the ship. In those days you drove your car onto a net which was then swung on board. We watched a boat smash on the quayside and the owner was watching next to us and was most upset as the boat slipped out of the net. There were some people stationed in Waterville who were laying the Atlantic cable. Until then there had been no electricity in many parts of Ireland. I used to watch them playing hurling outside the hotel. Such a fast, exciting and dangerous game. Many players would sustain injuries mostly to their faces and played on covered in blood. Very gory!!

I went to Austria with Mum and Dad on two separate holidays. We went via Ostend and drove to Schwertberg where we stayed. Grandmama and Uncle Balthy [Ilona's brother] had accommodation there in part of the Schloss which belonged to Jean-George Hoyos [1914-1998, the son of Edgar's brother Alick, Ludwig Alexander Hoyos 1876-1937] and Helga Hoyos [née von Amann, 1916-2015], cousins. Balthy's sons lived there too. Friedrich, the elder son in his early 20s spent most of his time in bed. Robert [born 1948] was nearer my age and was much more sociable. I think it was 1960 when we were there for Grandmama's 80th birthday celebrations [Ilona's 80th birthday was 12 August 1959]. I remember the beautiful Chinese-style drawing room full of relatives who came to wish Grandmama a Happy Birthday. Vendeline Ledebur (née Bismarck) and her sister Barbara were there. Barbara was heavily pregnant at the time. Uncle Balthy's eldest daughter Christabel came too [Marie Christabel was born in 1932 and died in 2001]. Austria was a very courteous country in those days. You were expected to kiss the hands of any older woman when greeting them and men always kissed ladies' hands with a half bow. I remember swimming in the little river that flows along the Schloss, it was the coldest water I have ever felt! The cousins were all very sporty, social and active rushing off to play tennis etc. I was just too young to be included in the rather wild, flirtatious life that I felt was an undercurrent.

Mum, Dad and I went to Vienna where we visited Schloss Schönbrunn [summer residence of the Habsburg monarchy], saw "Die Fledermaus" at the Opera House and had a drive in a 'Fiaker' (horse and carriage) famous for showing tourists around the sights of the city. Another highlight was a visit

to the Spanish Riding School where we saw an amazing performance by the beautiful Lipizzaner horses. We also had a day in Salzburg during the worst thunderstorm I have ever been in. The basements of the houses were knee deep in water within minutes and a house further down the street was struck by lightning. I was so wet that we had to go and buy some socks and trousers before driving on. On our final visit we went to see Onkel Walter Berchem in Wurzburg, Bavaria. He lived in a huge baroque schloss. He was about 80 and a dear old man and a first cousin of Grandmama's [Walter and Ilona's mothers were born Feštetićs and part of the Habsburg monarchy]. He had been at the 80th birthday celebration and asked us to visit him.

Mummy was keen on homeopathy and we used to go to see Dr Margery Blackie a leading homeopathic Doctor. We would stay at the Challoner Catholic Club in London. It was fun to be recognised each time we went. The owners had some lovely friendly dogs who seemed to remember us too! Mummy would take me to the galleries while Dad rested. When I was 14 we went on a parish pilgrimage to Lourdes. Dad was secretly hoping for a cure but realised when we were there that there were so many people far worse than he was. We travelled by train with the Abbot of Belmont and some of the invalids from Coombe Cheshire Home. I was asked to help with the invalids and found it quite harrowing at a young age. There were some amazing young people who were guides and carers from Oxford University and I was very impressed with their wonderful commitment. The candlelit processions every evening in Lourdes were very beautiful and memorable.

After I left school, my parents arranged an exchange for me with a French family. I went first to Paris to stay with Francoise and her family. Coincidentally they lived in an apartment which had a door leading into another apartment where it turned out a school friend of mine lived. I was so surprised when Anne de Rougement just walked in while we were having breakfast! We travelled to Verbiers to go skiing. It was so beautiful in deep snow. I was a beginner so spent my days in classes on my own as Francoise and her family were regular skiers. I was there for Christmas and New Year at the time of an election. There was much political conversation about General De Gaulle all in French which I could just get the hang of. We had cold Christmas pudding cut in slices like cake which was apparently the custom! I rather missed our home Christmas. New Year's Eve was very exciting. All the ski instructors skied downhill holding torches in the dark, also a regular custom, without using their ski sticks. Francoise came to Bryn Myrddin on exchange but it did not work very well. She spent much of her time in bed with headaches. She was unused to country life and didn't like the food. I definitely got the better deal!!

In 1964, during the summer holidays before going to Cambridge I went to Austria to stay with some cousins, Christoph and Vendelin Ledebur, for three months to help look after their children Francisca and Philip. At Alkoven was a beautiful country house not far from Linz in Upper Austria. The family included Christoph's father Karl Ledebur who was a philosopher. He was a wonderful person and we had long conversations but he told me to come back to Austria when I knew my Shakespeare better!! Occasionally Karl's brother Uncle Eugene used to turn up for two or three weeks then disappear for several weeks. He took me duck shooting a couple of times at 3.00 am. Uncle Karl took me deer stalking which was wonderful and he was very knowledgeable about deer management. They nicknamed me Pummelchen because I had rosy cheeks! It means rosy apple! Vendelin took me to buy a dirndl [traditional dress] in Salzburg and we went on various outings swimming in freshwater lakes. Once we had a barbecue of fresh fish on the banks of the River Danube. It was very

fast flowing and we jumped in and got carried downstream and repeated the process till we were worn out! I remember midges being a big problem. I helped Vendelin around the gardens and remember picking warm apricots off the espaliered trees in the walled garden. Austria, being inland, used to get almost unbearably hot in the middle of the day and I got a few bad headaches. All the family were so kind and welcoming to me. Vendelin had got to know Elaine at Oxford. She sadly died at the age of 28. Christoph brought up their 4 children. He became a priest as a late vocation. Alex got to know him when he was working on the Reichstag for Norman Foster in Berlin.

When I came home from Austria I was able to speak German quite well and it helped with the O-level which I took at the same time as my two A-levels. I took Geography and English and got a C and a D. In those days many people took only two A-levels, and you could get to University with only two. I think you need three nowadays.

In 1964 - 1965, my parents thought it would be a good idea if I went to Lady Margaret House in Grange Rd. Cambridge. Lady Margaret House was a kind of Catholic finishing school. Most of my peers were doing A-levels but I took grade 7 piano with a Miss Palmer and went to the Technical College to do music theory. I also studied S-level English at Lady Margaret House. Margie and Richard were still at Cambridge then, living in Little Newnham and were very kind to me. I did a bit of babysitting for them. I had a whale of a time. I worked on *Granta* [a literary magazine], belonged to the Welsh Society and did lots of socialising and punting etc. Lady Margaret House was pretty strict and we had to be in by 9pm and no male visitors were allowed. I remember we all sat up in the middle of the night to listen to Cassius Clay (later professional heavyweight boxer Muhammad Ali) beat Sonny Liston [Charles L. Liston] on May 25th 1965.

I had the use of a huge Austin car, an ex-police car which Mummy acquired for me to use. I later got to use her mini pick-up when I was at college in London. Mummy always thought I would be safer driving myself rather than relying on other people. In the summer holidays a friend from Lady Margaret House who was an only child asked me to come on holiday to Majorca with her and her parents. We had a lovely time staying in a hotel in Palma. It was incredibly hot and impossible to go out in the middle of the day. The evenings were very lively. We could see flamenco dancing and cabaret out of our balcony windows. We also went to a bull fight which in retrospect I would have preferred not to go to, however it was the Spanish culture and was very skilled. Oonagh's parents Mr and Mrs Talwrn Jones were both doctors from Wigan and I went to stay with them there. Oonagh's mother had a permanent cigarette in her mouth which she never moved. The ash would grow longer until it fell off!! Doctors smoked a lot in those days as did many of the general populace. Buses, trains, cinemas, theatres all reeked of stale cigarettes.

In 1965 – 1968 I went to West Ham College of Advanced Technology (now North East London University; 1300 students of which 1100 were mixed race and only 30 girls in the whole college) to do an external London degree in Social Science. In those days, one couldn't do Social Science until the age of 19. Elaine, as my godmother, was instrumental in finding me a course and encouraging me to go. Previously I had thought of going to agricultural college. I loved London, especially the second and third year at college. Mary Ag and Ray lived in Winchmore Hill in those days and were always very kind to me if I went to see them. West Ham College was pretty basic. It had no accommodation and we had to travel by tube for some of our lectures to a place called Three Mills, an old mill building with high Victorian windows. During my first term I lived in Sloane Gardens with

a girl from Mayfield and drove in my mini pick-up 9 miles to college every day. In the second term I lived in Forest Gate in a bedsit then moved for the third term to Stratford where I lived as a lodger with a dear old Norwegian couple who gave me meals. For the second and third years I lived in West Ham round the corner from the football stadium in a house with 6 other students. It worked very well. I did most of the cooking for our evening meals but never had to wash up!! I shared a room with a girl called Val who was one of my bridesmaids. The other housemates were boys on our course.

We had a problem with our degrees. A lecturer at one of the other external London Colleges did not agree with the system and leaked the exam questions during the year to his students. After we had taken our first paper, we realised something was drastically different about the questions. Our exams were stopped as the problem had been discovered. We were given the choice of doing different exams in two weeks' time or in September. We all voted for the first option. Many students had nervous breakdowns and got given aegrotat degrees. I actually liked exams and got my 2.2. We never went to Alexandra Palace to get our graduation certificates as a protest. Shame really as the Queen Mother was the Chancellor.

I played in the college mixed hockey team. We had a brilliant Indian player who played in bare feet!! I think we hardly lost any games. I was awarded my college colours. I was on the committee which was responsible for bringing a bar to the college. This involved a trip to the Guinness factory at Park Royal as a fact-finding process. I was also the social secretary for the rugby club which was hard work but good fun. We organised several fund-raisers which we also did the catering for. My favourite degree subject was the Philosophy part of the course. The lecturer was a brilliant Welsh man, Dr Ivor Edwards. It was like listening to a Welsh preacher! One day Gwynfor Evans (leader of Plaid Cymru and MP for Carmarthen) came to see Dr Edwards who was a friend of his. Gwynfor knew Mummy and he asked Dr Edwards if he could meet me. I was so touched that he had taken the trouble to see me. He was an incredible Welsh figure with the most charming and gentle personality.

Between 1965 and 1969 I had several holiday jobs. I worked for the Post Office in the sorting rooms in Carmarthen for three Christmasses. I really loved working there. For 3 or 4 holidays I worked at the Ivy Bush as a barmaid - quite a challenge for my parents who had been very cautious with my older sisters about allowing them in pubs etc. In London, I worked two years running at Wimbledon for Lyons selling strawberries during the tennis which led to my being asked to work at Buckingham Palace for three garden parties, one of which Mummy and Daddy had been invited to!! I met someone at Wimbledon who invited me to come with him to the Overseas Club in Earl's Court to a dance. I had just been paid my Wimbledon wages. I put my handbag under a chair while we danced and someone stole my wages. My friend got the manager to give me a job to try and recoup my money. I ended up working there for several holidays, cooking breakfasts for guests and waitressing. My manager was a man called Lester Jolly. Bron went to work at the Sheraton Hotel in London nearly 25 years later and it turned out that her manager then was Lester Jolly. What a coincidence! In 1966 I had three jobs at once to make enough money to travel to Turkey. I started at 5am at King's Cross sandwich bar, then from 9am Swan & Edgar during July sales on the stockings and tights counter, followed by 6pm till midnight at the Rose & Crown in Fleet Street. This pub had a really interesting clientele made up of Sunday Times and Times journalists. The landlord was really good and made me go upstairs and eat a proper meal before starting work.

One holiday I worked at Senate House doing filing in a department which housed the entire country's records of anyone who had ever cheated in exams. All these jobs helped me to eke out my university expenses as I only got a very tiny grant. They also paid for two amazing holidays. I went to Turkey in 1967 with three friends from college in a mini. We travelled to 11 different European countries in total. In those days, you could only take £60 out of the country. We were away for six weeks and I came back with £16!! Food was so cheap in Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The car broke down in Venice of all places. Not the best place to find a garage! The following year, seven of us (5 boys and 2 girls) from college went in a Bedford van to Morocco via France and Spain. We crossed from Tangiers to Gibraltar, where my friend lost her passport and we had to get help from the British Consulate. We travelled into the Sahara Desert which was really interesting for me as a Geography student. We got caught in a sandstorm while trying to erect our tents. I found a scorpion under my pillow one day. Marrakesh was a fascinating and colourful place, but I did not like Morocco half as much as Turkey where the people had been so courteous and welcoming.

In 1968-1970, after doing my degree in London I went to Cardiff University to do a Certificate in Education (another name for a PGCE). I got a bed-sit in Claude Road with a lovely couple who worked for Welsh TV. We did three weeks observing in different schools then came back into college for lectures. I met my future husband Jim O'Kane then. We had come to the Uni bar for lunch, and he was on the floor as I was climbing into a seat. He knew Les Blythe in the group I was with as they had both been at the CAT (Cardiff College of Advanced Technology). We got talking and went to the bar then we went for a meal upstairs in the college canteen. Steak was 4 shillings and ninepence, which I lent Jim. We arranged to meet again and he came to fetch me from my bedsit. We went to the cinema to see *Lion in Winter*. The following weekend we went to London in my mini with John and Dai (twins, University friends of Jim's originating from Llanelli) for a Wales v England International. We stayed in my old house in West Ham where there were still a couple of my previous house mates. We had a great rugby time. I spoke to Derek Quinnell (no. 8 on the Welsh international team) on that trip outside London Welsh Club. We had a lovely autumn getting to know one another, and I met all Jim's mates from the CAT. We went walking in Roath Park in the autumn leaves on some beautiful sunny frosty days. I went on some of the rugby trips with Jim to Aberystwyth, Bangor etc. Lots of fun. Jim's friends, including Russ Jones, were great fun and we always sang brilliant medleys on the buses or in the bars. Russ and Jim had a great scene ongoing at Internationals. They would have play fights at a restaurant in St Mary's Street and people would clear a space for them! Russ used to come to an Italian restaurant with us where he knew the owner and would always say it was someone's birthday and we would get a free bottle of wine. Russ was a brilliant stand-up joke teller. Penny Lloyd used to stand up and sing *The Holy City* in the Uni bar. Jim was called upon at the CAT to do Zumbas. We had recurring finishing parties which people used to attend. It was all very mad!!

I had a car incident one night. I gave Huw Llewellyn Davies (now a famous Welsh rugby commentator but then a student) a lift back from the bar. I was at the traffic lights next to the Claude pub waiting for the red light to change. When it did I turned slowly right and two people fell out of the pub onto my bonnet. It was a dark and rainy night. I went to the police station. At first they were just taking a statement and said the people were not going to take it any further. However, Huw had had a lot to drink and starting fooling about with one of the copper's helmet. They changed their minds and decided to do me for undue care and attention. I went to court and

was fined £8 which was about the lowest fine in those days. I had to blow into a breathalyser but had not been drinking. They were really hard to blow into!

After the first term I moved into a house in Fanny Street with Banjo, Chris, and Maureen. They were on my course. I don't remember spending much time with them though I still write to Maureen. I took Banjo home one Easter as he was going to be on his own. He was a red-headed protestant Northern Irishman. I'm not sure what he thought of our Catholic family - we still used to say the rosary every day even when there were visitors! I stayed in Fanny St. for the next two terms during which I did a term's placement in a school with Gareth Edwards (famous Welsh scrum half) and Nick Williams (Welsh sevens player) both at Cardiff teacher training college. We had a great Headmaster who was very sympathetic to the boys when they needed time off for internationals etc. Rugby was an amateur game then. In the summer term it was back to college for exams etc. I typed Jim's thesis on 'The Effect of Stereo-specific Polymers on Liquid Crystalline Substances' for his finals in 1969. That is what became touch screen technology later.

In September, I moved into Llandaff Rd. Upstairs was Pete Jones, the Uni President. His girlfriend Eleri was a regular visitor. On the next floor down was Gerry Hawkins and Mike Sword Daniels. I started on the ground floor in the front room. Mike Edwards had the other room. When he left I moved into that room which had a French window onto a small garden. The house was a lovely old Victorian one not far from Llandaff Cathedral one way and the other way to town.

Jim was doing his management course at Cardiff University in September 1969—70 and I was doing my probationary year's teaching at Lady Mary School in Roath Park area of Cardiff. There were three of us on probation. I got on very well with the Deputy Head Mr Callas as I was teaching Geography which was his subject. He was a really strict teacher. The Head was a weak man who never saw anyone alone. It was difficult there as we were not allowed to go out at lunchtime to the bank or anything. The staff were lovely to me when I left and gave me a wedding present. There was a national education strike before my wedding and I made my wedding dress during it with Mum's help. I don't agree with strikes in term time but the Union said we should strike, so I went along with it being a very new, shy member.

We got married at Easter on the same day as the Grand National, Wales v England rugby and the Boat Race. A lot of our guests have never forgiven us!! I should have mentioned that Jim's mum came to Bryn Myrddin after Christmas to meet Mum and Dad. It was an amazing lovely time. Mum threw her arms round Renee on the doorstep and my Dad sang Gilbert & Sullivan while she played the piano. We had a good time discussing wedding plans. At that time we had thought we would get married in the summer but soon changed our minds and decided on the Easter holidays. So there was quite a short time really to organise the wedding. We drove back to Preston for a few days then drove back down to Tenby on New Year's Eve to Mary and John Uzzell Edwards's party in their beach studio in Tenby. I had been at Cambridge in my gap year with Mary. She had been going out with John then. He became a famous Welsh artist. I remember walking along the beach with Jim and we saw phosphorous in the water.

Our wedding [4 April 1970] was a magical time. It was a sunny April day and it all went beautifully. In those days it was quite unusual for the bride and groom to stay for the evening. We had an evening reception at the Falcon in Carmarthen, having had the main reception in a marquee on the east lawn at Bryn Myrddin. Jim and I sat on the bar and sang "Paddy works on the railway" Then Michael Barry

drove us to The Cresselly Arms at Cothi Bridge for the night. From there we went to Cardiff for one night. We went to the cinema and ended up sitting next to one of our farm tenants! From there we drove to Lynmouth where we played cribbage in the bar. We walked up the River Lyn valley a long way and it SNOWED!! Next day we drove to Tintagel for one night then on to Polperro for two nights. Lynmouth and Polperro were lovely. Then we had intended to stay in Plymouth but got there and decided to drive home as we knew there were still people staying with Mum and Dad and lots of presents to open etc.

In July we went to Dublin for six weeks staying with Ogmore (Alan Tilley, a college friend of Jim's). We had a great time and went to meet some O'Kane relations. Uncle Mick had a lovely country house near the site of the Battle of the Boyne. We played Pitch and Putt up in the Wicklow Mountains and went to Johnny Fox's well-known pub. We helped Ogmore's housemate Neil on some shifts he was doing at the Dublin slums and went to the Dublin Welsh male voice choir. It was a great pub life with much singing.

We moved to Newport in September for Jim to do his new job at Bowaters and me to start my new job as a Child Care Officer with Gwent Social Services. We had nowhere to live. We stayed on Roddy's floor for a few days then moved into a hotel for another few days. Finally we had a huge piece of luck. My cousin Bill Vaughan allowed us to stay rent-free for a year in a terraced house in Princes Street, Newport. It was tiny with a little yard right next to the railway. The trains used to shake the house at night! We got Sam as a puppy while we were there, arranged by a social work colleague, from a farm near Abergavenny. Renee, Jim's Mum, came to stay with us in October. Colette and Joe brought her down and went home. She was struggling with asthma and could not walk down to the end of the street. Two or three weeks later after she had gone home she died on November the 2nd (All Souls' Day). It was a traumatic time. Colette phoned my Mum who phoned me. I had just seen Jim off on the train at Newport to a course at Cranfield so could not contact him until he arrived there at night (no mobile phones in those days); he had to stay there and come home the next day. A very sad time for us all. My Mum asked Colette and family to come for Christmas at Bryn Myrddin which was rather a lovely time albeit poignant. As they arrived on Christmas Eve it started to snow and I had got sparklers for Bruce and Rachel to run about with on the drive. Alex was a young baby then. They stayed a few days before heading back to Preston. My father became ill that autumn and couldn't shake off a chest infection. We moved his bed to the front room and had our first television (never very good reception at Bryn Myrddin). He died on May 28th 1971. We had each lost a parent in our first year of marriage. When we were all at Bryn Myrddin for the funeral Jim was playing with all the nephews and nieces on the lawn, and Michael Barry suggested to him that he should teach. He was getting very disillusioned with his job at Bowater's and the following year he found the advert for the job at Oakham School, and life changed for ever for us all.

During the summer of 1971, after Daddy had died, Jim and I managed a fete at Bryn Myrddin for Save the Children which had been arranged previous to Dad's death. Mummy didn't want to call it off so we agreed to run it. It was opened by the famous Welsh comedian Ryan Davies. He was a very kind-hearted man who had been brought up nearby at Nantgaredig in a children's home. That summer, Griffy Philipps had arranged for Jim to play cricket for Abergwili CC which he enjoyed. We also went to an amazing memorable concert as part of the Eisteddfod which was held at Griffy's house Glangwili, which was being used as one of the venues for Eisteddfod events. The concert was

in a marquee, and it was the first time we had heard Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony. Jim can still smell the grass in the marquee whenever he hears that music. We have played it most Friday evenings during our married life along with Irish music, pop, older musicals etc.

In the time between Newport and Usk we had a short holiday in France. Jim played cricket in a Bowater's team at Portland Bill prison before we caught the ferry to France. We camped in Les Sables D'Olonne on the west coast. On our return we went to Lamballe in Brittany to Monique De Launay, a French cousin of my father's. I remember her giving Jim warm tomatoes out of her garden to eat.

We moved to Usk in summer 1971. We were very happy there. Jim enjoyed playing cricket for Usk C.C. I got to know Bron Petersen who lived next door to us in the Old Priory which she and Dave were trying to renovate. We used to do a monthly shop at Carrefour superstore and come home and have a drink with Dave and Jim to celebrate our shopping!

In May 1972, Daniel was born at the Royal Gwent Hospital. We had started out at St. Joseph's nursing home but Dan got the umbilical cord around his neck so we were moved to the hospital. Jim had been playing cricket after taking me to St. Josephs. He asked the nurses if he could come back to be with me. They agreed. But when he got back the night staff wouldn't let him join me. I went by ambulance to the hospital next morning. Jim followed in the car and stayed with me for most of the birth. As it was forceps birth, he had to wait outside for a little while. Jim managed to get on the hospital radio in his euphoria at having a new baby son! In those days you stayed in hospital for 10 days with your newborn. It was an extremely helpful time where the nurses spoilt us. They did the night feeds so that we could sleep. Mummy came to stay for a few days to help us when I got home.

The Nag's Head became Jim's regular watering hole where we got to know the iconic landlord Mike Keyes. I remember one evening when there had been a big power cut and everyone went to the Nag's Head which was lit with lots of candles. When Dan was a baby he used to crawl sideways like a crab. Whenever we went to the Nag's Head, even when Dan was grown up, Mike Keyes would make Dan crawl around the bar before he would serve us!!

Jim went up to Oakham from Usk on a beautiful sunny day in June for his interview with Mr Buchanan. Jim was so taken with a string quartet playing on Deanscroft lawn, the whole ambience of Oakham School and the Headmaster's welcome that he was very excited about the job. Mrs Buchanan was a little bit off-putting when Jim phoned to accept the post, because Mr Buchanan was busy, but he came to the phone and the rest is history! I travelled up to look for a house and after a couple of unsuitable viewings on the wrong side of the railway came up with the house in Whissendine. The owners were lovely and a deal was struck. We had to get a bridging loan to move as our house sale had not gone through in time. It was a slightly worrying time financially but we finally sold the house before Christmas at an amazing price compared with when we bought it. We moved in August 1973 with a litter of Sam's puppies in the furniture van.

I was expecting Bron in the following February so life was quite challenging for the first year. We had a very kind neighbour Joyce Smith who was an amazing support. Jim had a new job to get used to and also the timetable at school was tricky with evening commitments and sport fixtures, Saturday school etc. Whissendine was very cold and we took time to become acclimatised to the different weather patterns compared to West Wales and Lancashire. We had an old coal boiler which gave us

our hot water and heating and it was always playing up and going out which was an absolute nuisance with small children and nappies to wash etc. We had a funny little washing machine with a hose that pushed on to the tap in the kitchen sink and didn't really get things clean. My mother gave us a spin dryer which was a godsend and got the washing dry enough to hang in the garden. I got a nasty bout of sinus before and during Bron's birth and remember some foggy weather that January and February. Mum came up from Wales to stay for a couple of weeks to look after Dan and help me with Bron. I remember Dan on the doorstep with Mum when I went to Oakham maternity hospital, Dan looking rather like a little waif. Jim was teaching when Bron was born but came to visit after his classes. That was when he registered Bron and the car on the same day. The mistake on Bron's birth certificate – O'Kang instead of O'Kane – only came to light when she was trying to replace a lost passport!! Fr Lynch christened Bron at the old church in Mill Street in early March while Mum was still staying with us. Bruce Rainford and Clare Vaughan were godparents. We had a party organised for Dan's 3rd birthday in early June and were amazed to find snow in the morning. A friend was bringing a goat for the children to see during the party. We were friendly with the Richmonds (their youngest was the same age as Dan) who lived a few doors away from us and went to some good parties at their house. Fr Lynch and Fr Michael used to come and there was always delicious food and flowing booze and usually singing. The Richmonds were from Preston, and Mike ran the Rutland Lancastrian Society which Freda used to cater for at Exton School. Freda also was chairman of the Catholic Ladies Society (no longer in existence) and organised speakers etc. I made a few friends there in those early days.

Oakham School was a whole new life for us, and Mrs Buchanan held monthly get-togethers for new staff wives with small children. We were expected to make friends and meet among ourselves after being introduced. Some senior staff wives were very kind, giving us clothes and toys and inviting us for coffee. Jim and I were also invited to Mr and Mrs Buchanan's dinner parties and other staff houses. The ladies left the gentlemen to their port after the dessert course and went back when it was deemed time to return for coffee. It was quite daunting! Jim found the Wheatsheaf a good place to relax on a regular basis and it became a light relief from the rather formal life within school. In 1975 there was a petrol crisis and I got quite isolated in Whissendine although I knew a lot of people and Dan started at the village hall play school. We decided that life might be easier if we moved to Oakham. We put the house up for sale and a buyer came in the first week. Our neighbour Joyce knew the owner of 13 Ashwell Rd, knew it was for sale, and suggested that it might suit us. That was after we had looked at a few houses including Fr Lynch's Presbytery (now Clodagh's house) which we liked, but we couldn't afford to do the repairs it needed. We moved into 13 Ashwell Rd in the summer 1973 and never looked back. Life became so much easier for us in Oakham. Jim could pop in and out between lessons and I was able to use the car.

When we moved into Oakham, I got a few part-time jobs. I was a tutor on one evening a week at Buchanan's House while Mike and Mary Stevens were house parents. I enjoyed being involved with the girls and it was a well-run house. At the same time for three years we had two pupils a year to live with us in term time. We had Majda and Fouad Hashem who had come from Lebanon during the troubles. The family had four children and didn't want to split them up, and Oakham School obliged by taking all of them. Fouad was only 10 and Majda was 12. In the summer term Fouad got a place in school so we then had Isabel Hanmer for one term. Her Father was Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire and the parents kindly took us out on their canal boat. The Hashems also invited us to their house in Marlow where we had some delicious Lebanese food. After that we had Jane

Alexander and Jenny Dash. We still hear from Jenny. They were 7th form girls. The school used to billet 7th form girls out with local families until there was enough boarding accommodation. Then we had Joe Herrin and Kath Watson and Dina Suleiman and Sarah Brown the following two years. They did have their meals at school but it was quite tough to have them while Dan and Bron were very small. I also did accounts at the school shop while Shiela Case was the manageress. She was so kind to me and I could bring my work home if I needed to be with Dan and Bron. Her husband Trevor was the school bursar and was also good to us when we moved into School House. They knew our cousins the Hughes' from Llwynbedw in Cardiganshire. Trevor used to go fishing with Peter Hughes. When Dan went to school I started doing supply teaching in several schools in Leicester and helped out at Burley Road School as a parent volunteer with Mrs Mackrill who was a lovely teacher. It was pretty tough managing Jim's and my timetables around the children. I also taught some Sociology classes for the Workers' Education Authority at Whissendine Church Hall. I hated teaching adults and Jim helped me a lot to get through the ordeal. I was very lucky to be asked to work across the road at Oakham School Nursery School so was able to be near home and to give up supply teaching. I was involved with nursery teaching for 30 years, ending with five years full time at Brooke Priory Nursery working with Sue Ross. I volunteered at the Catholic Youth Club in the old church and at the prison play group on a rota basis.

Dan and Bron had a really good education at Burley Road School and did well. There was a fantastic school orchestra run by first Mrs Treanor and later Mrs Page. Drama run by Mrs Hackett with scenery painted by Alan Madison was memorable. Mrs Hunting gave them both a love of literature. Miss Northern was the ideal teacher to prepare pupils for the move to secondary school. Mr Jervis was a very good headmaster. Both Dan and Bron had a great sports career at Burley Road School. Both did well in athletics. Dan played in the competitive football team winning the local schools league in his final year. Bron was in the school netball team shooting strategic goals to win the county schools' league at Wreake Valley School near Leicester.

We had several holidays with the Routledges. One was at Holy Island and another at Galloway. We had a wonderful holiday camping in Cornwall near Newquay. Colette and family were caravanning in a nearby site. We had Sam, so weren't allowed on her site. We went to St. Ives for the day and had lunch in a café in the downstairs part of the restaurant. St. Ives was really crowded and when we were on the beach Sam got separated and ran off. We retraced our steps frantically and found her again sitting under the table where we had had lunch!! Two other holidays staying kindly in Colette and Joe's caravan were at Bowness where Colette left Alex with us for a few days. The other was at a site in Gisburn.

We had some holidays in Newcastle Emlyn and Bryn Myrddin. We took Sam to Newcastle Emlyn and she produced a litter of puppies under Mummy's bed. We had no idea that she was expecting pups and very sadly had no choice but to get rid of the litter. In 1978, Mum came to stay for two months in the autumn. She was really not very well by then so was needing nursing care. She had broken her hip two years previously in her kitchen at Newcastle Emlyn. I have always felt responsible as I had spilt some oil on the floor while cooking chips for the children and she slipped on it and had never really been right since then, having some stays in hospital with stomach haemorrhages. Many relatives and friends came to see her while she was with us at Oakham for two months. She moved to the nursing home near Elaine after she had been with us and died on April 6th 1979.

Lis was born on Jan 1st 1983, and was a very happy addition to our family. The gap in years meant that Dan and Bron were a great help with our young baby. People at school and our friends were very kind and supportive. We started to go to Bee Stone [a house in the North York Moors, owned by the Vaughans] for some holidays then which were lovely and gave the children a chance to be in the country air. The Rolphs came to stay there with us one time and the Routledges also.

We moved into School House in 1986. Lis went to Burley Road School in September 1987, just catching Mr Jervis as Headmaster. The school was not quite the same as when Dan and Bron had been there but Lis also played in the orchestra, was often a narrator in school plays and was also a goal shooter in the winning netball team at Wreake Valley. She went on to Oakham School as her brother and sister had done before her. We returned to our house in Ashwell Rd in 1998, and have lived there ever since. Jim and I both retired from teaching in 2006. Jim did Health and Safety and Security at Oakham School until 2012 and I worked part time in the school uniform shop until 2016.

Bron married Mark on Aug 27th 2006, and our first grandchild, Jude, was born Jan 14th 2009. Dan and Gem married on August 1st 2010, and Lis and Steve married July 27th 2013. Rose was born August 28th 2016. All three wedding receptions were held at Oakham School's Wilson Pavilion.



With Jim O'Kane on our wedding day, 4 April 1970.