Verena Rosemary Quinnell



Memoirs

The following are words left in an envelope in the safe. Firstly some typed early memories.

Wimbledon 1927

This is the First thing I can remember. We were in a room on the top floor at Worple Road. Gladys and Edith were there and Angela was a small baby all in white.
Gladys opened a window and held Angela out so that I couldn't see her. "I've dropped the baby." she said. How I screamed until at last mother came running up to see what was happening. "Why is that child screaming like that?" she asked. "Oh, she's always yelling for nothing" said Gladys. Of course the baby was safely inside by then and I just could not get through to mother what had happened. Nothing has ever frightened me so much since.

PS Edith had a car accident on her day off and was found to be wearing Mother's best blue silk undies.

Wimbledon 1927 - Tony is born

When I was three I was taken on a tube train by a woman who was looking after me. We went to this nursing home where Mother lay in bed looking terrible. I can remember her haggard smile. She had just had Tony. Angela was in the same room. She was in a high chair, crying her eyes out.
Mother gave me a paint box and a painting book which was lovely because I missed her terribly. On the way home I sat on this woman's lap and I can remember wetting myself. Her coat was thick and luckily she never noticed.
Back home she gave me some water in an egg cup and I painted at a table down in the basement.

Wimbledon 1929 - 5th Birthday

We were all at Mere and Daddy and I went back to Worple Road because I was starting at Miss Stewart's - "The Ruskin School and Kindergarten. Well it was only a kindergarten and in a house just like ours, five doors down the road.
I remember having this large parcel. Inside was a shoe box full of presents but the only one I can remember were those little wooden dolls made by Mary - I loved them.
Later I was stung by a wasp and the usual shadowy female who was looking after me gave me a blue

bag.
At School we saw the R100 from the window and I remember having to draw it. Later it crashed.

Wimbledon 1930? - Aunt Esther comes to tea

She was one of those ancient relatives who we had never met but heard a lot about. One day we were told that we must be on our best behavior because Aunt Esther was coming to tea.
It was a bit odd because we never heard the front door bell - suddenly she just happened to be there and we had to go into the drawing room to meet her.
She was sitting next to Mother during tea - a little bent old lady dressed entirely in black in very old fashioned clothes. Unfortunately she was extremely deaf so we had to speak up very clearly when she put us through that cross-questioning which children were subjected to in those days.
Suddenly her chin dropped and we realised she was asleep. Mother put her finger to her mouth to warn us to keep quiet. All of a sudden she woke up and, to our astonishment and embarrassment, put us through the same catechism as before. How we kept a straight face I will never know. So eventually she departed and we were free to giggle.
Years later Mother told us that Aunt Esther had never come to tea at all, It was Jennifer dressed up. We were absolutely astounded.

Sherborne - 1933

We had spent the Summer holidays at Mere as usual. Sumpy had her birthday in August and Angela in September with the usual celebrations. On 26th September we went to Sherborne, Angela and I as new girls. The next day was my birthday and I woke up with the feeling of excitement one used to have. Nothing happened. It was just "Praised be Jesus Christ", jump out of bed and go to Mass. No one said anything and I felt quite sure that my birthday had been forgotten. What misery!
Then on the Breakfast table, there was a small package - a much wanted watch - and for tea there appeared my favorite cherry cake with pink icing made by Bakers.
So all was well but I alsways felt peeved at having to have my birthday at school and not during the holidays.

Wimbledon 1934? - The Crystal Palace.

We went to Sydenham to see this. It was vast and empty apart from naked statues - how we stared and giggled. It was the fig leaves.
Later it burned down so I'm glad I went.

Sherborne - 1935

One day we were all summoned by Mother Edwards. She had something important to tell us.
"A New girl is coming to the school", she announced. "She will be a day girl. Now I want you to know that her father is a butcher but you must not laugh at her or tease her because of that".
Her name was Barbara Gillet so, of course, we called her Giblets and never stopped teasing her.

Colquite - 1939

Angela, Tony and myself were sent here a few days before war broke out. The house belonged to Aunt Catherine and Uncle Harry - rich relations who had offered to have us as the best of two evils. From what one heard of official evacuees I think they had a point.
Unfortunately they reckoned without Jennifer, who insisted that we took this terrible little dog of hers with us. The first thing it did was to perform on what was , I am sure, a very valuable carpet. Aunt Catherine had a fit and probably longed for the real evacuees. The dog went down to the stables and I just cant remember what happened to it - well, I can guess.
Being poor ourselves, we looked forward to a life of luxury. We were too young to realise that being rich usually means not spending , so it was quite a shock to find that parsimony was the rule. However, we had great hopes for Christmas. At home tables really did groan so it had to be even better at Colquite. Alas Aunt Catherine did not pay a shilling a week into the Co-op Christmas club.

Nor did she buy vast jars and tins of sweets from "Wholesale". I suppose we had a Christmas dinner of sorts and then a plate of nuts was passed round and that was it.
Once a week my Aunt had an 'At Home' and all these county people came. In the middle of the table stood a Fuller's walnut cake but it was not to be eaten. It was just for show. It was obviously an accepted custom because no-one ever asked for a slice. However, when my birthday came the show cake was deemed too stale, or perhaps too dusty, for 'at home' and I had it as a birthday cake.
On 3rd of September, when war was declared, we were in the garden when Aunt Catherine came out to tell us the news. We sat about discussing this event and I always remember Tony saying very solemnly, "I have never known war."
Uncle Harry was more open handed than his wife and quite often slipped us a shilling but soon there was nothing to spend it on. We were always warned to to tell Aunt Catherine if he gave us money. I think he was a bit of a worry as he was supposed to have a mania about being poisoned but I never noticed anything odd about him. He was just a bluff country gentleman who loved the land.
Aunt Catherine used to kiss the top of his bald head whenever she went by. I think this was sweet. I taught uncle Harry how to knit for soldiers. It took him 18 months to make a scarf and it was terribly wide in one place but we decided it would be a kind of balaclava. I wonder if anybody ever wore it.
Their daughter, Bay, came to stay sometimes with husband and baby. She was small and brittle. She smoked and used to say "Bloody". I liked her a lotand the food certainly improved when she was there and we used to go on trips to the sea.
Aunt Catherine kept all the food locked up and every day she would go to the servants' hall and dole out all that was needed for the day. A woman came twice a week to bake and her daughter, the cook, used to keep back some yeast buns for me. They were lovely when fresh but awful the day after, when they were supposed to be eaten.
I went to the local grammar school and was properly taught. I was terribly backward and had to work very hard but eventually got matric. The history teacher inspired me, being rather handsome and this started off a lifelong love of history.
At 17 I cut off my plaits and left school thinking I was grown up.

Mere - 1943

If I was going home for half term I would write to Mary and she would arrange leave at the same time. I didn't always go home because it was one night and half a days journey and at the end a five mile hitch hike. This usually meant a hike as there was very little to hitch.
Fortunately Kitt and Una very considerately worked their way up the L.N.E.R. - Peterborough, Doncaster and Newcastle - all convenient for Durham, so I often went there and usually arrived at the same time as a new baby.
But Mere was the desirable place to go. I loved to sing but was untalented, but Mary didn't mind. She would bash out my favorite songs on the piano, all culled from the Week End Book - "Annie Laurie", "Coming through the Rye", etc. and I would belt them out at the top of my voice.
At College I learned to make puppets and Mary and I made very good caractertures of Aunt Maud and Daddy. We had to keep them hidden, of course. The next thing was to write a play which was based on a row between these two old protagonists and where, of course, the famous lines "I am a master of this breakfast house" was incorporated.
What fun we had with this but then daddy was run over and guilt overwhelmed us and the puppets were abandoned.

---o0o---

DADDY - Playing the piano for us to dance and reading Streulpeter from the German edition.

MOTHER - Kicking her height with lovely long slender legs, which she kept to herself.

JENEFER - Standing in her shop with piles of S.T.'s behind her.

KITT - Often his playing with us and shutting us in drawers when he had had enough.

ROGER - Being put in the legs of his flying suit - lovely and furry.

NICK - Treating me like an adult at Imphy when I was 14.

Secondly there are some answers to questions she was asked as part of the book '8000 years of Wisdom' written around 2007.

My name is Verena Rosemary Quinnell (nee Glencross). I was born 27th September 1924 in wimbledon SW20, the 9th of 11 children.

How was your upbringing?
Middle Class but always hard up as we were all privately educated - clothes were handed down, how I longed for new clothes. Nowadays you cant keep me out of the charity shops!

I started out as a teacher, but after my husband left me and being left with young children, I took up market research so as to have some adult contacts. I went on doing this until the age of 75 to subsidise my many travels.

Any childhood memories?
I remember the medicines, syrup of figs (bowels were of great concern), milk of magnesia, malt and cod liver oil and best of all, Virol. Virol was a type of malt and was advertised heavily at stations, "Growing guts need it", "Nursing mothers need it", "Delicate children need it". I rather fancied being a delicate child!

What was your most important decision?
My most important decision? That's a hard one. So many mistakes. The most shattering was the adoption of my daughter but that was really decided for me.
A happy ending there - after 50 years we were reunited and I found I had become a Grandmother and Great Grandmother over night!
I had three sons from my marriage, the oldest died Christmas 2007 aged 60 and I miss him terribly. The next one works in Hong Kong and the youngest lives in the same city as me. He has married late and has two beautiful children - a real bonus. He is a teacher.

What was your favorite decade?
My favorite decade? The 80's really - the kids left university and I was able to spend my hard earned money on myself so explored the world. This extended into the 90's as well.

I have never been arrested

What is your favorite Saying?
'Keep on keeping on!'.

What would your parental advice be?
'Dont talk so much' and 'Neither a borrower or a lender be'.

Who are your Heroes?
The suffragettes without a doubt, and talking of decades, the 70s were pretty right on too. Most of my life I had resented women's inferior status and now we joined together and talked and talked and marched and found our power. Heady stuff.
I admire the unsung heroes - those who kept their mouths shut and took the rap for the greater good. Let us salute them.

What are you most grateful for?
Long life, nearly 83. Mostly just luck and being very active. The swimming pool and gym and not eating junk food, of course a glass of red wine a day. Lots of friends and interests.
Mostly being able to laugh at the crazyness of life.

Any regrets?
Where to start? Mostly my almost complete lack of confidence until middle age, which resulted in being walked upon, What a waste. I hope I have made up for it. It's wonderful to know I am not rubbish and to be in charge.
Not doing more for my son who died last year. He had problems which I was never really able to fully discuss with him. It makes me feel so sad. Also trusting too much in other people.

Money is the cause of inequality. It encourages greed and self indulgence. Lets barter.

A better world - we are more aware of what is going on everywhere because of the multimedia.
People can be incredibly generous during disasters etc.
Health has improved - we oldies are gaining from new remedies.

A worse world - Wars, wars, wars and the suffering of the innocent because of mens desire to dominate. Global warming of course.

Ambitions - I wanted to be an interpreter or a writer but the war put paid to my ambitions.

I was a picky kid but I loved a bar of chocolate after swimming. And sausages for breakfast and after church on Sundays.

It has to be the war for any 80 year olds. Our lives were completely disrupted.

For the first two years I stayed with relations in Cornwall - then a years student teaching in London and two years teacher training in Durham.
The V1s and V2s coming down stayed in my mind - the crunch of the latter and the noise of the former - bomp bomp bomp bomp and then - silence and then it fell.

Hockey (1st 11) Netball (2nd 11). I loved games, swimming, rope climbing.

Computers - fantastic. A whole world in ones home.

Yes - being left to bring up my family - I had to go out to work, take in student lodgers to give my kids the best start in life. We muddled through and I turned into a strong woman and that was the best thing that happened to me.

To Girls - Be independent and the world will be yours.

To Boys - Cultivate your gentle side and stop trying to be macho.

In Her Own Words: Rosemary's Memories

Wimbledon 1927

This is the first thing I can remember. We were in a room on the top floor at Worple Rd. Gladys and Edith [presumably servants] were there and Angela was a small baby, all in white.
Gladys opened the window and held Angela out so that I couldn't see her. "I've dropped the baby," she said. How I screamed until, at last, Mother came running in to see what was happening. "Why is that child screaming like that?" she asked.
"Oh, she's always yelling for nothing," said Gladys. Of course, the baby was safely inside by then and I just couldn't get through to mother what had happened.
Nothing has ever frightened me so much since.
PS: Edith had a car accident on her day off and was found to be wearing Mother's best blue silk undies.

Wimbledon 1930 (?) - Aunt Esther Comes to Tea
She was one of those ancient relatives whom we never met but heard a lot about. One day we were told we must be on our best behaviour because Aunt Esther was coming to tea.

It was a bit odd because we never heard the front door bell – suddenly she just happened to be there and we had to go into the drawing room to meet her.
She was sitting next to Mother during tea – a little bent old lady dressed entirely in black in very old-fashioned clothes. Unfortunately, she was extremely deaf so we had to speak up very clearly when she put us through that cross-questioning which children were subjected to in those days.
Suddenly her chin dropped and we realised she was asleep. Mother put her finger to her mouth to warn us to keep quiet. All of a sudden she woke up and, to our astonishment and embarrassment, put us through the same catechism as before. How we all kept a straight face I will never know. So eventually she departed and we were free to giggle.
Years later, Mother told us that Aunt Esther had never come to tea at all. It was Jennifer dressed up. We were absolutely astounded.

Sherborne 1935
One day we were all summoned by Mother Edwards. She had something important to tell us.
"A new girl is coming to the school," she announced. "She will be a day girl. Now I want you to know that her father is a butcher but you must not laugh at her or tease her at all because of that."
Her name was Barbara Gillett so, of course, we called her Giblets and never stopped teasing her.

The War
For the first two years I stayed with relations in Cornwall – then a year's student teaching in London and two years teacher training in Durham.
The V1s and V2s coming down stay in my mind – the crunch of the latter and the noise of the other – bomp bomp bomp and then silence, and then it fell.

Later Life
Being left to bring up my family – I had to go out and to work, take in student lodgers and give my kids the best start in life. We muddled through and I turned into a strong woman, and that was the best thing to happen to me.

Heroes
The Suffragettes, without a doubt. [On women's emancipation generally], I admire the unsung heroes – those who kept their mouths shut and took the rap for the greater good. Let us salute them.

END