

Joan Tomblin

## Life History

I was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> January 1925 to Philip and Ivy (nee Smith) Haddon. I think at Ivy Bank Wellington, Somerset, where I lived for the next 25 years. My father was my 'hero'. He had been badly wounded in the WW1, lost his left arm, had other injuries and was told he would never walk properly again. However, he did and played a very good game of tennis especially doubles with his brother Baldwin. Before the 1914 war he had been a good all round sportsman particularly at football was wanted by Exeter! In fact, he worked in Lloyds Bank.

My only memory of 'Ivy' was sitting on her lap in the bedroom. She must have died shortly afterwards, I believe in childbirth and the baby was stillborn – though it was never mentioned. Granny Smith came to live with us for a while but apart from snaps I have few memories, except for her funeral day when the sitting room floor was covered in wreaths and ever since, I have disliked the smell of arum lilies.

Three families, Haddon, Smith and Sparkes – had inter married and my Uncle Eric and Auntie Phyllis with their daughter, Beth lived next door and spent a lot of time with them in my early years. When I was 7 and my sister 8 years, Daddy married a widow, Evelyn Gard nee Hayter. Luckily, Pam and I hit it off from the start apart for odd times when I resented having to share Daddy with two other people. Both Mummy and Daddy had good voices and performed at chapel concerts. Mummy was a good cook very good needlewoman and had patience in teaching me to make a pair of pyjamas. We had a normal sort of life in a small town, socialising, chapel, walks, tennis club and swimming in the summer holidays. Pam and I attended Blackdown school for girls, mostly boarders and some day girls. We used to walk, back for lunch at home and back for afternoon school. During the holidays, we had the freedom of the countryside and when we had bicycles, we took sandwiches and off for the day. I obtained a School Certificate in 1940 and then undertook a 2 year shorthand, typing and bookkeeping course in Taunton at the end of which I became an employee of Somerset County Council. After a short spell in the Clerk's department, I was transferred to the Education Department and eventually helped to organise the Somerset Youth Service. For some reason, we were in a 'reserved' occupation.

Unhappily Mummy developed breast cancer and had to undergo a mastectomy and in the early 1940s no modern treatments were available and she died round about D Day in 1944. I was rather naive and the evening I spent with her in hospital, the night before she died had a profound and lasting effect. However life went on.

Daddy, Pam and I all helped at the ToCH canteen tea/snacks bar during the war and early post war when some French ex-prisoners of war were based in Wellington amongst them Pam's future husband. Then ex-prisoners of war were stationed in Wellington to dismantle Nissan huts and ship them to France for temporary housing. I think it was in late 1945 that Pam and I went to France to meet his family. We stayed with his eldest sister and her husband who

ran a Estaminet in a small village – a completely new environment for us. Anyway Pam and Alfred fixed the wedding for July 1947 and I had my bridesmaids outfit but I could not be there. It was a great disappointment – I had developed a pleural effusion which showed the antibodies of TB so I was confined to bed for six weeks with the window wide open and drinking 2 pints of full cream milk per day and jars of cod liver oil and malt – no antibiotics at that time, consequently I gained 3 stone and no clothes fitted, not much fun.

I returned to work after about 8 months but when the post of Secretary to the Headmaster of Wellington School, a minor public school, was advertised I applied. I was appointed. My father and uncle had attended the school. It was good experience but after 2 years I felt it was time to leave Wellington for a while.

The post of Secretary to the Warden of Urchfont Manor, Wiltshire County Council's residential college for adult education was available, I applied and to my amazement landed the job. I had no degree and my predecessor had a PhD! For 2 years I lived in this lovely Queen Anne Manor House and in a way it was my university. I could attend some lectures. Courses were on 'the human factor in industry, international affairs, music, art and other crafts and appreciation of the local flora and fauna, etc. When Guy Hunter and his wife Lou left and a new warden and a live-in housekeeper were appointed things were not the same again I moved.

This time I contacted BBC Bristol and was in 'talks' and then later secretary to 'Auntie Mollie' in children's hour. Television was in 1953 becoming popular and I was sent to BBC London on a course. I loved it and applied for a transfer. After a spell training in light entertainment I was fortunate to land up in dramatized documentaries with producer Gilchrist Calder. The first programme I worked on with Gil was 'Woman Alone' about unmarried mothers who in the mid-1950s were ostracised by society and often disowned by their own families – how times have changed. My duties included attending some of the outside rehearsals, continuity when filming, sitting in the gallery in the studio when on air making notes and previewing cameras with their next shot. Other programmes were on cruelty to children (NSPCC), alcoholics, prostitutes, outbreak of foot and mouth, etc. All programmes were in black and white and were broadcast 'live' at that time.

Needless to say I was in constant touch with home and Pam and her family. Dad came up to go to Wimbledon and stayed in the flat I shared with another girl and of course I went home some weekends. In one of these, I found Dad had torn his Achilles tendon and had to have his leg in plaster – so the time had come to return.

By that time Granny Hayter could no longer cope in her bungalow near Bath so she too was at home. Eventually, Granny moved to a local care home.

Pam and the children came home for about 6 weeks every alternate summer and Dad and I joined them in France where they rented a flat by the sea. We now had a car which we both enjoyed. I was employed as County Secretary to the Somerset Federation of Women's Institutes which again opened up other avenues including making a speech and awarding prizes at the Taunton College of Art.

Most of my friends had moved away from Wellington and sometimes I found it difficult not to hurt the feelings of the older generation. I was roped into becoming a Guide Lieutenant in our local Methodist church group and to driving local preachers to village churches in the district (Dad was Circuit Steward). Friends came to stay at weekends and there were few dull moments. Gradually Dad's hip became more painful and as he didn't want another operation, the treatment was Cortisone tablets. We had spent Christmas 1963 in France with Pam and family and returned to our normal life but on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1964 Dad said he had a pain in his chest and would not be going to church. I called the doctor and he diagnosed angina. Later that day Dad suffered a massive heart attack and died. I was with him so you can imagine the shock.

Pam and I decided the house must be sold and I applied for training as a Probation Officer and was accepted. I started in September 1964 and was based in Gloucester for 3 months. After Christmas did 'theory' in London and then under supervision was sent to Uxbridge and given a small case load and eventually qualified in September 1965. During this time, John began to play an important part. I should explain that he had been married to Barbara, one of my older cousins, so had been in the family for years – in fact as teenagers Pam and I had stayed with them in Harrow and John was best man at Pam's wedding. Sadly, Barbara had cancer and after a long battle, died shortly after my father. John worked for Kodak in colour processing which by 1964 was established in Hemel Hempstead where he also lived. Anyway, we decided to marry and had a quiet wedding with our immediate families in August 1965.

I completed my course at Uxbridge in September and then enjoyed being a housewife. John had recently taken up golf, a game I had always wanted to play, so I took lessons obtained a handicap and was fortunate to join John as a lady member of Harpenden Golf Club. John served on the men's committee and later I on the ladies committee and was made Lady Captain in 1976 and later Lady President in 2002/3.

We were fortunate in having 34 happy years together and I missed him so much especially his counsel and sense of humour. We both believed in 'service' and John was president of the local Lions club and he also helped at a club for teenagers with mental problems. I was a voluntary counsellor at the Citizen's Advice Bureau for 14 years, later with the Heather Club which had been set up in 1981 by Dacorum Council and Carey Baptist Church to help the elderly confused and give their carers a short break. Over the years more and more of our members developed dementia. I resigned in 2007 when I had womb cancer. Little did I think I would end up in a care home with special interest in dementia, but I am fortunate to be in Tara's Retreat.

I like people and being with them and I am very lucky to have met so many in different walks of life, also to have been blessed to receive so much love, care and affection from family, friends and the church.