

*In memory of Mum and Dad who did their very best to bring me up, but found it hard going.*

September 1942 was close to the middle of the second world war. Glasgow and the West of Scotland were heavily bombed because of the shipbuilding industry, rendering many families homeless; people over 18 were conscripted into the Services, food was strictly rationed, and amid this general misery my mother phoned the doctor. She was seven months pregnant, dizzy and breathless, and her legs were swollen out of all recognition. Renfrew was a small place, and there were few cars on the roads then, so it didn't take him long to drive to Broadloan, the street where my parents lived. It's still there. Dad hurried home from his job in Lobnitz drawing office. He was a naval architect.

Mum had already suffered one miscarriage; she and Dad were justifiably nervous, and the news wasn't good. She had pre-eclampsia, which they called 'white leg' then, a potentially dangerous condition, and they were shocked when the doctor told them that if the pregnancy wasn't terminated, Mum and baby would die. What could Dad say but 'Save Cathie' my mother. For the rest of his life, after a few drinks, Dad would talk to me about that dreadful day and the agonizing decision he'd had to make. 'You do understand, don't you? I had no choice. I couldn't let your mother die. After all, you weren't even born. I didn't know you.' And I'd nod. To my parents' relief everything did turn out all right. I was a tiny premature baby born in the nearby maternity hospital in Johnstone, where I clung onto life in an oxygen tent. Mum did say later that she'd been piqued because her plans to spend the confinement, which in those days lasted at least a fortnight, in a comfortable middle class nursing home had been thwarted. But she was soon immersed in the minor traumas of inexperienced motherhood.

She had to leave me in hospital, visiting every day until I reached 5lbs in weight. But once she got me back to Broadloan how ashamed she was of this ugly, wrinkled baby. My whole tiny body was covered in fine dark hair, I didn't have any fingernails, my hands were tightly clenched, and I wouldn't open my eyes for days. When they went shopping, she kept me well covered up, and pulled a little knitted hat over my face so the neighbours couldn't get a good look at me. Poor Mum, always worried about what other people might say; how she envied the mothers whose large, healthy babies were admired when they went out for walks. As the weeks passed, well-meaning relatives and friends encouraged Mum to put me outdoors in the pram; a massive, large-wheeled contraption, to get some fresh air, but she wouldn't do that in case I caught a chill. I was still tiny and delicate. She'd open the sitting-room windows and put the pram in there, hood up and blankets on. It was lucky she took such care of me; many infants died of hypothermia in Glasgow during the bitterly cold winter of 1942.

My name was automatically Catherine of course because Scottish people still followed the traditional naming pattern. The first girl was given her maternal grandmother's Christian name, followed by her maternal grandmother's maiden name and her mother's maiden name. Very useful when you're doing genealogy. I was Catherine Young McCallum Templeton. Grandpa McCallum told Mum in his dour way that she could dispense with Cuthbert, my great-grandma's maiden name. That was a relief! The first boy took the paternal grandfather's Christian name followed by the paternal grandmother's maiden name. My brother was Thomas for Grandpa Templeton and Barr, Grandma Templeton's maiden name. Unfortunately Grandma Templeton was called Jessie; Mum refused to give that name to my sister and broke with tradition in 1950.

Mum must have been lonely at times. Her father lived nearby, in Paisley, but her two brothers were away in the Army and her mother Cathie McCallum had died extremely suddenly three years earlier, in 1939, after contracting pneumonia. Penicillin had been discovered in 1928 but didn't come into widespread use till the 1940s. It cured infections; it became the 'wonder drug,' but it was too late to help my grandmother. The rest of Mum's extended McCallum family lived in Galston, Ayrshire and Dad's parents and two sisters lived in Renfrew. Unusually for these days, Mum had taken a degree at Glasgow University in 1936 and a further year of teacher training at Camphill College. She then taught in a school for the blind and enjoyed the independence of being self-supporting while living with her father, who taught tailoring in Paisley College. In those wartime years, women had to give up their teaching careers on marriage in favour of men returning from the war because there were so few jobs, and it was considered that married women would be supported by their husbands. So after all her years of university education and professional training she was ignominiously relegated to the home.

During my first year of life Glasgow was heavily bombed. The shipyards were the main objectives,

but although Renfrew was on the outskirts of the city, bombs fell most nights that winter. Dad said the Germans didn't realise how close the shipyards were to the river Clyde and they usually dropped their bombs on the houses behind. The air-raid warning sirens sounded almost every night, and Mum and Dad soon got fed up with having to dress themselves and me in the middle of the winter night, go outside and join the queue of people lining up in the cold to get into the shelters. They decided to risk staying in their own home instead. When they heard the sinister sound of the sirens and the high pitched whine of bombs dropping, they used to put my wicker Moses basket under the table and lie across it. (Dear souls, they thought naively that this would protect me.) I was unsettled and fretful. Once I fell asleep, they were reluctant to wake me up, for I wouldn't go back to sleep again. Mum said I cried constantly throughout the first year of my life. When I was two, they took me on holiday and had to go home early because I screamed all the time. They said the moment I was back home again all my crying and fussing stopped immediately. What a tyrant I was. It's interesting to speculate how much my protracted stay in an oxygen tent might have contributed to that behaviour, and indeed to my astigmatism, short-sightedness, macular degeneration and cataracts.

These were troubled and difficult times, and Dad was delighted to be offered a job in Dundee on the East coast of Scotland, far away from the bombing, but of course still subject to wartime rationing and restrictions. He was employed by the Admiralty and shipbuilding was a Reserved Occupation. The men who designed and built warships weren't sent off to fight. Dad used to say he felt in equal parts relieved and guilty that he didn't have to go to War. In 1943 the three of us moved into a bungalow in Collingwood Street, Barnhill, about six miles north of Dundee. It had a long garden, a *double few* they called it, running down to the East coast railway line and the sea. Dad always remained extremely proud of being able to buy that house and was fond of telling us how the previous owner had told him that its cost went over four figures, and she doubted if a young whippersnapper would be able to pay her over a thousand pounds! It was quite an achievement, it's true. Wages were tiny in those days and most people couldn't aspire to a house of their own. Dear Dad. He never forgot his life's small triumphs and revelled in relating them.

Dundee is in the Highlands, a long way from Renfrew where Mum and Dad had attended the same school and they were isolated from that network of friends and family which supplied most people with black-market goods; an egg or two, some vegetables on the sly which helped most people get through the worst of the rationing. Dad grew spinach and carrots in the sandy soil of our back garden, but astute rabbits ate faster than he could plant. Collingwood Street was exposed to the biting east wind which Mum and Dad used to say came straight from Siberia. They'd been accustomed to the milder climate of the West coast of Scotland, where palm trees could grow in sheltered spots, and we all felt the chill. It was bitter in the winters, and not particularly warm in the summers. I just got used to feeling cold all the time, I suppose. Years later Mum used to smile as she enumerated the many layers of clothes I had to wear in winter. First there was a fine woollen vest with short sleeves, then a sleeveless liberty bodice, which was thicker, and also made of wool. On top of that I'd wear a long-sleeved blouse and a jumper or cardigan. There would be knickers and long woollen stockings which were held up by suspenders attached to the liberty bodice under a woollen tartan skirt. When I went outside to play, I'd be wearing a pair of thick woollen socks and a knitted pixie hood, a woollen scarf round my neck, crossed over my chest and secured by a kilt pin at the back. Over that went a woollen coat. It's surprising I managed to do any playing outside at all, trussed up like that.

There were two bedrooms, a sitting room, dining room and kitchen. In wartime there was no furniture to be had, although we did possess beds and chairs, even a sofa. I don't know why we didn't have a kitchen table to start with in Barnhill. and we used the ironing board for a short time, until a colleague of dad's took pity on us and gave us a large table with a marble top. We did have a dresser, painted in the ubiquitous colours of the 40s, green and cream. Attached to the kitchen was the laundry room, bare apart from two large deep sinks with sloping fronts, for washing and rinsing. Since winter clothes were invariably made of wool it was a heavy job. Sometimes I'd come home from school to find Mum doing the washing, filling the house with the fresh smell of soap. We used large yellow bars of soap. When did soap flakes appear? And detergents? Did we use soap for washing the dishes then? I don't know. Clothes were pounded and rubbed on a ribbed metal or wood washing board, then put through the mangle which squashed most of the water out of them. The washing was piled into a wicker basket and pegged outside on a clothesline which went right across the lawn, supported by a notched pole. In winter the clothes were brought indoors, often frozen stiff, to dry on the pulley, an apparatus of wooden slats which hung from the kitchen ceiling. Every kitchen had one, and a clothes horse as well, to get the washing dry. Outside the back door next to the wash house was the coal bunker; we did have electricity, but in those days before central heating coal fires were the normal way to heat your home. There was a fireplace in bedrooms as well as living areas.

Coal was delivered by burly, grimy men who carried it in sacks over their shoulders and emptied it into the bunker. This continued until well into the 1970's, when the miners went on strike and the nation reconsidered its dependence on them. But before then we had to cluster around the fire. Periodically Dad would refill the coal scuttles; small, portable containers except for the one in the sitting room, a brass box with a lid embossed with Edinburgh castle, and lesser scuttles for bedrooms.

Winters were harsh, but there was an intense luminescent quality about the summer light up in Dundee. The waves were a bright, thin blue and the sandy beach was never golden; just pale yellow. Everything stood out in detail. It didn't take long for my arms and legs to turn a deep golden brown. My cousin Mabel on a visit from Renfrew came out in hives just sitting on the beach one day, and the green paint blistered on our front door. You could often see the Northern Lights, like a distant firework display. Mum remembered her father my Grandpa McCallum reading the newspaper outside at nine in the evening. Summertime ! What freedom I found in light clothing and sandals. I had one best dress, an old dress for playing and an even older one used as a night-gown. Sometimes, we'd picnic on the sand-dunes which were littered with barbed-wire bundles, and very occasionally we'd go swimming. In the 1940s mothers knitted swimsuits, which stretched and bagged indescribably in the water, and weighed heavily. Mum saved up her housekeeping money and bought an electric Singer. You could buy fine elastic thread for your sewing machine and create close rows of bouclé cotton (no artificial fabrics then!) which made swimming costumes more modest. We called it 'shirring'. You could also 'shirr' dresses and skirts, which gave an effect similar to smocking, and we called them *Dirndl* skirts though they bore only a slight resemblance to the Austrian ones. Don't forget that the factories were not making peace-time clothing and women either made their own or employed dressmakers.

During the long winters I often played inside in the sitting room with its angular utility furniture and standard lamp, and the bedroom I shared with Barr, his wooden cot against the wall. There weren't any toys, books, games or puzzles to be bought during the war. The factories were all manufacturing weapons. But we children of the forties had never known another life. Never having experienced the materialistic delights of toys manufactured in peacetime, I was content with balls and skipping ropes; my imagination easily transformed planks of wood into boats or a line of bricks into a shop. I'd spend hours filling little paper sweetie bags with sand (our garden was mainly sand; we were only yards from the dunes on the beach) and transporting them in my home made wheelbarrow to a hidey hole under the garden bench, where Dad found them months later and irritably getting out his spade, dismantled the whole heap. Mum made me a limp rag doll when I was two or three, but I didn't know what I was supposed to do with it. I'd never owned a doll before, and I despised and mistreated it.

The war ended when I was just three, and I suppose we must have celebrated. Mum told me a plane flew over the house one day doing *Victory rolls*. I have photos of Uncle Archie, Mum's younger brother on a visit to Barnhill with his new English wife Aunt Angela. He was dressed in scratchy khaki uniform, and I was wearing Mum's knitted pixy hood. This must have been just after he was demobbed, and he probably didn't have anything else to wear. The factories hadn't been manufacturing cloth other than that required for Servicemen's clothing since the beginning of the war, and it was very common to see men and women wearing uniform. Archie and Angela had met in the Army, as had Mum's other brother Jack and Joan, who was Welsh, to the family's dismay. We Scots didn't have much respect for the Welsh whom we regarded as penny-pinching and bitter. Angela was gentle, much less anxious and tense than my mother who was always scolding me, or worried and in a hurry, but I found her accent quite strange, and I couldn't understand a lot of what she said. The word *saucer*, for example, made me laugh, as did her habit of referring to small things as *dear little*.

I was about four when Mum and Dad gave me Mary, my first real doll. She was made of china, like all dolls in those days because plastic hadn't yet been invented. Imagine a world without biros, plastic buckets and bowls, the myriad of plastic toys. As for garden furniture – we didn't have enough to furnish our homes and gardens were used for growing food not flowers. There was a predecessor though, called bakelite, which was used for making radios, considered an essential for getting news of the war. But by this time my brother Barr was a toddler. He used to steal Mary and push her through the bars of our garden gate, until she fell on the pavement beyond, so she was constantly being repaired with wide bandages of sticking plaster. Dad and Mum made a tremendous, loving effort one Christmas, when they made a dolls' house and presented it to me. But I didn't know what to do with this large box, full of miniature furniture. I was totally

perplexed. In the end I picked it up and shook it! Mum and Dad were horrified, of course, and it was put on a shelf and hardly touched for the rest of its life. I had a wind-up record player, and two records (not even made of vinyl in these days!) that Mum said used to drive her mad, since I played them continually. One was called *Buttons and Bows*. I can still hear the tune.

I was a strange child. Mum used to shudder when, for want of other companions I suppose, I used to play with the large black spiders in our porch. I thought they were miniature people, and had no instinctive fear of them at all. But when I was about three or four and my older cousin Mabel shuddered, I lost interest in them. Because I had been premature, I was small for my age and could walk and run around under the dining table, an activity my parents found disconcerting. In the long wartime evenings when heavy blackout curtains were drawn, and wardens would knock on the door if they spied even a chink of light, our living room was like a dark cave. I'd walk slowly round and round the room in a circle, talking to imaginary people who seemed real enough to me. I'd have conversations and play games while Mum and Dad watched me uneasily. They didn't say anything at the time, but much later they told me how spine chilling and un-nerving my behaviour was. I've always had a strong sense of the supernatural, and been able to see things other people can't.

Perhaps I inherited the Second Sight from my Highland ancestors. I've spent all my life repressing it, fearing it might take me over if I allow myself to acknowledge it. I can't recall any specific instances of the Sight during my childhood, but I was alone much of the time, always deeply involved in imaginative games reflecting the stories I read and heard, mostly from the Bible. There weren't any story books around during the war. I'd be the young Samuel, offering up my toys to the Lord and listening for His voice as I fell asleep; or Ruth, travelling on foot to an unknown land. Often, I'd be an angel, standing on a hill looking down on creation. I was always aware of forces around me, and happy in their company. But I kept this side of my life low-key; Mum just shook her head and wouldn't talk about it. Dad seemed to understand, though he was fond of telling me I was far too imaginative for my own good. The only person I told about my other world was my paternal grandmother, Jessie Barr, and as a devout Jehovah's Witness she told me that my gift was the work of the devil and forbidden by the Bible.

In April 1946, when I was three and a half, Mum went to the Nursing home at Broughty Ferry, only a couple of miles away from Barnhill. In those days women stayed in *confinement* for a couple of weeks, men weren't given any time off work, and their children weren't allowed to visit, so I didn't see Mum at all. How hidebound and insensitive most institutions were then. During the day I stayed with the neighbours across the road, Mr and Mrs Adams, and Dad took me home after work. I felt strangely disorientated. The Adams family had two older sons, who introduced me to Weetabix, a revelation in cuisine. I'd always eaten porridge for breakfast and had no idea that other foods existed. Mum came back and home was familiar and comforting. She made an attempt to interest me in the new baby that fascinated her so much, but I was totally devoid of curiosity about this little creature that seemed to be constantly being bathed or having its nappies changed. Nappies were fluffy square cotton towels, folded into triangles, which gave babies a curious shape. I can't say I wanted to play with my baby brother. I wasn't jealous of Barr. I didn't register him as a living person at all. I kept my distance and ignored him. Mum was busy and preoccupied, she had little time for me, and usually scolded me when she caught me. I became adept at sliding out of the door unnoticed and running out to play. I was glad to get away from the smell of domesticity: talcum powder, clean washing, and the tall silver tins of government-supplied dried baby milk. There was government orange juice, cod liver oil and Virol, a malt extract, which I was dosed with daily. I liked it; it was strong and sweet; there wasn't much sugar around in my young days.

Barnhill was an idyllic, wild, open place to grow up. There were enough children around my own age to form a gang and we all played out in Collingwood Street; there were few cars in those days, so no danger of getting run over, or on a large tract of waste land conveniently adjoining our house. Our parents never seemed to worry about us; I built dens, climbed trees and turned into a regular tomboy. *Benign neglect* is what my sister called our upbringing. Sometimes Mum asked where I was going, but 'out to play' seemed to satisfy her. I came back for mealtimes and did as I pleased. I wonder now if this was when I began to draw away from and secretly despise her. Mum never went outside; she wasn't active. She liked nice clothes. Her drawers were crammed with heavy pink silk underwear from pre-war days. She was obsessed by the new baby and didn't have the energy to control me. I gradually began to defy her with impunity. If I did anything too outrageous, she'd wait till Dad came home to tell me off. Dad was the law enforcer, but as often as not he was on my side.

My best friend Garven McKie lived a couple of doors up the road. His big sister, Isla, a few years older, kept an eye on us from time to time. When I went to Garven's house I had to be careful to give the bad-tempered Scottie dog next door a wide berth. If the garden gate was open, it would waddle down the path and growl at me. It belonged to a woman called Mrs Geekie who was as old as the hills and fond of shouting at us children. Garven and I made dens in the undergrowth. We'd pick delicious, soft *Tayberries* in season, there were redcurrants, gooseberries and plums in our garden, and when we were really hungry, we'd pick and eat some tall, hollow green stems that tasted rather nasty, but kept hunger at bay. We called it 'rhubarb', but I now realise it was a relative of cow parsley. Eating it could have been fatal if it had been hemlock and when they discovered this my parents told us off very seriously. Garven was more adventurous than me. When he was only 3 or 4, he quite often boarded the bus at the bottom of Collingwood Street and went to Dundee. Possibly, he was following Isla to school. He'd be discovered by the conductor at the terminus and brought home on the next bus. I'm not sure if his mother always noticed he'd gone missing! Garven also had a habit of taking the glass milk bottles from people's doorsteps home to his mother, who spent quite a lot of time scurrying round the neighbourhood wondering where to replace them!

Everybody had a Ration Book, just a small booklet of cheap paper, with inked-in dated squares, or *coupons*, that you cut out with scissors and gave to the shopkeeper with your payment for goods. There were separate pages for groceries, clothing and commodities. Money alone wouldn't do; without the coupons you couldn't buy anything. One of Dad's favourite stories was about the time bananas appeared in the shops again. Banana boats hadn't dared sail across the ocean during the war for fear of attack. I was about four and had never seen one. They were rationed, of course, and you were only allowed to buy one for each ration book. Mum put these four precious bananas safely in the larder as a treat for the next day. But Barr who was still just a baby got up in the night and had no problem opening and eating them. Dad used to shake his head. 'There was a telltale line of banana skins across the kitchen floor in the morning. He'd left one and a half for the rest of us. Probably couldn't eat any more.'

I learnt to read with Dad, sitting on his knee while we read the headlines from the Daily Express or the Sunday Mirror. Dad, as often as not, would be rolling a cigarette in a tiny machine called a Rizla, using small, delicate leaves of tissue paper which he moistened carefully with the tip of his tongue. Almost everyone seemed to smoke these days. I never needed a formal reading lesson; I used to think I was born being able to read, and Mum agreed it seemed like that to her as well. By the time I was five and went to school I had my own copy of the *Beano*, or the *Dandy* delivered to the house every week. A lot of it was mystifying, but I enjoyed the antics of Keyhole Kate, Corky the Cat, and Desperate Dan.

Mum and Dad valued education very highly, and were prepared to pay, but when they applied to Dundee High, a prestigious private school, there were no vacancies, so for a few weeks in September 1947 I attended a small school in Barnhill, where we used slates to write on. It sounds really Dickensian. But in wartime a lot of things were in short supply, including paper, pens and pencils. However Dad's boss in the shipbuilding company pulled a few strings and found me a place at Dundee High, much to the envy of some of the neighbours. I was put in the year above but was well able to hold my place near the top of the class. Boys and girls had separate entrances and classrooms, even separate playgrounds. I never set eyes on any of the boys who attended Dundee High, though rumour had it that in the Senior school the sexes were allowed to meet. It's difficult to join an established class halfway through a term no matter what age you are. It was certainly an ordeal for me, a harum scarum little girl, younger than all the others, accustomed to doing as I pleased and not as I was told. I never did really fit in, although I made a few friends. All the other girls already knew one another; they had friends and desks; they knew the school routine, the timetable, where the classrooms and the Hall and the toilets were. I had to struggle to catch up with them, and I don't remember any of them being particularly kind to me.

The uniform was a navy gym slip with wide box pleats, cream shirt and striped tie, jumper, blazer adorned with school badge, coat and a hat with gold ribbons. I managed to look quite tidy in it and my parents were pleased that I was attending the best school in the area. I'm not sure if this was entirely because they were keen for me to get a good education, or if they were determined to make their way up the social ladder. It must have been quite a financial investment. Apart from the uniform, fees and the inevitable shoe bags, plimsolls and PE kit, they had to buy all my school textbooks and exercise books, which we called *jotters*. Owning your own books certainly made you take care of them! For the first few weeks Dad came with me in the bus and saw me across Dundee's busy main square where the neo-classical High School

building sat smugly within its iron fencing, like a Greek Temple. I vividly remember one of my first lessons - there were more girls in the classroom than I'd ever seen before, dressed in their neat uniforms, all unified and studious while I was a stranger. For a whole lesson we sat in serried rows of desks painstakingly copying down the school song from the blackboard. It was in Latin. We had to take the words home and learn them off by heart so we could sing them at Speech Day. To my amazement and utter horror when I got home from school and dropped my new stiff leather satchel on the floor, Mum told me that from now on I'd have to go there every day.

He worked quite close to school, at the Caledonian shipyard. Once I got used to the journey I began going to and from school on my own. Sometimes I'd go home on the bus with a girl in my class, Ann Ramsay who lived in Barnhill too. Occasionally I'd deliberately take my time, shake her off and go to the Museum after school, dawdling in fascinated horror past the Egyptian sarcophagi and the particularly gruesome desiccated skeleton of an Egyptian who'd been buried in the desert sand. His skin was flaky and brown, his face retained few recognisably human vestiges. I always visited him! Then I'd leave the building via the Natural History section. There was a line of stuffed Antarctic animals, polar bears and penguins all a little the worse for wear. I'd wander down through the market to the bus station on the harbour where you could see ships from India unloading their cargoes of jute. Jute was used to make linoleum, the universal floor covering then. You could lay it down, cut it and have a neat-looking surface in no time at all. There were several men in that market area who didn't have any legs at all and sat on low skateboard contraptions close to the ground, poor souls, begging. Looking back, how shameful it was that ex-servicemen should have been reduced to such ignominy, but as a child, I found their crab-like presence at my feet disturbing. Up in the main square, quite often there would be a pipe band, the soldiers all kilted, playing and practising marching; lending a wild atmosphere to a weekday as we made our way past.

In Dundee at that time, all children wearing school uniform paid a penny for a bus trip no matter how far they were travelling. It was a simple, effective system. Sometimes older schoolchildren argued with the conductor, but if they weren't wearing their blazers, they had to pay full fare. Sometimes I'd spend that penny on a biscuit or a bun, then start the long walk home along the coast road, but to my delight I was always picked up and given a lift by some concerned adult in a car. These were certainly different times! Not, I hasten to add, that I told my parents what I'd been doing. They'd have been horrified if they'd known half my exploits.

Catherine