

*My Journey
So Far*

GUINEVERE L.

A note on the cover image: *Flaming June* is an 1895 painting by Sir Frederic Leighton, popularised anew in 1989 by its use as the cover art on album *Waltz Darling* by Malcolm McLaren and the Bootzilla Band.

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*For my children Craig and Claire,
and for my airline family:
thank you.*

Preface

Whenever I meet new people and we engage in conversation, usually I am posed questions like ‘Where are your parents?’, ‘Why did you come to Australia?’, ‘Where’s your husband?’, ‘Why do you look away and appear distant, what are you hiding behind those eyes?’, and ‘Why do you keep people away from you, what are you running away from?’.

I begin answering with a few words and it is obvious that they want to know more. I would usually try to stop or divert our conversation by saying, “I have to go now,” or switch the subject of the conversation to the other person by adding, “What about you?”

Over the years, I have repeatedly heard wonderfully caring remarks such as, “I’d like to get to know you more,” or “With just the little you have shared, I think you should write a book.”

No matter who comes into my life, the glimpses into my life through my memory show how the instability, mistrust, fear, and abuse that I have experienced have shaped me. My experiences cannot be explained in one sentence, ten sentences or even 100 sentences.

I don’t want to write about my story. I just want to forget all my unpleasant memories and hope that they will disappear. To this day however, the more I try to forget those memories, the more they haunt me.

I considered whether I should continue writing fragmented notes and placing them in a drawer and keep the torments to myself, or write them into an emotionally

heartfelt book and share it with people so they can understand some of the complications that I have endured throughout my life.

I decided to share. This is my gift to you. This is my story.

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Part I

CHILDHOOD

I was a good girl

Young Guinevere

I was born at home at 33 Sarum Close, Shipton Bellinger, Hampshire, England by a midwife in July 1956. I am unsure as to why my mother, Patricia, had children. She had enough siblings to care for.

My mother wanted a boy and had only chosen a boy's name: Geoffrey. However, with my arrival she hastily chose the name Guinevere. I was too much for her to manage, her nervous ways stemming from her own upbringing.

As a toddler and child, I was a little cheeky and restless. I was always told that my sister Morgan was easier to deal with. And she was. If she was placed somewhere that is where she would stay, whereas if I was placed somewhere, I wouldn't stay there for long. I was a tad more energetic. Toilet training at eighteen months of age was a breeze. If I wet my pants I would take them off quick-smart and I wasn't happy with only that. I would toss them away, whereas my sister would just sit in whatever mess she created, waiting for Mum to fix it. At least Mum knew what to expect with Morgan.

When the time came to wean me off the bottle I was informed that 'the milkman took it'. I never liked the milkman from that moment forward. Whenever I saw him I would just glare at the poor guy. If I was smacked as a

youngster and told to go upstairs I would reluctantly go and would creep halfway back down the stairwell in defiance.

Morgan was much older and it was my mother's nervous disposition that contributed to the decision for that large age gap, and my father supported that decision. Morgan, who I really didn't know very well, was a teenager when I was born. She was in the workforce and I can't remember her being around much at home either. I was still young when she married, floating away with her new Royal Air Force husband who came from another neighbouring village, moving from place to place across different parts of England and overseas. She had worked in a shoe shop prior to her marriage.

Morgan's subsequent needs were well suited to her, driven by placating to her husband and her not having any need for a career for herself. My brother-in-law's upcoming profession and her blossoming new family of three children in nearly as many years required its own attention.

As a toddler, I remember sitting in my highchair and throwing my bread crusts at Morgan and her friends. Perhaps the bread crusts and her seemed to go together—I preferred to be with my dad, and if I wasn't with my dad I was often on my own.

I was quite often dressed extremely well and had all the designer toys one could imagine. The toys kept me amused and the desired outcome of being out of Mum's way was achieved. So with that in mind I guess that was all my mum could cope with for me. I was given every material thing I could want.

I was four years of age and loved nature, exploring and playing in the garden, although me playing in the garden

sometimes involved pulling the heads off flowers that my dad had diligently planted. His prized roses didn't escape my eye either. I would pull the petals off and dry them in a sunny spot on the window's ledge until they were crunchy. Then I could hold on to the scent. I think that was where my affinity for natural medicine started.

My dad's garden at the rear of the house was heavily planted with fruit trees and other assorted seasonal fruit and vegetables. Flowers were grown in beds at the front for show. We had fields of hay as far as the eye could see to play in at the back of our house. When it was time for the farmer to bale up the hay I would arrange those stacks to become great cubby houses. All through the summer months I would sneak through a gap in the bushes in our back garden fenceline and play until it was time for bed.

Mum cooked and cleaned the house. Our meat was home delivered. My mother would go out and choose the meat from the open back of the butcher's van. The home-grown vegetables and fruit were gathered in abundance from the garden.

Sacks of coal for the fire were delivered as well. The large truck would arrive regularly and we would take delivery of as many sacks as we required to fill up the stocks in the coal-house attached to the back of the house. The coal house remnants, along with Dad's old gardening hat, were used at Christmas time to build the snowman's facial features, with a carrot for his nose.

Venturing out of the gate alone, I watched nature along the pathways. My adventurous ways took me along the Roman roads around the village. My journeys were a joy in

all the different seasons. Stinging nettles grew along the edge of the pathways wherever they could. Usually their remedy, the dock leaf, was close by and could rub any pain away. Wild primroses, buttercups, and daises were scattered everywhere. I would spend hours of my time sitting on the grass picking daises for daisy chains or trying to find that elusive four-leaf clover.

In Spring, I would see wild pussy willow and clamber to break off a stem, then keep walking along rubbing the softness of the buds. On the odd occasion, something really worth bringing home would pop up, like a stone flint from the Roman days for show-and-tell at school. If Mum had given me a bag to take with me I would pick wild blackberries so Mum could make blackberry pie.

With my love for nature, I wondered what might be over the horizon or around every corner. Along the walk to school, I would see a spider with her web highlighted from the morning dew on the bushes of neighbouring properties. School nature studies were the best fun, being out and about, collecting leaves, identifying them, tracing them and pressing them into books.

If I was around people I was fossicking for treasures at the secondhand sales known as jumble sales where people gathered together to sell personal belongings they no longer needed. I also enjoyed the Autumn Harvest festival. There were plenty of homemade things from the village community who donated their time to this annual event.

During Autumn while it wasn't too cold, I would go out and explore in the constant English drizzle. The rain was conducive to hunting for wild mushrooms in the surrounding fields for breakfast. We found more when it was raining.

Autumn was also the time that trees lost their leaves so the ground was well-covered. My mum didn't agree to my crunching of them under my feet on my way home from school. She used her hard-earned pounds to buy my good quality Clarks shoes for me and she felt I was ruining my shoes that protected my feet. She was a big believer of protecting one's feet, which carry you all your life.

Throughout Winter, I enjoyed the feeling of fresh, soft snow under my feet. I was thrilled to put my shoes on, open the front door, and feel the excitement of making my footprint the first one in the snow. Opening the curtain in the morning, I enjoyed seeing a bird's footprint on the snowy windowsill.

Birds pecked at the bottles of milk left at the door and I found it a regular challenge to get the milk before the birds did.

Looking up, I could see when the sky was full of snow. I'd feel a softening of the cold temperature and the sky became pink. This was the setting for those soft flakes to fall and sometimes they would keep falling. It was extra special when we had deep snow. The snow would settle and its surface would harden from glimpses of the winter sun. I would walk outside, and try walking on top of the hardened surface hoping not to fall through. I inevitably fell through and found myself in snow up to my waist. My dad didn't think this was fun with the extra time digging his way outside. The roads and pathways were compacted and extremely slippery, and this made it difficult for him to get to work.

In the long, cold Winter days and evenings when the weather turned bad, of course I enjoyed playing with my

toys. I tried playing with the other children in the village but found it difficult to get along with their interests, and they didn't appear to enjoy nature like I did. So I would go out, preferring myself as my own company, as it appeared to be much easier that way anyway.

Our holidays were beach holidays. We drove to neighbouring counties or across the water by ferry to the Isle of Wight on our own or catching up with my mother's family. The Stonehenge monument was a leisurely drive away. We took regular outings to the local cathedrals of Winchester and Salisbury and other monuments like Old Sarum Castle. There were plenty of castles in England offering cultural activities. There was always a wedding to attend or a gathering for some reason, which happened to complement such a large, spread out Hampshire family. One day, we drove to the New Forest National Park, where we regularly caught up with my mother's family for picnics and a game of 'rounders', the bat and ball game played socially in Britain.

The rendezvous point was Stoney Cross, an old airfield surrounded by thick woodlands. It also gave me a chance to go exploring in the woodlands with my cousins looking for deer and ponies that roamed wild throughout the forest.

One day we were on our way back through the Hampshire countryside when my father started to complain of pains in his chest. The following days saw my father tended to by the local general practitioner who moved him downstairs onto a bed where he remained for a few weeks until he deteriorated to the extent that he was taken to hospital.

I remember the blue ambulance arriving and I somehow knew what was about to happen. I took my position against the outside wall of the house.

“Come and say goodbye to your father,” I heard my mother say. I could only shake my head.

“No, I can’t,” I said to myself.

My favourite person in the whole world was about to be taken from me. The doors of the ambulance closed and he was whisked away and gone forever.

He had died of a heart attack. This was brought on due to mismanagement by the local general practitioner, according to my mother’s thoughts. That may have contributed to his death. However, my father smoked and didn’t exercise and I think those factors as the culprit are more accurate.

My life had started to change and I was just seven years of age. I was beginning to endure an unstable upbringing at a tender age. My dad was only fifty-three years of age. He had seen his eldest daughter marry the year before.

I still had my bunny rabbit, my poodle called Peachy to cling to, I thought, and my budgies that sat for years on the back porch. Slowly the budgies disappeared over time. I can’t remember what happened to them. Then one day my bunny rabbit disappeared. It was a distraction, feeding him from a bowl of salad scraps my mother gave me. I was told that he had run away and at the time even that was difficult to understand; later I learnt he kept getting out and it became time consuming for everyone to keep looking for him. I still had Peachy to play with in the garden, although my fear was that he might disappear as well.

My dad’s death fuelled my greater love of nature and exploring. I detached myself from anything close that breathed and I therefore clung to my toys even more. My mother returned to work in what she knew as we had limited income, and I returned to normal school life.

Our only visitors after Dad's death were two of Mum's brothers, who warranted the drive from their homes thirty-eight miles away in the outskirts of Southampton to take all of Dad's tool collection from the shed.

One day, I remember not being happy at school so I stood up and walked home. The school teacher, Mrs Bailey, had to have a word with my mother.

"Please let Guinevere know that she just cannot walk out when she wants to," exclaimed Mrs Bailey in disbelief. Mum then spoke to me and I can't remember ever doing that again; at least not at school.

My mum worked for a short time in Tidworth, which was a small town a mile away from Shipton Bellinger. Around 1600 AD the beginnings of a fine country home became apparent, evolving to become known as Tedworth House. This impressive house and grounds was a palatial country residence housing generations of political figures who entertained the rich, famous, and powerful until the early 20th century when it housed military officials.

Then she worked at the local vicarage, which was a large home in the village. It was built in the 19th century and housed the incoming army brigadiers. Her professionalism warranted a good job and she didn't have a challenge securing work. On my regular visits to this house, I enjoyed exploring the many rooms and doors I would walk through, with something interesting behind each one. "Look and don't touch Guinevere," my mum would tell me.

The gardens were rambling too. In the grounds there was a shed, which was probably an old stable at some stage. I would climb up the rickety old wooden stairs very carefully into the loft above and open big wooden shutter windows

to contemplate, and more suitably, dream. The smell of old, stained, damp wood lingered as I sat there until the air outside wafted through. I would peer down and watch the groundsman tending the gardens from my perch on the edge of the window.

When we ventured away from village life, it was to go on holidays and catch up with my mother's family. Those visits felt different and not the same as they used to feel. I would see my cousins with their mum and dad and I felt like something was missing, not having my dad around.