

Tape Transcript of Barbara J. Gadd. April 2006

Toby the dog

Didn't you have a dog called Toby when you were in Ceylon?

Oh yes. Dear Toby. When I came home on furlough I left him with my friend Ruth, I suppose. When I returned to Ceylon he'd settled with her in the country, like, and I didn't like to uproot him and bring him back under my roof, because I could always go and visit him. When I went to stay with Ruth, Toby always came and slept under my bed and he lived to be about fifteen I rather think. Yes, Toby was lovely.

So what sort of dog was he?

Well, he was a mongrel of course, but a terrier type. His ears flopped. No he was quite a trainable little dog, like.

So, did you live in the school or did you have a house of your own?

Oh, I had a bungalow, separate, yes. It was next to the school – I think it joined on at some point, but I wasn't under the school's roof. Well I remember we hadwell it was very embarrassing really when the dog I had (*not Toby*) got rabies and it caused a great commotion. Well, he seemed rather restless in the evening and I couldn't understand why, because he was usually a peaceful and manageable sort of dog. But in the morning he went berserk, you see. At that time I had some chickens in the garden and my secretary in those days was rather given to setting eggs and producing chicks or something (*laugh*) and they were sort of trotting about loose and this blessed dog went in pursuit and that sort of, I think that alerted people to what was wrong, you see and they said I must go indoors, because apparently the theory was that rabid dogs always went for their owners. So I was shoved back inside, you see. Well, you can imagine with a school, making them all go inside and stay there was, well in the tropics where everything was wide open for ventilation, was quite a business. And a young man came in off the street to lend a hand when he realised this commotion was going on and he turned out to be a boy who'd grown up in our orphanage up in mid-country. We had one for a time. I don't know how long it was there. A very nice young man who came to the rescue or did his best to rescue us. Anyway, luckily nobody was the worse for it. I think he may have been slightly nipped in the leg and I made him go for the you see we lived only a short distance from the Pasteur Institute a little further up, so it was quite handy to go up and down and I started him off having the injections, well then he decided to break away and have the local remedy. Well I couldn't do anything about it – it was his choice not mine. Anyway, everybody survived, nobody got hydrophobia, I'm glad to say. The dog had to be put down of course. It was shot. The police came, but idiotically they didn't bring a gun with them – typical – so there was this mad dog racing around and it was just in the morning when the daygirls were arriving with grown-ups

bringing them in some cases and it was quite a palaver. It was a miracle really that nobody was the worse for it. Well, he'd been regularly inoculated every year up at the Pasteur Institute, further up on the main road, but obviously it didn't help and they said – they did a post mortem – it was one of the worst cases they'd ever seen. So it was an absolute miracle that we survived that.

So there were daygirls and boarders were there, at the school?

Oh yes – I had daygirls. Well, it had I think originally been just boarders. We didn't get as many boarders after a certain time. We still had quite a number of boarders, but there was a demand for places for daygirls, you see, and we took them, because, well we were better off with daygirls, than with all boarders, 'cos obviously we didn't get the fees if we only took boarders.

Were they all ages or were they just senior girls?

It was an all-age school when it started. Whether eventually we cut down on the younger ones I don't now remember, to tell the truth. I think we had them, but we may have reduced the very young ones, because they are a bigger demand on, you know, what you can provide, as it were. Getting matrons was a bit of a trouble, I seem to remember, getting suitable people to do it. I wouldn't do it again, I don't think, but it was quite interesting at the time. I survived alright.

So presumably you had to learn Singalese before you went out there?

Well, I didn't have to. I was supposed to learn it, but my language time was rather broken up because theoretically when people first went out they learned the language and did nothing else, but I got grabbed into work with the school too soon because of necessity and I didn't really have the time and I don't think I'm that good at learning languages. I can do it, but the problem was to get a suitable teacher. I had a nice old boy teaching me at one point, but they weren't trained to teach languages, you see. I mean, in some of our mission fields there were language schools that you were sent to and they got on much better obviously, because they were being properly taught. But I never was and as I say, I don't think I really had enough time to give to it and I don't think I'm bright enough really at picking up languages to sort of do it off the back of my hand, as it were. I learnt a certain amount, certainly and in a way I didn't need to all that much in Colombo because there was so much English spoken still when I went out, with the Government Offices round about and so on. That was why they were so strict about rabies and things, because it was Government Offices, you see, and they couldn't afford to have outbreaks of, well anything, not just rabies. Even measles could have been a disaster. So there was that to think of.

So was it Toby who got rabies, or another dog?

No, not Toby, long after Toby. Toby lived to a great age. Ruth had him you see when I came home on furlough and I didn't want to drag him back to Colombo when he'd settled

happily with her in the country. As I say, he lived ... well he was still alive when I left. Yes, he was a sweet dog Toby. I don't know how I came by him I don't think he was anything special – you know, he was mongrel we collected up from somewhere. As I said, as the Pasteur Institute was close by I always my dogs inoculated against Rabies and I had a certificate to prove it and they'd done a PM on this rabid dog and they said it was one of the worst cases they'd ever come across, so obviously the inoculation didn't work. I remember after I came home, I think it was, there was quite a spate of correspondence in one of the English papers about how quarantine shouldn't be necessary for pets from abroad and there was this inoculation available and I think I did write to the paper and say that I'd had it for my dog and it didn't work. Whether it was ever published I don't remember now, but I remember that correspondence going on. Theoretically, if they were properly – well there was no question of his being properly inoculated. I had the certificate with the dose marked on it every time. I suppose it doesn't always work for some reason, I don't know really. I do not know. I think we had a lucky escape. Well it can be quite useful to have a dog around, not rushing about biting people or anything. Oh yes, the children loved Toby. He was very tame and they used to pin a duster round his tummy and said he was wearing a sarong. (*Laugh*). He was a very obliging dog. I liked it's nice to have some sort of pets around where there are children – you know it's fun for them and its good training. Who was it used to say 'Tawby, Tawby' could never quite get the pronunciation right? 'Tawby, Tawby ...'

You must have gone out to Ceylon by ship.

Oh yes. I did all my journeys by sea.

Had the war started then?

'39 I went out. It had about – or soon after, yes. Oh, yes the war must have started, because I took months to get there by sea. We went right out nearly to the Azores. We set out from Liverpool and we must have sailed at about midnight. I don't know whether we stayed up to look out, but it was just going down the Mersey then and in the morning, well it was wonderful really, when I looked out, we'd gone out into the Irish Sea and there was this great Armada spreading out, you see – we were in convoy, with all sorts of boats and they spread out over and there was this mass of shipping – it was unbelievable really. And then we turned right and went north to go round the top of Ireland, because the war, you see, was still on. From there we shot out across the Atlantic almost to the Azores (*laugh*) and then we got a signal – we were prepared to go around the Cape, because that was what had been happening, but we got a signal ordering us through the Mediterranean. And I think we were the second convoy through the Mediterranean. And well it was interesting, you see – my brother was in North Africa at that time doing his military service. Well I don't think he did any fighting but he was in something, he was called up into it. He eventually came back out of North Africa and I think crossed over to Sicily and then over into Italy, and then went all up through Italy and eventually got absorbed into whatever was going on at the top of there I suppose. And I know at one point my convoy went so near to the coast of Africa that I could have thrown a pebble on

the beach I think. If my brother had been visible on the beach then I could have hit him with a pebble (*laugh*).

It must have been quite exciting.

Well, you don't really want that sort of excitement much, not really I don't think. Excitement's all right in retrospect perhaps or at a distance, but not when you're in the thick of it probably. I don't know, I've lived a very dicey sort of life on the whole, I think, come to think of it. Not that I had any particular urge to do things like that as far as I remember, but it just seemed to be what happened.

I never got much mastery of Singalese because I got whipped into the work so early. I had to start school work and so on, which takes up a lot of time. And I never had a good enough teacher really. I mean I had a dear old boy initially – he was a sweetie – but he wasn't really a language teacher.

Is it quite a difficult language to learn?

Well, yes, it's foreign to us, because it's not part of our Latin tradition, of course. It comes down from the eastern language. What is it? - I can't say the name of it now. Sanskrit, or something like that, you see, it's a different background. But with good teaching it was learnable for the amount we needed. But you see the trouble was, I didn't need it all that much in Colombo because so much English was being spoken still – even when I went out there you could get by reasonably well. I remember I had a father and I think he must have had a post office somewhere and he was given to phoning me oh, ever so early in the morning – you know at half past six or something like that, because it was all quiet then, he reckoned, you see. Well, that was all very well, but it was bit of a nuisance really (*laugh*). He was the one who told me that his time was very precious. I always thought that was rather nice.

What about your time? You could say that your time was very precious!

Oh well, it didn't matter about that, of course. I was only English and female. I didn't demand high respect I don't think. (*Much laughter*). Well I think we made a useful contribution at the time that it was useful so to speak – the Mission Schools. Well, you see, the real thing was, as one of the parents pointed out at one time, they could rely on the Mission Schools to have integrity. They couldn't be bribed, they didn't falsify results and things like that. They could trust us. And their own people they couldn't trust at all really. They were shocking, so that I can see the point. Whether that ever really got absorbed into their own system I wouldn't like to say, I don't know what happened. The political situation changed, I suppose. I know we celebrated – what was that? – oh Ceylon's Independence – that was right. There were celebrations and my staff, I think, inveigled me into going down to the harbour to see the fireworks or something and we were standing there quite happily with a lot of other people – you know – there seemed to be crowds round about and I discovered that we were the front row over the harbour. Everybody else was pushing from behind (*laugh*). So we thought we'd better get away

from there! I'd have ended up in the harbour! Well there we are. Laugh! We had some laughs I expect.

I used to keep in touch with one of them I think after I came home.

I remember Ruth. You used to have letters from her.

Yes. I can't remember exactly what happened about that. I've got a feeling there was some slight estrangement - that I'd, well, done something or failed to do something that they thought I should be doing. No. I've forgotten what happened about that.

Yes, I remember – did I revisit the island? I remember the Spicy breezes as we approached. We approached the island early in the morning and we really did smell the Spicy breezes.

Ah well. I don't know if we saw life or not. I don't know what we saw, to be honest. Well, I suppose it was experience. Put it down to experience.