

Some reminiscences of my father, Wad.

My father's parents were tea planters in Ceylon. After living five years with them on their tea plantation, he was sent home in 1910 with his older sister to relatives in the Vale of Worcester. The children were separated, each going to live with families where there was another child of the same sex and about the same age. My father was proud of his family in the abstract; he had a book about the Waddington family tracing the family history back to the 12th century. However, he never talked about his sister or the people he grew up with, except to say that they were farmers and Quakers, the salt of the earth, and that he had had to go to Meeting every Sunday where everyone was silent, communing with their own God unless, rarely, they were moved to speak.

He was a shy person and not very domesticated, perhaps, my mother thought, because he never recovered from the shock of being sent away from home so young. But he had a great love of life, and an experimental — he might call it scientific — attitude towards the question of how best to live.

With little time for official religion, he was always deeply interested in philosophy and questions of the meaning of life. His autobiographical essay in *Evolution of an Evolutionist* explains how important his metaphysical views were to the development of his scientific ideas. He was open to a very wide range of ideas, from Alexandrian Gnostics and Arabic alchemists that he read as a schoolboy to the abstruse metaphysics of Whitehead and Wittenstein. Not merely a rationalist/materialist, he always took a wholistic approach, arguing against reductionism. Very concerned with my philosophical education, he provided me when I was a teenager with a rich variety of reading: Russell on the history of philosophy, Freud on *The Ego and the Id*, Sartre and the existentialists.

His interest in life also took much more practical forms. When he went to Edinburgh in 1947 to head the Institute of Animal Genetics there was still a severe postwar housing shortage. So he organized a communal household for the scientific staff of his lab at Mortonhall. This was a large Georgian mansion just outside the city, surrounded by extensive formal gardens complete with clipped yew hedges, classical statues and broken fountains. Everyone lived together in this house, with separate flats but communal eating arrangements. There were even separate dining halls for children and grownups.

It was a wonderful life for the children, though, as I later discovered, less so for the grownups. With strict rationing still in effect and limited available food, the sharing of coupons and household chores, such as cooking the daily breakfast porridge — lumpy, burnt, thin? — led to much conflict and jealousy. I remember my sister Carrie and I along with the other children running around the grounds in a gang, playing hide and seek and climbing trees, me always trailing behind because I was younger than the others. We followed the servants, many of them refugees, watching as they stoked the boiler or cooked the meals in the huge, shadowy basement. I also

remember gathering the chicken eggs in the stable and going to see the old gardener at work in the large walled garden. On very special occasions such as Christmas we were allowed to eat with the grownups at a long wooden table, the grownups at one end and the children with their nursemaids, and perhaps mothers too, at the other. All the children got a turn at stirring the enormous Christmas pudding, stuffed with raisins and suet. I remember wrapping a silver sixpenny bit and putting it in for some lucky person to find.

My parents were away at work a lot; Wad, it goes without saying spent long hours at the lab, but even my mother, an architect in the civil service, had at that time to work a five and a half day week. We saw them at weekends; there are some photos of us playing on a bank under the yew hedges, while the grownups sat on blankets on the grass and talked. I loved it when my father would carry me on his shoulders.

When Mortonhall broke up in 1952 (the grownups quarrelled, the housing shortage eased), my parents bought a large, well proportioned stone house in Blacket Place. My mother organised the household, with a live in housekeeper and a cleaner. My father also helped with setting up the house; for example he must have been instrumental in getting the wallpaper we had in the music room because it was American, covered in brightly colored cardinals and blue jays. He was quite handy; he built the chicken run we had in the early days, and later built fairly crude but serviceable furniture for our house in Italy. He also was cajoled into helping in the garden – he liked to do things like ordering special plants or getting exotic chickens, but did sometimes actually weed or lay some crazy paving.

He also enjoyed cooking, and later on would often cook our Sunday dinner, especially when it was something out of the ordinary. I remember once he made a rice dish, in a rice pot that I still have, full of cardamon seeds, raisins and little spiced meat balls. He liked the surprise of coming across a hidden cardamon pod, just as he liked the surprise of finding the sixpenny bit hidden at the bottom of the Christmas pudding.

His study was lined with books and special little objects from his travels. After family dinner, my mother and I would sit in the sitting room reading, listening to the sound of his typing or dictating from the study next door. He had another room in the basement for his painting.

The four of us spent time together on Sundays. We would sit in the garden in deckchairs reading the papers, or go for a walk or a picnic in the Pentland hills. A favorite excursion was a visit to the beach at Dirleton, where we would pitch a tent as shelter from the wind, and then perhaps swim, explore tidepools or play games on the beach. For lunch we would build a fire from driftwood and cook sausages on sticks. Then we might all paint the view, sitting in a row with our different paint boxes, comparing notes afterwards as to who had the best sky or rocks.

My father loved to travel, organising trips and conferences all over the world at a time when it was quite an unusual thing to do. He once went with my mother to Nigeria and came back with beautiful blue and white textiles, native drums, and

carved elephants. From my point of view it was his returning that was so wonderful; he always brought fabulous presents and very interesting slides. I remember in particular his return from Japan sometime in the mid 50s; I think he'd been there for a year (though in retrospect that seems a little unlikely) and he came back with an amazing assortment of hand made silk kimonos, brocaded silk dress lengths for my mother, elaborately dressed dolls for my sister and me, bits of edible seaweed that the guests from the lab spat into the fire when we served them up at a cocktail party, and, best of all, magical shells that opened up into brightly colored flowers when you put them in a glass of water. It was a glimpse into another world, quite different from drab Edinburgh.

Our holidays were always very special because my mother only had two weeks leave each year from her office. One year (1954) they planned an elaborate and wonderful trip to France for all four of us. We went to several Loire chateaux and the Lascaux caves, sketched little Gothic churches, met up with the artist John Piper, a family friend, to see the factory where his tapestries were woven, and visited a lavender farm with barns heaped full of amazingly scented seeds — I seem to remember jumping in them. The scents and the heat impressed me the most, as well as my father's assured and relaxed way of travelling. Even for our first night abroad he had found a little wayside inn where we sat under the vine pergola, drinking citron pressé and then having dinner, with wine copiously watered down for us children. For lunch we would stop the car at some turn in the road and picnic on bread and cheese, salami and chocolate.

I was closest to my father when I was about thirteen. Because I was starting chemistry at school, he helped me set up a lab in our basement where I made oxygen and did various other basic experiments, including raising generations of mice with variously colored coats. He also gave me an old enlarger and a Leica from the lab and showed me the elements of photography, a hobby I practised for quite a while. That summer my sister was away on her own in Stratford seeing the plays, and he designed a scientific tour of Britain for me. Together with my mother, we visited the telescope at Jodrell Bank, stood on top of the nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point, went to Stonehenge and Wells Cathedral, and, best of all, went to find ammonites in the shale cliffs in Devon where he had first dug fossils as a student. He gave me books to read, *The Voyage of the Beagle* and *Origin of Species*, books on philosophy by Plato and Bertrand Russell. That autumn he was writing *The Ethical Animal*, his attempt to formulate a scientific justification for morality, and I spent evenings in his study discussing his ideas. I remember him explaining to me Whitehead's perception of reality as a network of interconnected and interacting nodes, with the point of view from each node equally valid.

Although much of Wad's intellectual life was lived elsewhere, we sometimes had very interesting guests at Blacket Place. I remember Lif Petrowski best. She was a Polish scientist, visiting the lab for a year, but had a wonderful laugh, could play Chopin beautifully and told Carrie and me fascinating stories about escaping from

the Warsaw ghetto through the sewers. My father also told us about some of the people he knew. His stories of Gregory Bateson, who was a very close friend of his in Cambridge in the 30s, stimulated Carrie's interest in anthropology, a field she later made her own.

Wad was always entranced by exotic things and brought them back to us, enriching our world – in the sixties I remember most the gifts from America: jazz records, books of beat poetry, paper dresses covered with brightly colored and abstract patterns that were, he assured us, the latest thing. He liked to expand our minds, teasing us. Beethoven was old hat he told me; John Cage, an avant guard electronic composer whom he'd met in New York, was much better. Mathematics was boring and dry; he much preferred the Arabic alchemists with their image of the Ourobouros, the pregnant egg that contains everything in itself. Nevertheless when I became a mathematician he was proud of me, though typically he never told me so; I only found this out after his death.

When I was a young woman we were, for various reasons, fairly distant. I was the purest of pure mathematicians, married to a poet, and did not take much interest at that time in Wad's attempts to build theoretical biology or his concern about the future, though we certainly talked about these things. Once when discussing Margaret Mead, who my parents knew well via Gregory Bateson, he said that she was too much for any man. At that time my sympathies were with her — I admired her presence, remembering her once striding into our kitchen with her stick. But I have always been immensely proud of Wad, and am increasing aware of his influence.

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