

I remember the first time I read a book by myself. It was The Buttercup Farm Family by Enid Blyton. I got stuck on the word “put” and had to ask Nanna.

I remember getting angry with my sister and sitting on top of her and banging her head on the floor.

I remember sitting at the piano making up a tune, then thinking it couldn't be any good because to do it properly you had to have lessons in composing.

I remember a frightening dream about being chased by Captain Hook and the pirates.

I remember when we kept chickens in the back garden and I collected the eggs.

I remember being told to write a poem at school when I was six. I didn't know how to begin, so I copied the first line from the girl in front of me, and wrote the rest of it myself.

I remember an older girl called Janet coming to play with us. One day she brought a little cushion with an opening at one corner. Inside there were scraps of beautiful fabrics. She let us take them out one at a time and look at them. It was wonderful.

I remember playing a record of Lillibulero and dancing round and round the wind-up gramophone.

I remember dreaming that I could fly. I didn't go high up but I could lift my feet off the ground and move effortlessly through the air. I still have this dream sometimes.

I remember dreaming that someone was tickling me and wouldn't stop and it was really horrible, so I bit them as hard as I could. I still have this dream too.

I remember when our South African aunt and cousins came to see us. I had been expecting black people in grass skirts and I was disappointed.

I remember finishing the last of Enid Blyton's Malory Towers books and wishing there were more.

I remember Nanna keeping us out of the way because Daddy needed to talk with Mummy about the business.

I remember saying goodbye to my parents at Charing Cross station when I was seven and first went to boarding school. I didn't cry because the girls in books didn't cry.

I remember the first time I saw a slug. It was a big black one, moving up the wall of the school dining room. I couldn't take my eyes off it because it was so horrible. I thought to myself: “That must be a slug.”

I remember the first time I ate baked beans. We had them at school, on fried bread, and I liked them a lot. I still do.

I remember the matron, putting a kaolin poultice on my knee after a girl pushed me over on the Sunday afternoon walk.

I remember permanganate of potash. It made the water bright purple and you had to sit with your feet in it.

I remember stone hot-water bottles.

I remember being part of a gang called The EE (it stood for Eating Eight). We stole spring onions from the kitchen garden.

I remember wishing I could run fast and be good at games.

I remember my best friend coming out of the cloakroom on a cold day, wearing a big coat with a hood, and saying, "I'm an Omo." She often got things wrong in ways that were funny, and that was one of the reasons I liked her so much.

I remember a girl called Helen, who bossed us around.

I remember learning to sing The Ashgrove and Linden Lea and Early One Morning.

I remember conducting the percussion band on Open Day. The teacher chose her favourite, Gina, but it turned out Gina couldn't beat 4/4 time. I was the only one who could.

I remember feeling sorry for a girl called Jane because I thought she was very ugly. When Mick Jagger became famous, it struck me that he looked just like Jane.

I remember reading under the bedclothes and the torchlight getting dimmer and dimmer.

I remember wearing long grey socks, held up by garters. I remember nametapes on everything.

I remember reading Kipling's Jungle Books and thinking they were the best books I'd ever read and feeling sad about saying goodbye to Baloo and Bagheera and their world.

I remember writing stories in an exercise book and telling people I wanted to be a writer.

I remember thinking poetry was mostly rather boring.

I remember picking up one of the Pooh books and realising for the first time that it was very funny. I reread both the books, laughing all the time.

I remember going with my sister to buy the Beano and Dandy and sitting on a wall to read them because we weren't allowed them at home.

I remember my father reciting The Charge of the Light Brigade. That was better than the poems we did at school.

I remember a Christmas tree that rotated and played a tune.

I remember those big old Christmas tree lights. When one bulb went, the whole lot stopped working. Grownups got very tetchy trying to find out which bulb needed replacing.

I remember watching the Coronation on television. Richard Dimbleby kept going on about how heavy the crown was and I cried.

I remember having a bilious attack, kneeling with my head over the toilet and feeling so ill I wished I could die.

I remember having chickenpox at school in a dormitory full of girls with chickenpox. We had a competition to see who could drink the most cups of tea in a day.

I remember dressing up in my party dress and standing in front of the mirror imagining I was a ballet dancer.

I remember daydreams about being a concert pianist. I remember longing to have an older brother. My father was a widower when he married my mother. I used to fantasise that a half-brother would turn up out of the blue.

I remember being afraid that Daddy would die.

I remember pretending to think I was adopted and getting a lot of concerned attention and reassurance from my parents. I had been hoping to learn that I *was* adopted because it would make me more interesting.

I remember being told, repeatedly, that I was lucky to have curly hair.

I remember hating my hair and wishing it was straight.

I remember sulking because I was made to wear a hat to church in the school holidays.

I remember telling my mother that I hated her, and meaning it.

I remember choosing a book about natural history and being disappointed because it was about nature not history.

I remember Nanna, a teetotaller, saying, "I've never touched an alcoholic in me life."

I remember using Daddy's oil paints to paint a picture of our garden. It was no good.

I remember our art teacher in the senior school, with her smock and her CND badge. She was only interested in the girls who were good at art.

I remember Miss Cox playing us a record of Mozart's Eine kleine Nachtmusik in a class music lesson, and thinking to myself, "I like this. I *really* like this." And feeling pleased with myself for liking classical music.

I remember falling (briefly) in love with Cliff Richard when I was 14 and we went to see him at the Palladium.

I remember falling in love with Frankie Vaughan and later with Anthony Newley, and writing a poem about the latter.

I remember falling in love with older girls at school. Mostly they were the ones who sang solos in the choir.

I remember learning how to inhale cigarette smoke and feeling dizzy and having to lie down.

I remember an incident in a war story when an American airman touched a nurse's breasts. After that I began to have sexual fantasies.

I remember writing a poem about Princess Margaret's wedding.

I remember being ashamed of myself because I was overweight.

I remember being taken to see a doctor and told that I was losing weight too quickly.

I remember being glad that I was at boarding school because there were no boys there and I didn't have to worry about looking attractive.

I remember reading Keats and thinking I would like to marry a poet and be his soulmate. I had forgotten all about wanting to be a writer myself.