

Extract from 'As I Remember it'

Some personal memories of Family life in 1930/40's Stowupland

I'm forgetting. I should be talking about Mother, not me! When she sang, her voice was rich and full, and it dominated when she was singing in a group. She was not musically educated or trained, but thank God she could sing in tune. All the time, she was struggling with her breathing, because of a large goitre, which she had carried ever since I knew her, and many years before me. Our doctor said he did not know how she could work so hard, especially when she was looking after my aged grandmother, who was a helpless invalid and lived in the upstairs bedroom. His opinion was that Mum should be the invalid, having somebody to do things for her! But the public health system was not then what it is now.

The thyroid operation

The time did come when Mother's breathing got worse. Then by some "miracle" the local Miller's daughter was called in to help. She had risen to the top in the medical world and was the senior surgeon in the London Women's Hospital, the same **Miss Gwen Smith** who so admirably handled the birth and death of our second daughter. She came to our house to examine Mother, and told us that the goitre was growing and would eventually block her airways altogether. Mother at 63 was reluctant to contemplate surgery, but by gentle persuasion and prayer she came round, and agreed for the sake of the family to undergo the dreaded operation.

At the **London Women's Hospital** Mother was looked after with great care, and the medical staff were amazed that a goitre of that size could be safely removed, considering her age. When she came home she was the wonder of the neighbourhood. She looked so much better, and even walked more easily, than when she had carried that load in her throat. Her voice was reduced to a whisper. All our relatives came round and took photos of Mum looking years younger.

But that is not the end of the tale of wonder! To make sure that the growth of the swollen thyroid gland would not continue, Miss Gwen Smith had arranged for Mother to receive further treatment according to the latest scientific research. This was only

available at **St. Bartholomew's Hospital** in central London. So it was arranged that Mother should go there for a period of about one month. The treatment involved deep X-ray therapy, a technique then in its infancy. Consequently, it was very carefully applied, and to make sure it was safe to proceed, Dr. Gwen called in on a daily basis, both to reassure Mum and also to learn about the new procedures, and assess their value.

While this was going on I was a student at Cheshunt College in Cambridge, busy working for my tripos exams. I had been out one afternoon with friends on bicycles and on a bend I had been hit by a trailer towed behind a car. My head had been banged against the roadway, which led to me behaving like a maniac! I was led back to the College by my friends, but the only reaction they could get out of me was peals of laughter. The President came to see what all the fuss was about, and saw me to my room and into bed where I was ordered to stay until a doctor came to check me out. The Doctor insisted that I should stay in bed a week, and his command I met with more peals of laughter! The point was that I was due to go to London next day to see Mother in hospital, and I was extremely annoyed that the College authorities insisted that I cancel the visit. I then wanted to get on with my studies in Hebrew, but that was not allowed either. Of course, I was incapable of rational thinking, but I would not acknowledge that at the time!

My minister in Stowmarket was advised of my condition, and he was asked to let Mother know that I could not go to London, without telling her why. I was able to visit her later in Bart's Hospital. Mum told me that the treatment was very rigorous, because she had to lie still without the slightest movement for long periods while the X-ray machine was doing its work. When she first arrived home after the treatment, she had lost all the hair off the back of her head, and there was very little hair left at all. But after a few days, her head was full of hair in tight curls. The wonder was that her hair was not grey as it had been, but a rich golden-brown. Mum looked like a young girl again! Dr. Gwen went to see her at home, and was delighted with her progress. She told Mum: "You are a very brave woman, to get through the operation and the after-treatment so well. But don't tell too many of your ageing friends about your treatment, or they will all be coming for X-ray as a rejuvenation scheme!"

I think Mum ultimately paid the price for her healing, as we understand it. They said when she died in 1941 that she had died of a rare oriental disease. She had been getting increasingly weary, and eventually had to collapse and get to bed. I think now we might call the cause of her death "leukemia". Later experience has shown that exposure to very powerful X-rays can have that result. Mum's experiences must have made some significant contribution to medical science. Or am I trying to justify something in my ignorance? I know one thing: that her real healing came when she left her physical body behind and entered into the full life of resurrection.