

Tribute to Gladys Victoria Sumner 29th April 1930 – 2nd May 2015

by

Mrs. Christine Harding

Late Mrs Gladys Victoria Sumner



In 1934, 2 little girls aged 4 Years, Gladys Small and Christine Boston, found themselves in the same class at the Girls Vocational School run by Mrs Casley-Haford and they became friends.

A few months before then, I had struck up a friendship with Eileen Fergusson-Williams, so I had 2 friends. Eileen and Glad. We came to be known as the 3 Musketeers. All during our stay at the school, Glad was called GVS, as she had the same initials as the school. Gladys Victoria Small attending the Girls Vocational School.

Glad and I travelled from class to class, taking part in all the schools activities. We were members of the school band. She played the tambourine and I played the triangle. The school closed down in 1940.

I went to the Annie Walsh Memorial School in 1941 and Glad and her cousin Mumsie Scott-Sawyer followed in 1943. Again we found ourselves in the same class and continued our friendship. We took our junior Cambridge School exams together after which we were sent to the boarding department by our parents to prepare for our Senior Cambridge school exams. We played hard, getting into mischief at times and also worked hard.

On Fridays in the boarding department, we were served tiny portions of ebbeh for supper. We would therefore go to bed hungry, often with our stomachs rumbling. So a few of the boarders including Glad and myself smuggled in food and laid out a good spread in the shower room. Just as we were about to partake of the banquet, 1 of the boarding teachers came in, confiscated the lot and gave it to the gardener, 1 DonJe. We were hopping mad.

The Annie Walsh was noted for its 100% pass rate at the senior Cambridge exams so woe betide that pupil who broke the chain. In that year, Glad and I were the only 2 boarders taking the exams. We were very conscious of that formidable task so we studied earnestly. The only snag was that lights went off at 9 pm and there was no way in which we would have covered the syllabus if we stopped studying at that time. The matron's room was partitioned off from the dormitory but the partition wall finished about 2 feet from the floor. She would place her kerosene lantern on the floor as she didn't like sleeping in the dark so, we devised a method of studying after lights out. We would lay on the floor, flat on our stomachs with our books, heads and shoulders in the matron's room and the rest of our bodies in the dormitory and stayed there studying for 4-5 hours. Matron pretended not to notice us. This paid off as we passed our exams and after leaving school had our names printed on the Honours List board in the assembly hall.

We were required to go to the centre at the POW school to take the exams. My father had just died so my mother's brother, William Wright would collect Glad and me in his car everyday and bring us back after the exams to the envy of the other boarders who were not going out, albeit only to take exams.

Being the only 2 school prefects in the boarding department at that time, whenever the boarders had to attend concerts at the British Council and other functions outside the school, Glad and I had the responsibility of chaperoning them. Surprisingly, they behaved very well. It turned out that they preferred going out with us rather than with the teachers.



In 1948 our last Xmas pageant was the nativity play. Glad was Joseph and I was Mary. When I got married, Glad was my chief bridesmaid. For quite some years after that, we were not in the same country but corresponded with each other. There was no email in those days. **We** used airmail.

Whenever fate dealt us a painful hand, we were there for each other. For example, when we were still at school, I lost my only brother Nat and she lost her only brother Frank. Also, later in life when I lost my eldest son Raymond and she lost her eldest son Alfred we consoled each other. Likewise, we shared happy moments together, attending social functions etc. She was bursting with joy when her sister's daughter Claudette who is in effect her daughter got married to my son Charles. We celebrated in style.

When they had their son Michael, Glad and I took it in turns to babysit. On occasions when they went away for the weekend Glad and I would babysit jointly at their place and have a thoroughly enjoyable time together.

Glad enjoyed cooking and entertaining and loved company: So you can imagine how miserable she was when illness took over. It was disheartening and painful to watch her deteriorating health. She used to say 'Christine, this old age is a terrible thing when you're not in good health'.

About 2 months ago I visited her in the home and we were sitting in the common room. I was telling her about Victoria Wood's new play from the Children's Choir Nymphs and Shepherds. Her face lit up and she asked if I remembered Madame Conton teaching us that song at school and she started singing Nymphs and Shepherds come away and I joined in with her. The other residents looked at us in amazement.

Glad was admitted to hospital on her 85th birthday and passed away 3 days afterwards. On that Saturday the 2nd May, as I stood by her bedside in the hospital and watched her life ebb away and take her last breath, I was rooted to the spot and couldn't speak or cry. I just stood there and stared. All that came to mind was that day in 1934 when 2 little 4 years olds met and became friends 81 years previously.

A span of life has indeed ended. All Glad's pain anxiety and confusion have all gone and she is now sleeping in the arms of the Lord.

The 3 musketeers are no more. Yesterday was Eileen's 1st anniversary of death. Today is Glad's funeral. There is only 1 left standing alone.

Glad had many friends. I cannot claim to be her closest friend but I can safely say after 81 years of friendship that I am her longest standing friend.

I make no apologies if this tribute appears lengthy but 81 years cannot simply be glossed over.

Glad may your dear soul rest in perfect peace.