CHAPTER 1

# The Early Years

I was 22 when I first became aware I had a clitoris. I was in a practical anatomy class at medical school, and I had just been asked to hack off the penis of a very well-endowed corpse. We had been divided into teams of six and allotted a body to work with. I was the only female in my group, and since none of the boys would do it, the gruesome task was left to me. After removing the organ an instructor showed me how to cut the penis lengthwise so that the second team allotted to that corpse could examine it and learn its anatomy. We were then transferred to a female corpse that was being dissected by an adjacent group. That's when I discovered the clitoris.

Having previously had no idea I had a clitoris, I raced home to get a mirror to see if I had some congenital abnormality. But no, there it was, sleeping silently where it always had been, unloved and untouched like an orchid hiding under a leaf in the Amazon rain forest. And thus, with just a few ultimately traumatic excursions into male territory, it was to remain.

Looking back on that episode of enlightenment, I think it's fair to say that I've always been somewhat… unconventional. Quirky and eccentric, and considered a nerd at school, it was clear from the outset that I was never going to be a conformist. I had too much curiosity, doggedness, and what the Native Americans call "the coyote trickster" sense of humour to quietly comply with the obligatory customs, rules, or styles of any cultural group or institution.

Maybe that's why I am one of the few Lancet-published scientist/physicians who has no reticence in confessing they've not only had psychic and paranormal experiences since childhood, but are just as happy to speak about their illuminating forays into complementary and alternative medicine, shamanic teachings, and energy medicine studies as they are about their accomplishments in genito-urinary medicine, or the studies they undertook to earn the coveted BSc and FRCP postnomial qualifications.

But I digress. The stories I want to share with you will make much more sense if I begin at the beginning where it all started.

The magical journey that led me to international medical research fame, seeing the spirits of patients' late relatives and pets, diving down rabbit holes of studying consciousness, metaphysics, after-life communication, Ayurvedic medicine in India under the auspices of the former Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health, and ultimately meeting HRH Prince Charles in person (long before he was King) began in Abergavenny in 1949.

I was the younger daughter of Wyndham and Elsie Blackwell. Dad was a bus driver, and Mum a housewife/market gardener who later ran a fruit and vegetable stall in Abergavenny market. Our family home was just a ramshackle tin shack that had once been part of a temporary village set up in the early 1900s to house the men employed to build Grwyne Fawr Reservoir Village in nearby Forest Coalpit. Because the buildings were built of wood and corrugated iron it quickly became known as "Tin Town."

The inner walls of our tin shed were made of slatted wood, and with no insulation, the bungalow was very cold and damp. Icicles up to a foot long would form overnight inside bedroom windows and because we had no inside toilet, we had to keep a pot under the bed, so sometimes, even

our urine froze. The coats on the bed and sacks on the floor provided little warmth, but we were content. We had a coal fire in the living room, and every Sunday we had a hot bath in a large tin tub, which Mum would drag inside to the small kitchen.

My sister and I would take turns having the first bath since my parents could only afford to heat one lot of water in the small galvanised electric boiler in the corner. There were no curtains in the kitchen, so Mum would use a dark green tablecloth to cover the window whilst we bathed. Life was not easy, and from infancy, I suffered recurrent ear infections, possibly made worse by my dear father's smoking. He used to blow hot smoke in my ears to ease the pain, an act of paternal love that nowadays would be considered abuse.

There was no internet back then, and we had no telephone or television. Since we lived a mile outside Abergavenny, we also had few friends with whom we could compare our lives. It was the best Mum and Dad could do. Our water supply came from a lake on an estate up the road, and in the spring, my sister and I were delighted when tiny tadpoles appeared in the *bosh** in our kitchen, whose tap was our only constant water supply. The council brought us drinking water in a horse-drawn tank pulled by a grey mare every few weeks. It was lovely seeing the horse, and Mum would give us a few carrots to feed it whilst the fresh water was unloaded into our galvanised tank. Likewise, we had no drainage other than a cesspit, which Dad would empty twice a year and spread the contents between rows of kale used to feed our cow. Nothing was ever wasted; scraps were given to our dog, grass clippings to the chickens, and our pig had what was left! Trips out would almost always be work-related. So in the early 1950s, when health and safety were not considered neces-

* South Wales slang for a kitchen sink.

sary, our relaxation usually involved Dad, his beloved Fergie tractor and a wooden trailer he had constructed.

Sugar Loaf Mountain was just up the road from us, along the main A40, then up a lane to the top. Nowadays, there is a proper car park, but Dad would take us right up to the foot of the mountain where we would picnic next to a stream. We would make sandwiches with white bread and butter and bacon fried on a makeshift open fire beside the stream. I can still smell the burning heather Dad harvested to get the fire going. None of this would be legal nowadays, but the mountain was empty back then, apart from the birds and us. It was a paradise, although we did not know it.

After eating, Dad was always very strict about pouring lots of water on the fire, and we would all stare at the steaming ashes before work began. Mum and Dad would cut fern and load it onto the trailer for winter bedding for our cow, whilst my sister and I would collect sheep droppings for fertilising Dad's tomatoes. During September, our gran and grandad would join us on the Sugarloaf to pick wimberries for Mum's market stall. There would be no sheep dropping collection on those occasions, but we would gather as much fern as possible, given the number of people on the trailer.

Other memorable days out were when Dad harvested hay with his trusted Fergie and trailer. One year, the groundsman at Nevill Hall Hospital, just down the road from our home, asked Dad to clear away the hay he had cut. Built in the 1890s and used as a convalescent hospital in 1920, the hospital grounds were beautiful with large trees, lush rhododendron bushes, and a stream. My parents and grandad would load the hay whilst me and my sister would scamper off to look for watercress in the stream. The days were sunny, and the scents of the wildflowers and hay still linger as I recall the trip home on the top of the hay wagon along

the Brecon Road. Massive horse chestnut trees lined the drive to the hospital and both sides of Brecon Road with the trees' branches meeting in the middle. We used to reach up and touch the leaves and duck when we passed a low-lying branch. Such days will never happen again, a prime example of the Welsh term *"hiraeth."*[*]

The six-year age difference between my sister and me meant we had little in common. She was slim and artistic and into painting and playing the piano, whilst I was a plump tomboy, more interested in milking the cow or helping Dad grind the valves in our car. I was very close to the land, and as a five-year-old, I would spend hours just sitting alone by our beehives, quietly talking to the bees. I had a Spirit friend, a dark-haired little girl called Christina, whom I would play with and make my mum lay a place for at the table next to me. Mum thought it odd, not that I was constantly talking to Christina, but that I never asked for food to be put on her plate.

When I was eleven, Dad had a heart attack. A doctor had warned Mum that my father could drop dead at any minute. After that well-meaning curse from the white-coated "shaman," my mother was forever watching Dad for any signs of imminent death. She developed severe anxiety and depression, which lasted until Dad actually did drop dead in our field some fifteen years later.

One Sunday morning, whilst helping her prepare the food she said to me, "Go and see if your dad is alright." My father had spent a little too long in our outside toilet which was replete with the Daily Mirror torn into neat squares on a spike, and a candle and matches for nocturnal use. My mother was afraid that Dad was dead, and I was the go-between.

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* "*Hiraeth*" is a Welsh word that has no direct English translation. It is an ephemeral, wistful yearning for past experiences and places.

"Pops, are you OK?" I whispered through the door.

"It's your mother worrying again. I am okay!" Dad replied crossly.

Dejected by my father's rebuke, I duly reported back to mum. A week later, the same thing happened, and fearful of another scolding, I stood at the wooden door of our outside (and indeed only) loo with its four-inch gap at the bottom for 1950s-style health and safety. But I could not see Dad's wellie boots moving.

"Dad … ?" I hesitantly enquired.

"What now?" He gruffly replied."

"Well … I am peeling potatoes for Sunday dinner, and I just want to know if you are okay so we don't waste any potatoes." My father's annoyance turned into a fit of laughter and I skipped happily back to Mum with the good news. Thus began my lifelong retreat into comedy in the face of adversity.

Dad was a dowser and a self-taught electrician, mechanic, and mystic. Indeed, he was "some unsung, rustic polymath" if ever there was one. These facts may be relevant to what happened some months later when Pops had a second heart attack. As was the usual practice in those days, he was nursed in bed at home. One day, Mum and I noted that something strange was going on. Dad was not only cold and clammy to the touch, but he was also vibrating. In fact, his entire body was buzzing. We were completely mystified. There was no obvious explanation for this strange phenomenon.

"Well, I certainly don't vibrate when I join him under the eiderdown at night," Mum said.

"Then I think we should call his GP," I suggested. The call was duly made, the visit paid, but still no explanation was forthcoming. Days passed and dad continued to buzz. A second GP stopped by from the practice. But he didn't have a clue either. And so it continued until one

day, Mum had a hair appointment. "Will you watch over your father?" she asked as she sailed out the door.

Intrigued by Dad's curious buzzing, I stood contemplating his juddering body when a bright idea suddenly popped into my head. *Perhaps all Dad needs is to be grounded!* I thought. Confident I could do that, I made a beeline for Dad's workshop. Rummaging around, I soon located a length of 13-amp electric cable, stripped the plastic off, and returned to my parent's bedroom, where I found Dad awake.

Ever the optimist, Dad good-naturedly agreed to let me wrap several feet of bare copper wire around his forehead and attach the other end to a metal spike. I thrust the spike into the garden outside his bedroom to earth him, and surprisingly, the buzzing ceased. Soon after, Mum arrived home. "Hello, what are you up to?" she enquired in a half-amused, half-quizzical tone that conveyed her befuddlement at how she and my father could have bred such an unusual child.

Whether it was the grounding that had helped Dad's recovery, I don't know, but curiously, some fifty some years later, grounding, also known as "earthing," is attracting considerable interest for its potential benefits in reducing inflammation, cardiovascular disease, muscle damage, chronic pain, and mood.

In fact, according to the late American Board-Certified Cardiologist Dr Stephen T. Sinatra, when done properly and safely, "grounding or earthing, may have profound effects on the autonomic nervous system (ANS), heart rate variability (HRV), and blood viscosity/zeta potential."*

Apparently earthing—the process of attuning to the earth's electrical potential—soaks up negatively charged electrons that neutralize free

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* "How Earthing Benefits the Heart" by Stephen T. Sinatra, M.D., https://heartmdinstitute.com/alternative-medicine/grounding-healthy-heart/

radicals in our bodies and help stop cells from sticking together. Perhaps my father's red blood cells and platelets had clotted, blocking his arteries and causing inflammation which, in turn, had raised his free radicals, thereby encouraging more cells to stick together.

How a shy and isolated eleven-year-old could have intuited that grounding might benefit her father would have been as much a mystery to me back then as Dad's bizarre buzzing. But over time, I would learn that a precociously developed sixth sense wasn't the only gift in my metaphysical armoury.

Apart from his work on Red and White buses, Dad was also an excellent, albeit self-taught, electrician, who had wired all the houses my grandad had built in the 1930s. He also undertook contract potato planting with his Fergie tractor and potato planter.

In springtime, Mum and I would be bundled into the hopper of the planter and be driven to a farm at the foothills of the Sugarloaf to plant potatoes, popping a potato down the shoot every time the bell on the planter pinged. In retrospect, Dad was a shaman of sorts; he was an excellent dowser, could easily graft apples and pears, and was telepathic. As a young man, he would dowse around the houses that Grandad built in Cwmyoy to determine where to sink a well. He also had a telepathic link with me.

One day, when I was a medical student in the early 1970s, I noticed that a long-standing mole over my right scapula was bleeding. I had just completed a three-month stint attached to a firm where many patients had malignant melanomas, and, at first, I dismissed my fears, thinking I was overreacting because of all that I had seen. But my GP was very concerned and the mole was excised within a week at my local hospital. I hadn't told my family since there was little point worrying them until the histology report was available. The surgeon who saw me was a little

annoyed that I had not been admitted for a general anaesthetic, and I sensed he felt it was a malignant lesion because he excised quite a large area of skin around the mole. Consequently, I was in a lot of pain that night. The following morning, I woke to find my landlord knocking on my door. Mum was on the phone. Dad had been awake all night with pain over his right scapula, and he knew it was my pain.

My main memories of my childhood are about working on the land, having recurrent ear and tonsil infections, being cold but well fed, and feeling very different from my peers. It was more than a feeling of being different because my fellow students actually lived in houses made with bricks. It was a feeling that I had almost nothing in common with them, as if I had come from a different planet and been abandoned here, giving me an inner sadness of the soul which has never left. This was highlighted when I was fifteen and the girls in my class were celebrating George Harrison's 21st birthday.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"The Beatles?!" They chorused, clearly bemused.

Years later, I was told by an old grammar schoolmate that I was regarded as a nerd, always to be found with my head in books rather than teenage magazines. I was extremely shy, and having had a stammer at infant school and not being able to read until I was eight years old, I had become a loner. I felt as if I saw the world through a different lens than my peers. It was no wonder I had only a few friends.

On Monday, February 20th, 1969, my first significant paranormal event occurred. I was a prefect and in charge of noting all the latecomers. The deputy headmaster and Latin teacher, Mr Harold Sharpe, worked with me whilst the rest of the school attended morning assembly. I was always

keen to get to school but was very upset that morning and afraid to go. I told my mother that someone in school was going to die but I didn't know who it was. When I got to school, I told a few friends the same thing. But no one died. The following day, I was seized with the same extreme trepidation.

"Do you need to see a doctor?" Mum asked.

"No, he'll just think I'm crazy," I said miserably, trying to convince both Mum and myself that it must just be a severe case of unexplained anxiety.

Once again, no one died.

On the third day, I woke up feeling incredibly peaceful. "Mr. Sharpe has died," I calmly announced to Mum.

"What?" Mum asked, intrigued but not quite believing it. Considering that we had no way of knowing if anyone had died, I couldn't really blame her. But then I went to school and heard the news that Mr. Sharpe had died suddenly in his sleep.

Several months later, Mr. Sharpe's wife who was one of my mother's customers, asked Mum if I would visit her house. She had heard about me predicting her husband's death and wanted to know if his Spirit was still in the house. A few days later, I was in her sitting room. "He's there," I said, pointing to a chair.

"I thought so," Mrs. Sharpe calmly said. And that was it. No one said another word about that spooky experience.

There were no more predictions of death until many years later when I was working as a consultant in Swansea. But Mr. Sharpe's predicted death was a milestone that foreshadowed the start of many paranormal events that followed over the years, whilst the death I was to foresee years later heralded a much more serious search into human consciousness.