

New RA chairman talks to Suburb News

My father always wanted to be an army officer and my mother wanted to marry one so they thought it perfectly normal that they met in occupied Berlin in the mid-fifties. The life of a forces family is one of constant upheaval and I was born during the EOKA crisis, in Cyprus.

I think my father was some sort of intelligence officer but this may have been a joke based on a photo of him looking particularly dopy and scrutinising the racing pages in the newspaper. According to my mother terrorists walked in and out of the house at will and my father slept with a pistol under his pillow. I don't remember any of this nor that I narrowly escaped being suffocated by my mother's favourite cat which took to sleeping in my cot. When we came home to Hampshire my mother wheeled me around in a wheelbarrow as we didn't have a pram.



Georgina in 'pram', aged about 8 months

Later we lived slightly more peacefully at the nuclear submarine base in Scotland where my brother was born. Then we moved to Edinburgh where the army tried to remove our front door for 6 weeks in the middle of winter – we only complained it didn't fit, and after a brush with an adder in Camberly I moved to Germany when I was just 5 and lived in a colonel's house – that means the kitchen curtains are a different colour – with red squirrels at the bottom of the garden. I can only suppose there were no major's houses available. I loved Germany. It was there I learned to buy Christmas decorations. If you've been to my house in December you will know I have an enormous collection of decorations for my tree. I was seven when my father was killed on active service in the Middle East and we came to live on the Suburb.

I went to two local primary schools but not on to Henrietta Barnett as my mother, Bridget Malcolm, was the school secretary under Leslie Marjoribanks. Rightly thinking it's no fun going to a school where everyone knows your mother she sent me to Westonbirt in Gloucestershire. In those days Barnett had loads of money and amazingly paid for me to go to boarding school. I'm not sure what I learned at Westonbirt that I couldn't have learned on the Suburb except to travel by train at every opportunity and how to keep warm in extreme circumstances. Westonbirt is very cold. We wore our uniform cloaks all day every

day and draped them on our beds at night. You could tell a Westonbirt girl at a distance by the way she always stood with her arms folded – it's the only way to keep your cloak on. I still stand like this. I did go to Henrietta Barnett for the 6th form and I can tell you – those girls stand quite differently.

One thing Westonbirt did do for me was introduce me to trees. There's a world famous arboretum next door to the school. And it was through trees that I carelessly got sucked into the Residents Association, that and the fact that my mother was on the RA Council until her death in 1995.

I have arranged white tie balls in Venice, pheasant shoots in Wiltshire and awards ceremonies at the Hilton. I've been a teacher and a matron at a prep school. I've worked for art dealers and dress designers. I've even been a cleaning lady. It's a lot more fun than you'd think. I got two best friends and a god daughter from cleaning other people's houses. And since one of those friends moved home to Sydney and I spent 6 months there, I can expect Australians to come to stay at the drop of a hat. And they do. There's one here now.

I walk all over the Suburb, checking on trees, and find that people are always coming up to me to ask for directions or just to talk. I don't know why. I must have the right sort of face.

As told to
Richard Wakefield



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