

The Story of my Life

by Penny Humphrey

My first strong memory is of a lady with white hair, who peered into my pram and I screamed.

Age four on a pavement in Falmouth, holding my mother's hand, a nun in black habit, with white framed face, crossed the road in front of us, there was something about her covered head and the way the long black material swayed around her ankles that terrified me. Why? I have no idea but I will still find myself crossing the road if I see a nun walking towards me.

Age five sitting on the verandah with my mother, shelling peas.

Age six sitting on the verandah steps with a lady visitor to the house, eating an apple and swallowing a pip. The lady told me a tree would grow up inside me, that scared me as I imagined branches growing out of my sleeves.

The lady undid her blue plastic necklace and gave it to me to hold.

"Pull it as hard as you can" she said "It will never break"

I pulled it as hard as I could and it flew into a hundred beads that bounced all over the granite step. She feigned horror and I cried, then she said she had tricked me and they were poppet beads and showed me how they fitted into each other. She laughed and patted me on the back. I went indoors.

Why do I remember that moment when so many precious memories have disappeared over time?

Happy days, living by the sea. Summer months when, memory tells me, the sun shone every single day and we swam, ate strawberry jam sandwiches and watched the basking sharks in crystal waters.

The ghostly giant and his wife who lived at the end of the long corridor and chased me. I mustn't turn round, I must just run. No one else ever said they saw them so I kept quiet about it until when I was eight they disappeared.

Age five and my mother being taken away in an ambulance, not returning for six months. I didn't know she had polio, I just thought she had left us so when she came back so elated to see her girls again, I told her I didn't like her.

Learning to read and write and marvelling at the whole idea; reading my first book all the way through from beginning to end. It was called Curious Kate and was about a calf.

Surfing with my dog, watching a calf being born, being in awe of my glamorous grandmother who visited us once a year, wore dark blue tinted glasses and fur coats and whitened her tea with condensed milk.

Roaming the cliffs alone trying to work out all the 'Why's' that filled my head but getting few answers.

The story of my childhood is a complicated sentence that I am always trying to finish.

Too late now perhaps to think I ever will, perhaps it's time to close that book and just accept that what was, was.