
The winter of ‘41 was the last camp held by the Northern Bengal Mounted Rifles with families present. Our father was at this time Captain & Commanding Officer of the Western Squadron of the N.B.M.R.

The Camp was a most impressive sight. Massive khaki tents were erected around the parade ground for the troops and their families. Daddy took his horse, the syce and Bijou. We probably took other servants but I can’t remember. The officers had been told to paint their swords khaki so as not to attract Japanese planes.

Daddy was incensed and had a thin khaki cover made for his sword. I remember this particularly as I asked him “What good are swords against Japanese planes, Daddy?” He was very short with me and not until years later did I realize it was the truth of the question that had made him so uncharacteristically cross.

Camp was very enjoyable for us as we met other children we could play with while the men carried out their exercises and competitions like tent pegging, for which my father won a cup. And there were also barrel racing for us and games for the women too.

It was the last Bivowack for the NBMR, which then became the Dismounted Rifles. This caused an unintended setback for the planters. No longer did they get their horse, groom and feed allowance from the Government and this meant many of the younger planters could no longer afford polo ponies, which had doubled as cavalry horses. By now there were more serious matters to attend to with the war coming closer.

In 1941 Daddy went up to the Assam boarder with 20,000 coolies and other Planters

from various Gardens to help build the Manipore road, the earlier Burma road having been abandoned. The British were attempting to drive a road through hills and dense jungle to Burma from India to rescue the army stranded there.

In the early days on the Road, several small groups of civilians and soldiers made it through on foot. One Englishman stumbled out of the forest and found my father. Once he discovered his wife had not make it through, he thrust a rolled-up silk scroll into Daddy's hand and said ' keep this for me, I'm going back for my wife.' Without even giving his name he plunged back into the jungle.

Daddy kept that scroll, which was silk embroidery of 2 peacocks, all his life. Even bringing it back to England, still rolled up, in case the owner turned up. Eventually we framed it and it is a poignant reminder of the horrors suffered from the Japanese invasion of Burma and Singapore.

While Jane and I were at school in Darjeeling, Mummy worked in Calcutta in the Censor's office. In some ways a preferable place to be during the Rains, as all buildings were air-conditioned. In February of 1942 Daddy came back from the Manipur Road project, so she did not return to Calcutta. Instead we provided much needed R&R for the British airmen stationed outside Calcutta, whose unfailing first request was "please don't feed us bully (corned) beef"!

*Mukerjee, Ann, Susie*

However, she did bring back from Calcutta two dachshunds that one of her friends found too difficult to keep in his flat, as they needed so much exercise. Susie was a Crufts champion and Mukerjee, her son.

Jane and I were horrified – German sausage dogs! We didn't consider them real dogs. But they soon became two of the best dogs we've ever owned. They were tireless and tough. We had a small drain under our front steps. One day I heard a lot of huffing then saw Susie slowly backing out. She had a rat as big as herself by the nose. As soon as she pulled it clear she proceeded to thrash it to death. She was 3 at the time and Muk, a year old. She lived till she was 16, he until 14, so you'll hear more of their exploits.

Mummy came back from another trip with two pedigree Siamese cats, one of which was pregnant. I think we just called her Queenie. The male was called Hong-Kong. She had four kittens and we gave away two. She never really recovered from the birth and didn't live very long. The two kittens became crazy characters.

Itty-Pitty Bird Catcher stalked birds along the little six-inch hedges till she was close enough to pounce. For a change of pace she caught snakes, which she would deposit at one's bedside. Snitch Moon Face loved to climb on the dining room table and scoop fish out of the round goldfish bowl. Only once, that I know, did he overturn it. I walked in and found goldfish flapping around the floor. Snitch, shocked, was up the curtain. The curtains were a favourite climb of his as they were made of coarse linen. Birds would fly in the dining room because it had two open arches on either side. They would perch on the curtains and Snitch would try and launch himself at them. He was not adept at it and we often found him swinging wildly by one paw, screaming his head off.

We seldom managed to catch the cats to lock them in a night. Eventually Itty-Pitty was killed by a leopard and all we found was her head. A tiger took Snitch.

The war was still a remote event for us. Even the Japanese bombing of Bow Bazaar in Calcutta, probably accidental though with a horrible death toll, reached us only like the outer tremors of an earthquake.

I had been suffering for a long time with tonsillitis and it got to the point when I was spending more time in the infirmary than in class. So in the holidays of 1942 Mummy took me down to Calcutta to have them out. In those days chloroform was used for operations, so one felt pretty sick afterwards. My plight was not improved but not getting the expected ice cream afterwards.

I remember seeing barrage balloons for the first time, flying over the Howrah bridge over the Hoogli river, where the air force base was. There were several Japanese bombing raids during the 3 days we were there but none noticed by us.

Somebody always profits from a war! Jane and I discovered a source of income in the form of chewing gum, which we had never had before. There was a School of Jungle Warfare training camp set on the Jaldacca river where we all went to fish. We were familiar with the jungle but the Americans who were being trained, clearly were not.

So Jane and I would place ourselves at a strategic point where we knew they always got lost. For the price of a stick of gum we'd lead them out. Hopefully they eventually learnt some stealth tactics but we could hear them crashing through the jungle which we moved through so silently.

We had plenty of practice. We used to crawl through the tunnel under the over-arching branches of the tea bushes. I once came face to face with a jackal – I'm not

sure who was the most startled. Our parents had .taught us to step quietly so as not to frighten the game. Once I even came within three paces of a resting doe. And I have stepped on a small cobra sunning itself on the path. It was more startled than I was.

During one of the holidays, while our father was still on 'The Road', Mummy took us to the sea at Gopalpur. To actually swim in the sea one had to get past the almost constant 16-foot rollers that reared up like a wall of glass before crashing onto the sand. To do this it was necessary to hire a 'swim boy' to dive with you through the waves at the right moment. Beyond the rollers the sea was amazingly calm, the only anxiety generated by knowing one had to return through the wall of water again which Jane and I accomplished twice, with much persuading. After that we spent the holiday playing on the beach. It was a terrifying experience.

There was beautiful lagoon nearby on which we went boating. We had been warned it was not safe for swimming but Mummy couldn't resist a dip on a hot day, the water was so clear and blue. She paid the price by contracting amoebic dysentery. This, coupled with the recurring malaria from which she already suffered, made it important for her not to spend another rainy season in India but to go to England for treatment at the School of Tropical Medicine in London. Also she felt I wasn't getting enough education, which wasn't true as it turned out.

By March of 1943, it was possible to get a ship Home if you had special reasons. The North African campaign was over and the Allies had control of the Red Sea. Japanese submarines were still operating freely in the Indian Ocean but the German hold on the Mediterranean was weak.

We were relieved to hear that we would be going through the Suez Canal rather than having to go the long, rough way around the Cape of Good Hope. And we'd be travelling on the Strathaird, a P&O ship that, along with her sister ships, had been docked in Australia since the start of the war. (These were the liners that regularly made the journey from England via Asia to Australia.)

Daddy stayed behind, as he couldn't leave the sixteen Tea Gardens he was supervising while so many Planters were at war. We three made the trip back across India again to Bombay. There we found not only the Strathaird but her three sister ships too; the Strathnaver, Strathaden and Strathallen. We were to set off in convoy at full speed across the Indian Ocean, without taking time to zigzag and were due to arrive in Aden four days later.

Mummy taught us to dress in the dark, which we did in under a minute, in case we were torpedoed. The Chief Steward gave us 3 packets of food every night which we ate in the morning. I doubt we would have remembered them in an emergency.

P&O Strathaird

There were only 200 passengers on board the Strathaird, all with essential reasons to return Home.. We were issued life vests, which we had to take everywhere we went. We all knew it was futile, as it was impressed on us that the ships were not going to stop to pick up anybody who fell overboard – even if they could rescue you before the sharks got you.

As it turned out this was not the real danger. The Japanese learnt that the four P&O ships were making for Aden and their submarines were out hunting for us. On the third day we woke to see four black columns of smoke joined across the top, halfway to the horizon off our Port side. We steamed past them all day and the smoke did not lessen, looking for all the world like a black table in the sky.

We learnt later that they were four British tankers, which had been mistaken for our four ships, and sunk by the Japanese; who then surfaced and machine gunned any survivors who managed to jump overboard into the burning sea.

By the next day we had reached Aden. We had most of the day to shop and go to the small beach, shark-proofed with nets, which was packed with troops getting a well-deserved break from the desert fighting.

By the time we steamed out of Aden all four P&O Liners were packed with troops; ours with Americans, plus some German and five Italian prisoners in the hold. Cabins that normally slept four now held six. The passengers were confined to the Promenade deck and American MPs were posted at all the stairways. However Jane and I found ways to get candy and gum from the soldiers – we let down our skipping ropes to the deck below and they tied stuff on!

I don't remember whether on this trip we were allowed ashore at Port Said, so maybe I recall our visits to Simon Artz from earlier trips. Then I remember we all sat cross-legged on oriental rugs while my mother sipped strong black coffee. The was nothing hurried about the whole affair and many pleasantries were exchanged before they got down to business of bargaining for whatever she had set her eye on.

At the entrance to the Mediterranean the four liners were met by a British convey including the battleship Warspite, six destroyers and a submarine, which was attached to the Strathnaver to protect her radar system. Before setting off each liner put up a massive barrage balloon. And from here to the end of the trip we tediously zigzagged our way home.

There was a notice on the bathroom door, which stated “Do not stay in the Bathroom when depth charges are being released.” It seemed to be our fate always to be taking a bath when the destroyers were releasing depth charges. I don’t remember them being a constant occurrence at other times. News that they had sunk a U-boat spread quickly throughout the convoy.

The Italian prisoners hated the Germans and a fight broke out between them. One of the Italians was killed. We understood then what it meant to stop for nothing. The body bag was put on a chute; a hasty service was conducted, and without slowing down the body was consigned to the deep. We weren’t supposed to witness this but it’s hard to keep anything secret from children.

When disaster struck it was not by the hand of man. We had reached the Gulf of Lions in calm weather. Then a storm struck us in the night. The steward woke us by banging on the doors. As we swung our feet out of bed they hit water. Of course we couldn’t turn on any lights as we were under blackout. We dressed as best we could and waited. We knew well where the lifeboat stations were and could have found them in the dark but happily we were not called to them.

The next morning we learnt the hard way that someone had left the watertight doors open. We stepped out on the bunk in sloshing water. There was no serious danger but the confusion had been compounded by the blackout. And we could see that every ship had lost its barrage balloon. Ours was trailing behind the ship like a silver lure. But by then we didn’t really need their protection in the skies, as the German air force was not flying around the bulge of Spain and Portugal into the Atlantic Ocean.

We were still at some risk from the U-boats as we came up through the transatlantic shipping lanes to the west coast of Ireland. Finally we made it to Grennoch, the port of Glasgow. From there we went by train to Inverness in Morayshire, then to Forres where Mummy’s sister, Aunt Hilda and Fettes lived.

Our Grandmother, mother’s mother, lived with them. She was bedridden and had diabetes, but she never complained and was still was mentally sharp.

We enjoyed that warm summer in Scotland. All three of us used to bike to Findhorn, about 5 miles away on the Moray Firth. We had no car and would have had no petrol, anyhow.

Mummy decided to move to England so that she could look for schools for Jane and me. She rented a half a cottage in the little village of East Leach in Gloucestershire. It was a picture-perfect village, like those you used to see on chocolate boxes. It had two almost identical churches that had been built by two sisters who refused to be outdone by each other. Services were held in each on alternate Sundays.

Finally, Mummy settled on a boarding school for me in Shropshire called St Margaret’s. Diana Bull, now Justus my life-long friend, whose father was a Brigadier,

told me it had been set up early in the war. When I went there, the school had moved from a smaller house to the manor house in Yeaton Pevery. There were about sixty girls of all ages, though only one group older than I was at 13.

When Daddy next came Home on leave in September 1945, he bought a car, a Jowett Javelin. For some reason, because he was on leave we got an extra ration of petrol. And we had bought a house, Effingham, in Selsey Bill, Sussex.

We meandered through Germany to Switzerland where we spent a month at Brunnen on the lake. Though Brunnen is a ski resort it is just as lovely in the summer. We walked in the surrounding hills, with a packed lunch from the hotel. And took a ride up the ski lifts. This was one of the best trips we had as a family.

Daddy returned to India while we finished our holidays in Selsey. Following this leave, Daddy moved to Rungneet, a garden just below Darjeeling. Jane went back to Cheltenham and I was going to India with Mummy for a 6-month holiday before starting at Art school in Chelsea. Three days before we went I had an abscess on my front tooth. All the dentist could do was drill and leave it open to drain till I got to Calcutta.

This was the first time we had ever flown. We took a Pan Am Clipper and in my memory it is still the largest plane I've ever flown on, though it probably wasn't a big as a 747. It was a slow trip by today's standards. Our first stop was Rome for refueling; then Tehran, where we developed engine trouble.

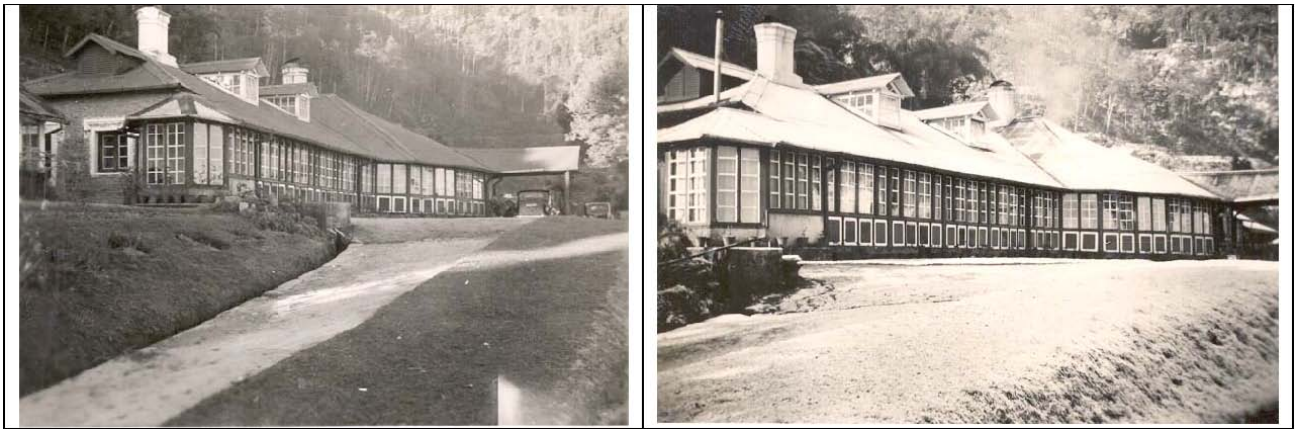
When we landed in Tehran we were all shepherded into a hangar and made to sit in the stifling heat for 8 hours, with guards surrounding the hangar, while Pan Am flew in a new engine. All we got was some water and that only because the passengers started to mutiny.

Our next stop was Karachi. Here many passengers left and others arrived, some with chickens on their laps. The whole trip passed in a haze for me, every pressure change an agony. We stayed in Calcutta long enough for me to have a root canal and then took the train to Siliguri.

This time it took far longer than usual as the train passed through Pakistan on its way to North Bengal. Partition had taken place the year before in 1947. Both times we crossed the border we had to switch crews and that caused problems, as in the past all drivers were Pakistanis and the engineers, Indian.

Finally we made it to Siliguri and were met by our driver. From there we had to make the dreaded trip to Darjeeling, which surprisingly wasn't as sickening as when I was a child. We continued round the town, past Singamari and on to Rungneet, which faced the Himalayan range, with Kanchenjunga right opposite, about 60 miles away as the crow flies.

*Above:From the driveway: the Himalayan range of Kanchenjunga and Nangar Parbat*

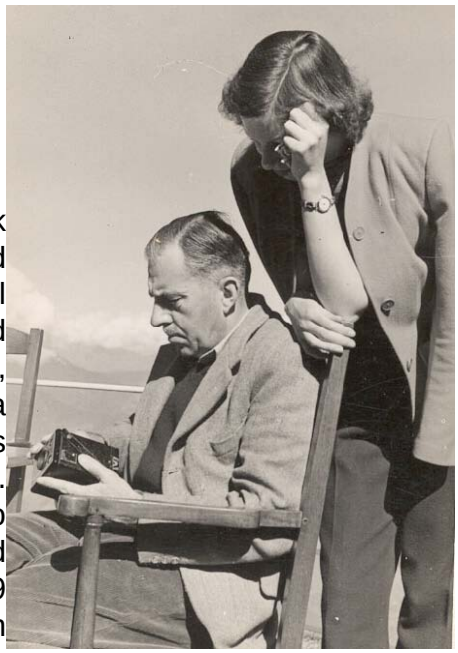


*Left:Rungneet*

*Right:Rare fall of snow*

We had a fireplace as it got cold in winter. The lamp, seen here, was made of rings of various woods. The side tables are Kashmiri walnut, some of which we still have. The beautiful oriental carpets that Daddy had collected so lovingly and moved from home to home across the world, are now all worn out.

*The following photos were taken on my Box Brownie*

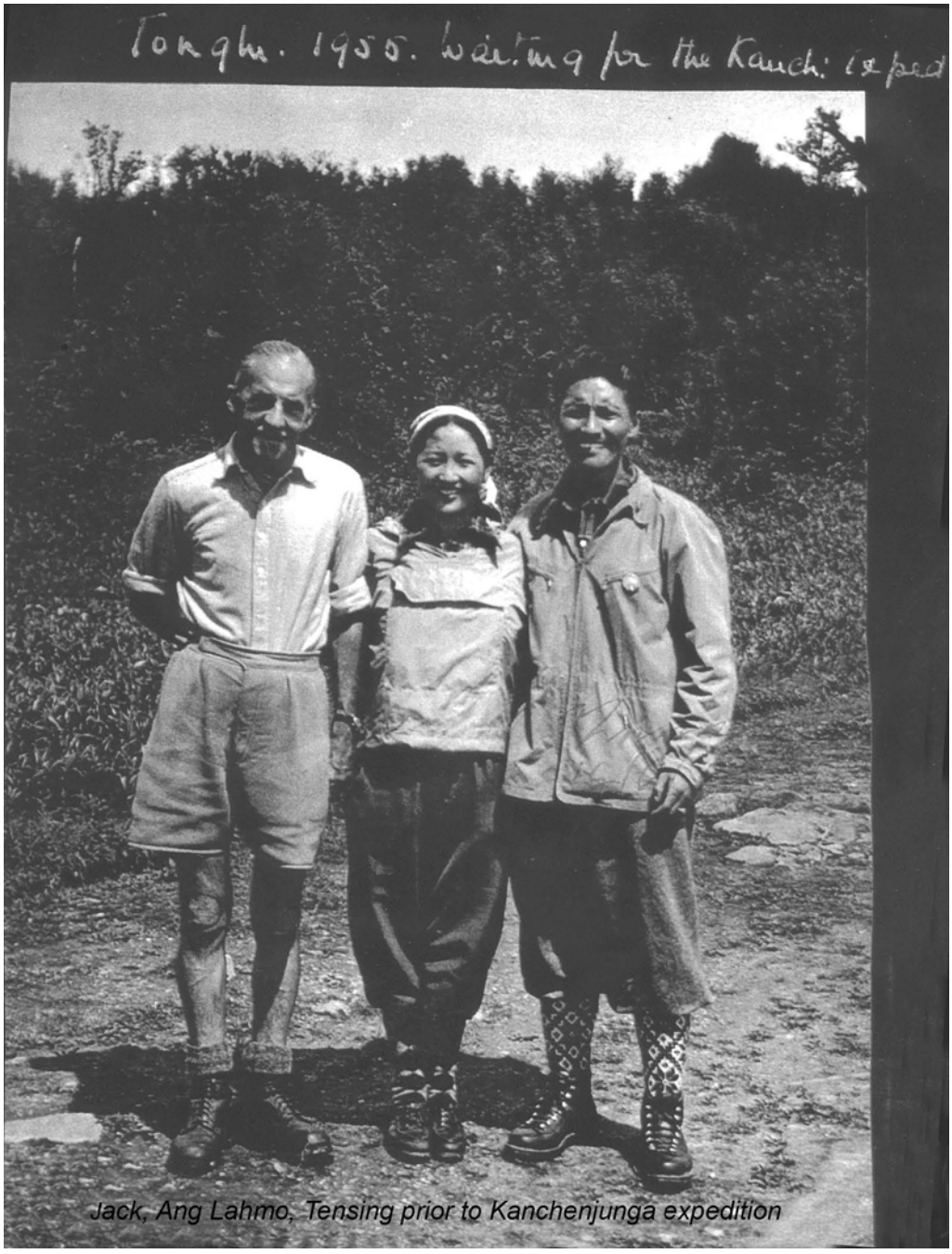


*We ate breakfast and lunch on the terrace*

While I was there Frank Smythe, the great climber, writer and photographer who was on several Everest expeditions and had discovered the Valley of the Flowers, was sent to our house suffering from a bad bout of malaria. He was delirious and we took it in turns to sit by his bed. Finally it was decided to move him to Delhi for treatment but he died there in June of 1949. He was only 49 years old. Later we went to visit his wife in England and saw the wonderful flowers, particularly the Rhododendrons, he had brought back from the Valley.

*An Aside*:

Jill Henderson had been the Secretary of the Himalayan Club for some time and had organized the Sherpas for the ascent of Everest Later she was to organize the Sherpas for Charles Evans successful attempt on Kanchenjunga in 1955. They actually saw them coming round the summit through my grandfather's telescope, as his team made the final ascent. He told us they never took the final step onto the absolute top in deference to her status as the Virgin Mountain.




*Jack, Ang Lahmo, Tensing prior to Kanchenjunga expedition*

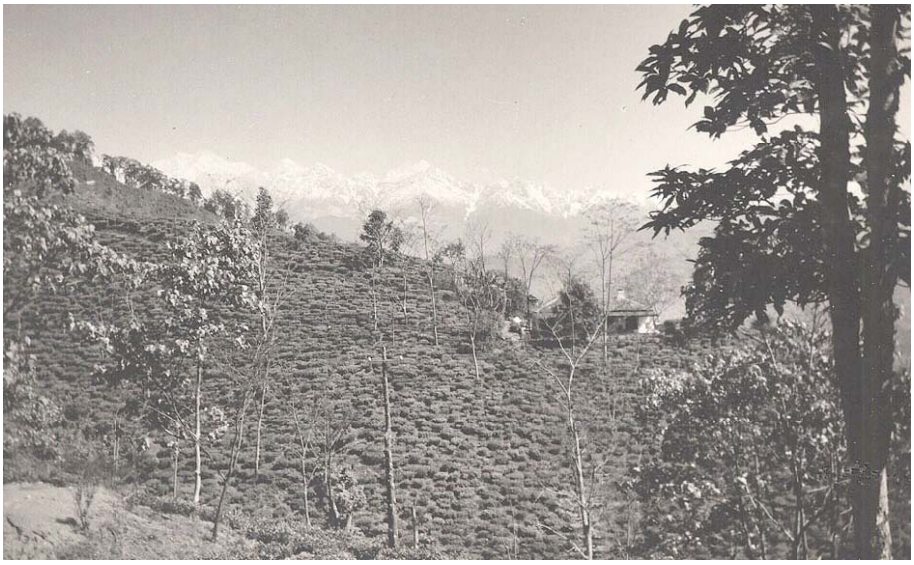
Around the side of Rungneet we had a large lawn we used for croquet and enjoyed

*Philip, Sue, Jill, Jack, Ann*

many matches with our friends.

At this time, Daddy was Superintendent of Gardens for Jardine Mathieson and though we lived in the Manager's bungalow, he did not manage the Garden.

Rungneet plantation was small and only needed one person to run it, Philip Wibmer who lived in a bungalow on the terrace below.



Just a little further on was the racecourse, called the Highest, Crookedest, Smallest racecourse in the world – 8 times round a mile. It had been the parade ground for one of the Regiments. On this ran the hill ponies – tats, we called them. The Maharajah of Birdwan had several horses that he raced. When he was there I sledom lost money, as he nearly always knew which horse was going to win. I've seen jockeys stand up in their stirrups to pull up a horse that wasn't supposed to win. And once saw a jockey deliberately fall off a horse he couldn't stop. Most of those horses had mouths like iron and a will of their own.

When they weren't racing, you could rent them. I used to ride around Birch hill, which would take me an hour, with a few detours. It was fun seeing the old haunts from Singamari days. None of the Darjeeling planters kept horses. I don't know whether they ever did, but certainly all had cars in '49. We had both a jeep and a Land Rover, which was a little too wide for the roads.

In fact, we used to measure the success of a party by how many cars, mainly old military jeeps, went 'over the kud'. The hill gardens had narrow dirt roads that zigzagged about every 50 yards up through the tea bushes. It was easy to go over the edge but I never heard of a serious accident because the tea bushes acted as a springboard. I remember someone saying the next day his jeep landed upright on the curve below and he'd driven home. The main drink in India was Carew's Gin and Tonic – it was a pretty crude gin made, I think, in India.

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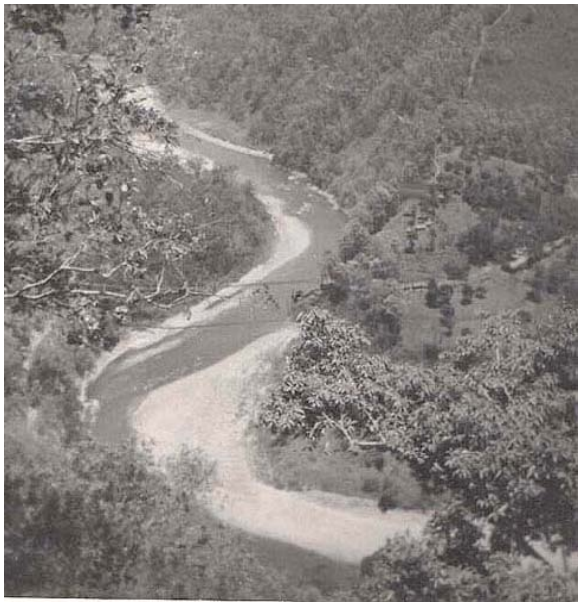
 We still had the two dachshunds, Susie and Mukerjee. Mummy had bought another male dog to breed with Susie but his balls never dropped. For that reason we called him Hi-Hi. He was a sweet, handsome dog.

There was a certain Babu who kept the accounts and used to come up to see my father every week. The dogs would bark at him, follow him into the room biting at his heels. It was embarrassing, as they never did it to other visitors.
Then my father discovered the Babu was embezzling and was probably nervous every time he came to see him. That must have set the dogs off.

Susie and Muk used to follow me when I went riding. They loved chasing the monkeys which used to sit at the side of the road. When they got tired I would take turns giving them a ride. They both knew how to sit across my arms with their paws hanging over each side.

They all loved riding in the jeep and would hang over the edge looking for monkeys. If they saw them they'd jump out – amazingly they never got hurt. And there were times they'd fall out without us realizing it. They'd usually make their way home or we'd pick them up on our return.



All three of the dogs were friends with Philip's white bull terrier, Pluto, who used to come up from his bungalow, recruit the dachunds and take them off hunting. One day they disappeared and didn't return at night. The next day Pluto returned with bleeding paws so we sent out a search party.

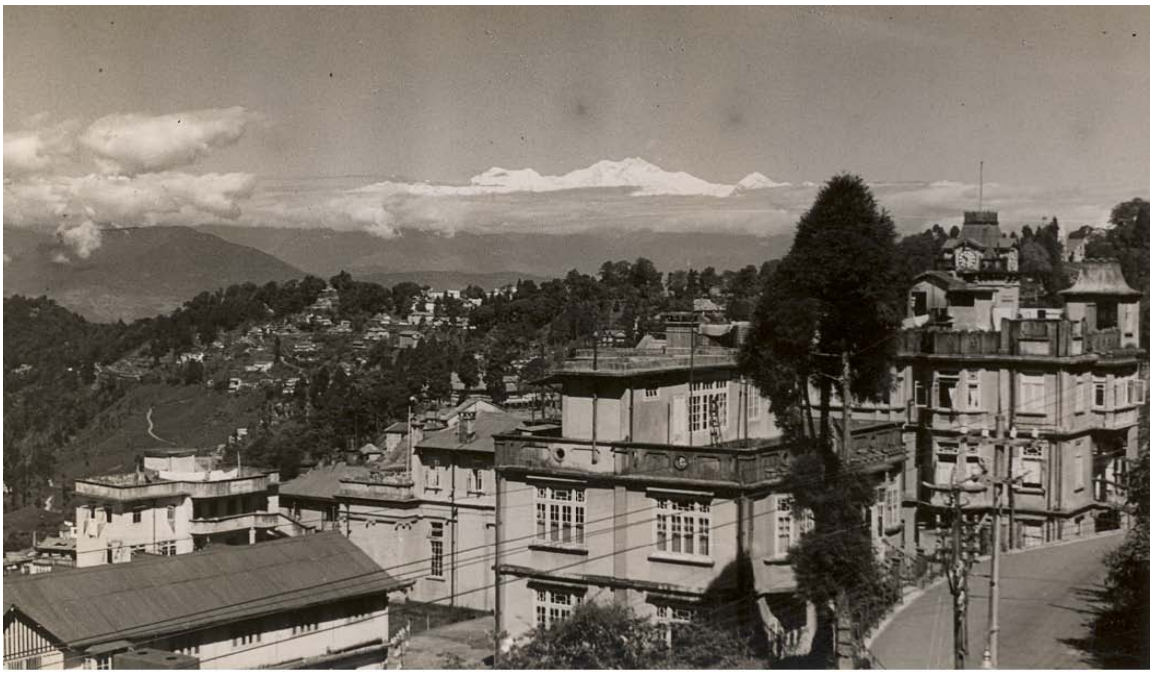
The dachunds were finally found, exhausted, 2000 ft down in the Rugneet-Manjitar valley. Monkeys have been known to kill dogs so we were lucky. They never took off like that again but never lost their taste for hunting monkeys. How could they when the monkeys would swing down from the trees, come up to them and jabber, then retreat, laughing I swear, into the branches.

We'd go into Darjeeling fairly frequently and sometimes lunch at the Planter's Club. And we'd wander round the Maidan, (town square) our favourite point of call being the studio of Sain, a talented Indian artist who painted many scenes of the Himalayas. My parents bought several pictures of his – Joanna now has two

*Planter's Club from (now) Nehru Road Playing Phut!*

Every country seems to have it's favourite game and among the Tibetans and Nepalese

Every week or so we'd go, of an evening, to the Planter's Club – or was it the Windamere hotel- for dancing and socializing as Government House was closed in the Winter, when the Governor of Bengal was in Residence in Calcutta. The men wore Dinner jackets and the women wore long dresses. I can't say I was a graceful dancer though I knew all the steps to the conventional dances. But being one of the few unmarried young women, I was in fair demand. There was also a large Cinema, near Bob & Sue's flat and I remember going to it but not what we saw.



Darjeeling from Bob & Sue's flat