

## Cheptour Ane Brocht Hame in Embro

The ertest link atwein Muriel Spark an masell wes, maist lik, at we wes clekkit bot a curn o yairds apairt. Muriel Spark wes brocht hame at 160 Bruntsfield Plece an nae dout hir pawrents cam thegither ti crie thair dochter ben thair ain hame. Tho A dinna hae pruif at ma faither an mither else bad in Bruntsfield Plece, A dae mynd at ma mither pyntit out a flett heich in the tenements neist the Bruntsfield Hottil an telt me at, whan thair wes ertest mairriet, thon wes thair hame an at ma faither wuid sklim outby ontill the cill o the bey winnoks ti dicht the gless wi a shambo. Bot the bit at frichtent hir wes whitlik he duin neist. Steikin the sash, he polissit the peins than clam roun the stane astragals ti waash the ither twa windaes at furmed the bey, an lest retoured the samen gate. Ma faither wes kent as ane o the twa men at firsten sklimmed aw the taps o the Cuillins an Blaven in ae day, sae it wes verra lik ti be trew. Furby, A hae a laddie at aye dis the sae lik splores tho A winna clype on him heir. Housomdevir, Bruntsfield wes whaur A jalouse at we baith jyned the fray.

Heir the firsten differ, tho. The wes twintie eir atwein uz. Muriel Spark wes brocht hame in 1918 sae shae wes a generautioun afoir me, mair lik aiges wi ma mither at wes 25 eir auld whan A wes borne in 1938. Ma mither wes bonnie, as wes Muriel, bot cam frae a faimlie at hed a wie bittie mair siller. In the Embro o thon tyme, this med a differ as wul cum clair in a wie. Furby, the Weir wes ti remuive ma faither fur sax eir o meilitarie sairvice an retour him til uz as a chynged man. Tho he wes a publishar in pace tyme ma faither wes a Ryal Inginere durand the Weir, aye be-in o a mechanicall kest o mynd, the samen as Bernard Camberg, Muriel's faither at wes also ane inginere. Oniegates, Muriel bad whaur shae wes amids the launskip shae deskreives in hir "Curriculum Vitae" an "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" whyle, in the absenss o ma faither, A wes transportit ti the superbills on the ither syde o the ceitie ti settifie the ambeitiouns o ma mither.

## Chapter One Born in Edinburgh

The first link between Muriel Spark and myself was probably that we were conceived only a few yards away from each other. Muriel Spark was born at 160 Bruntsfield Place and no doubt her parents came together to create their daughter in the privacy of their own home. Though I don't have proof that my mother and father also lived in Bruntsfield Place I remember that my mother pointed out a flat high in the tenements next the Bruntsfield Hotel and told me that, when they were first married, that was their home and that my father would climb out on to the sill of the bay windows to wipe the glass with a chamois leather. But the thing that frightened her was what he did next. Closing the sash, he polished the panes then climbed round the stone columns to wash the other two windows that formed the bay, then at last returned the same way. My father was known as one of the two men who were the first to climb all the summits of the Cuillins and Blaven in one day, so it was very likely to be true. Also, I have a son that still carries out such exploits though I won't tell tales on him here. However, Bruntsfield was I reckon where we both entered the affray.

Here we come to the first difference, though. There were twenty years between us. Muriel was born in 1918 so she was a generation before me, nearer the age of my mother that was 25 when I was born in 1938. My mother was pretty, as was Muriel, but came from a family that had a little more money. In the Edinburgh of that time this made a difference as will become clear shortly. As well as that the War was to remove my father for six years of military service and return him to us a changed man. Though he was a publisher in peacetime my father was a Royal Engineer during the War, always having been of a mechanical bent, like Bernard Camberg, Muriel's father, also an engineer. In any case, Muriel continued to live where she was, in the landscape she describes in her "Curriculum Vitae" and "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" while, in the absence of my father, I was transported to the suburbs on the other side of the city to satisfy the ambitions of my mother.

Afoir this Muriel Camberg hed flittit tae. In eir 1937 shae sauled ti Suddron Rhodesiae – nou Zimbabwe – ti be mairriet on a dominie cryed Spark. Thai hed a wie laddie bot the mairriage didna lest an Muriel in hir serss fur expairience laed the bairn in Efricae wi a nouriss and tuik a verra daungeruss vodge hame. Eftir the Weir wes owre, hir bairn folloed hir hamewith, an bad in Embro wi hir pawrents. Muriel gaed ti Lunnon ti finnd a yokin. Durand the Weir ma Grannie halped ti upbring masell furbye. Shae hed gied ma mither siller ti coff a bungalo and eftir a bit, bocht ane fur hirsell juist up the rodd. Whan A wes auld eneuch, A wes sint ti the samen skuil as ma deid auld faither – Daniel Stewart’s College – though a jalouse this wes agin ma faither’s wissis.

The bataillyie atwein thon thriesum owre sicna maitters gaed on fur a whein eirs eftir the Weir. Ma mither clammit at ma faither wes doitit, ane beleif at Muriel Spark hauddit about hir umquhyle guidman and a curn ithers at shae didna grie wi. The out-cum o ma ain faimlie mellie wes at ma faither bannist hissell ti Nyow Zealand, wi a nyow wyfe an ti contine hiz wirk in publishin. Monie eir eftir, A also gied owre ma struissil wi ma mither, at wes daein baith masell an ma ain smaw faimlie nae guid, an stappit peyin hir onie lawtie ir respek. The cantrips o ma mither an sister damishit lyfes an leirit me the vaill o a waarm faimlie an hame. Lik my mither, Muriel Spark also tyned hir laddie’s guidwull, bot owre the quastion o releigioun, as A wul tel in a whyllie.

Whan Muriel Spark retoured ti Lunnon, she wes bode wirk wi the Fremmit Offish. Thon wesna the rale nemm o the bodie shae wes waled bi, at wes saicret an bene upset ti outpit propagandae ti the Germanes on the raidio an in the nyowspeypers. Eftirwart shae begoud ti wirk wi magas, the ertest about jowells an eftir a maga anent poesie whaur shae fand doums monie unco buddies, aw etlin ti prog the ither in the riggin. Whan at lang an lest A stertit ti wryte, A hed the samen expairience wi a Scots langage maga, tho it wesna as veiciuss. Fur thon trak o tyme at Muriel Spark wes wirkin as Editar o The Poetry Review, 1947-49, ma faither hed retoured til hiz professioun as a publishar at he folloed richt up ontill the day he died in auld aige. This yokin is mynes an ma guidwyfe’s at the verra mament.

Before this Muriel Camberg had moved home too. In 1937 she sailed to Southern Rhodesia – now Zimbabwe – to be married to a school teacher called Spark. They had a little boy, but the marriage did not last and Muriel in her search for experience left the child in Africa with a nanny and made a very dangerous voyage home. After the War was over her child followed her and lived in Edinburgh with her parents. Muriel went to London to find employment. During the War, my Grandmother helped to bring me up, in the same manner. She had given my mother money to buy a bungalow and after a time, bought one for herself, nearby. When I was old enough, I was sent to the same school as my deceased grandfather – Daniel Stewart’s College – though I guess that this was against my father’s wishes.

The battle between the threesome over such matters went on for a few years after the War. My mother claimed that my father was mentally unstable, a belief that Muriel Spark held about her one-time husband and a few others she did not agree with. The outcome of my own family combat was that my father banished himself to New Zealand, with a new wife and to continue to work in publishing. Many years after I also gave up on my struggle with my mother, who was doing neither myself nor my young family any good, and stopped paying her any filial respect. The mischief done by my mother and sister damaged lives and taught me the value of a warm family and home life. In a similar way to my mother Muriel Spark also lost the goodwill of her son, but over the question of religion, as I will tell you later.

When Muriel Spark returned to London, she was offered work at the Foreign Office. That wasn’t the real name for the body she was chosen by, that was secret and it had been established to put out propaganda to the Germans on the radio and in the newspapers. After that she began to work on magazines, the first about jewels and thereafter a poetry magazine where she found a bunch of eccentric characters, all attempting to stab each other in the back. I had the same experience with a Scots language magazine, though it was not as vicious. For that period that Muriel Spark was working as Editor of The Poetry Review 1947-49, my father had returned to the profession as a publisher that he followed until the day he died in old age. This occupation is mine, and my wife’s, at the moment.

Muriel, tho, nou enterit intil a warl at A cuidna pit on ti A hae onie knowlege o. Fawmous nemms melled wi the teitils o gryte institutiouns as shae skimmed the lether o spede, frae poesie ti buiks o leitherarie criticeise, frae schort stores ti nouvelles an fillums. Shae growit intil a gryte owthar, oreiginall, conceise wi wirds an shairp in hir unnerstaunnin. Bot A maun awn at A consither hir harn pan wes aye afoir hir hert. Ye mibbies be speirin whitwey A hae the richt ti skanse the warks of a best-sellin wrytar bot A hae the wecht o Hume ahent me. He thocht at sympathie wes the maist fekfu o wir feillins fur garrin uz wirk thegither. Equal-aquals, a lak o't caws uz apairt. Whitlik shae wun frae swallie-in cauld English politie shae tyned in the couthie an cantie warl o hir pawrents.

Muriel, though, now entered a world that I could not pretend to have any knowledge of. Famous names mingled with the titles of great institutions as she climbed the ladder of success, from poetry to books of literary criticism, from short stories to novels and films. She matured into a great author, original, concise with words and sharp in her understanding. But I must admit that I consider her head always precedes her heart. You may be asking how I have the right to look critically at the works of a best-selling author but I have the weight of Hume behind me. He thought sympathy was the most effective of our emotions for making us work together. Equally, a lack of it separates us. What she gained from swallowing cold English culture she lost on the agreeable and pleasant world of her parents.