

**Recollections of my Grandfather, Sabine Baring-Gould,
My Grandmother and my Early Childhood**

**By
Joyce Rawstone © 1992**

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Ron Wawman writes: In the winter of 1992, Joyce Rawstone, then in her 84rd year, and at that time the only Grandchild living who remembers living at Lew with my Grandfather, Sabine Baring-Gould wrote a brief memoir. During World War I her father, William Priestley had joined the army and her mother was working in London as a VAD. Joyce, the eldest child of Sabine's daughter Joan Priestley, was sent to Lew House, together with her younger sister, Diana. Here they spent a considerable amount of time with their grandfather,

During this time Joyce and Sabine, who, despite being an octogenarian, was in loco parentis, got to know each other well. Joyce's beautifully written account is important because it gives a unique child's eye appraisal of Sabine at what must have been a difficult time for both of them. It is evident that Joyce had a deep affection for her grandfather and her account reflects well on them both. Sabine emerges as a stern, but gentle and loving grandfather. Through Sabine's consistent, caring behaviour towards her, Joyce learnt lessons that served her well throughout her life.

I am grateful to Joyce's daughter Claire Stewart-Richardson for permission to publish this delightful memoir.

I remember my Grandmother – always in a dark dress, with a high collar and tucker (a white frill inside the collar), a large brooch at her throat, and with a chain at her slim waist, from which hung the key of the store cupboard.

The store cupboard was opposite the haunted bedroom, and every day I went with Granny to give out the stores. The shelves were lined with preserves – salted peas, beans, and every other produce from the large walled garden. All preserving was done at home – bottled peaches, plums and pears – and I used to be given a lump of sugar that had settled in the halves of a crystallised orange or lemon.

Before I saw Granny, I went to say “Good morning” to Cook, Mrs. — and the other servants who passed through the kitchen. (Cooks invariably were called Mrs. — as a courtesy title.) Cook was stately and formidable, in a pink dress, with a white starched, bib-fronted apron and a mob cap. Her figure was reminiscent of Queen Mary, with a wasp waist, encircled by a wide starched belt. If I forgot my manners, I was sent back to the nursery. Otherwise, I sat on what seemed to me to be a huge oak settle by the big black kitchen range, with all its hinges, door handles and edges of polished steel gleaming like silver. I remember also the copper pots, burnished like gold, on a shelf or hanging up, and Cook telling me that they had to be scoured inside and out, in case verdigris formed, as that would poison people.

When my manners were good, Cook would give me a crystallised cherry, or something nice that she had made. Sometimes, perhaps, there would be a pigeon with a broken wing, wrapped in a cloth in a basket, beside the range, to be fed and hugged until it got better.

I spent much of my days bothering Tom, the gardener, and Charlie Dustin, [*sic*] the coachman.

My sister Diana and I would be washed and dressed after tea to go down to Granny in the Ballroom, where there was a rug, on which we sat, while she pulled us, getting faster and

¹ Joyce: born Bombay 10 June 1909

faster, until we tumbled off. We then ran after her and fell back on the rug. What fun that was! There were lovely Louis XVI chairs all around the Ballroom, Holland-covered, except for very special occasions. Two of them were uncovered for us, and we sat on them while Granny played nursery rhymes for us to sing to on the square piano – which is the same one I saw upstairs in the Gallery, when I stayed there recently.

Since then, these particular chairs have all vanished, only to have been replaced by very ordinary gilt chairs. Where they went and when, who knows? But the Holland covers remained to hide the replacements. There were also four lovely walnut Queen Anne era cushion mirrors, of which I have now seen only one! The house was let furnished to several tenants over the years.

In those days, I looked forward to my bath at night in a hip bath, in front of a warming fire. A very large hot water can stood beside it, and my Nanny would add hot water as the bath cooled. She would then read me a story. What luxury!

Diana was three years younger than me – she had been born² at Wiaston Grange, in Derbyshire, where my Mother and Father hunted with the Meynell hounds.

When my parents returned to India, Diana and I went back to Lew. By this time, Granny was failing, and sat exercising her fingers on a soft woolly ball, and we only saw her to say good night.

In the summer, my mother returned from India and took a house at Plymouth. Her faithful maids – Florrie, the Head Housemaid, and Margaret, the Parlourmaid – went with her. Our nurse came to look after us when we were sent for to go to Plymouth. My Mother then disappeared to a nursing home in Plymouth, and we were later told that we had a baby sister.³ I remember their return – an ugly baby with a red face and red hair!

How long our stay in Plymouth lasted, I do not remember, but the day came when Molly was despatched to my father's sister, Aunt Mabel, and Diana and I to Lew Trenchard with Florrie.

How happy I was to be back and to see Grampy! However, these were changed days. War had been declared; all the horses but one had gone, and Charlie Dustin had only the one horse left for the dog-cart, for Grampy to do his visiting. I was taken visiting by Grampy, always sitting between him and Charlie.

Only one gardener – Tom – was left to cope with the huge walled garden. One day, he told me that a tree near the drive was dying, so out we went – Tom with a bucket of ox blood to pour round the roots. The tree lived!

At the beginning of World War I, my Father came home to join up, and my Mother took a house in Brompton Square. She went out each day in V.A.D. uniform, so we saw little of her, but she always came to say goodnight, changed, and looking so pretty. I felt very proud of her. One night we were pulled out of bed to see the first Zeppelin fly over London.

We had a horrid nursery governess who used to take us for walks – Diana in the pram – to the station to see the wounded soldiers taken out of the trains and taken away in ambulances. How I hated the sights I saw! I felt so unhappy to see so many men walking on crutches, and indeed this gave us nightmares. The governess was sacked, and again Diana and I returned to Lew Trenchard – Florrie in tears because she and Ted, our chauffeur, had just got engaged before he went off to France.

This visit was a long one. I was in heaven, being back with Grampy, of whom I saw much more. Sadly Granny had died, but Aunt Cicely was there as housekeeper. Her office was the first room at the top of the oak staircase. The servants were very depleted – mostly

² Diana: born Derbyshire, 27 July 1913.

³ Molly: born Plymouth 27 November 1914.

only the head ones were left. A bathroom was installed opposite my Grandfather's bedroom (both were over the kitchen for warmth).

Those days for me were heaven! Lovely, irresponsible days! I ran where I liked and did as I pleased.

My Grandfather loved figs, and so did I! One day I heard someone say that if you kept figs in a dark cupboard, they would ripen; so when there was no one about, I picked all the figs from a fig tree against the wall by the dove cot. I hid them all in a dark cupboard in the passage leading to my bedroom, which then was over the Ballroom, with the window to the front. Nothing was ever said!

Each night, Diana and I were bathed together in Grampy's bathroom, and afterwards crossed the passage to say goodnight. He was always changed and waiting for us beside a lovely log fire. I noticed his buckled shoes, silk stockings and knee breeches. Florrie would come and take Diana to bed, and Grampy would tell me a story. Then we walked hand in hand along the Gallery.

I would stop and look at the portraits, hung side by side of two relations: Jacquetta Baring – Lady Northcote (1768-1841) and Emily Baring – Lady Young (1775-1847) I told Grampy that every night I prayed that I would grow up to be as pretty as they were. On we went, up a few steps, and down the passage leading to my room. When we got opposite the cupboard, Grampy stopped and said: "Won't you give your old Grandfather just one?" Found out! I opened the door and handed him one fig. This happened every night until they were finished. Oh dear! My guilt seemed to last so long! But the lesson was learned – I never remember taking or stealing anything ever again!

Often I went visiting with Grampy in the dog-cart. On one particular day I had, as usual, asked many questions, but got no answer. Eventually Grampy turned to Charlie and said "Put Miss Joyce out. She can walk home." Charlie lifted me out, put me down at the side of the road, facing home, and they drove on. Obviously I felt injured by this MOST unexpected treatment. Charlie later filled in the story. After they had clip-clopped along some way, Charlie said: "You know, Sir, we left Miss Joyce quite a long way off." "Did we?" said my Grandfather. "Well turn back and go and fetch her." When they got back to me, Grampy said: "Come on Joyce. Climb up." With my nose in the air, I replied: "No. I can walk." This happened a second time, whereupon Grampy turned to Charlie and said: "Pick her up and put her in the back." This Charlie did, and I felt very hurt. Why, I wondered was Grampy so silent? Why had he turned me out? He later explained to me that I must never talk to any one who was obviously in deep thought. Perhaps he was in the middle of a story or a sermon. It was a lesson to me.

Grampy's sermons were always very short and easy to listen to. When a visiting parson came, he took out a stop-watch, and when ten minutes were up, stood up and said: "Now to God the Father, etc.", bringing the sermon to an abrupt end. Again I asked why. The answer, which I have never forgotten, was: "If a parson cannot make his point in ten minutes, it is no good. He should be able to make his point in ten minutes. If that point is remembered every Sunday, he should have succeeded in drilling home fifty two points in a year. Not too bad!" Long has this been remembered, and, to this day, I cannot bear a long rambling sermon. By the end of it you have forgotten the original point!

About sharing: I dearly loved pork brawn. Whenever Grampy saw it on the sideboard for breakfast, I was sent for to have breakfast with him to share it. I did enjoy those breakfasts with him so much!

My great friend, with whom I played many hours, lived at the Ramps. His name was Roger Arundel, and he was the curate's son. We were forbidden to go to the lake and the boathouse, because the lake was believed to be an old mine. It was very deep, and the water was below the surrounding ground level, and the path down to it was very slippery. It got to

my Grandfather's ears that we went there. One night, after my bath, he said: "Joyce, the water in the lake is very deep and very green and dirty; also I think there are huge eels in it. They are like water snakes. You wouldn't like to fall in amongst them – you might never come up again." That was enough to stop us!

Some times I was asked to tea at the Rectory with my three cousins: Sabine, Adele and Edward (Teddy). Of the three brothers, I remember Teddy the best – he, Adele and I played with a model railway in the garden.

One day I walked into the Library, where Grampy was standing writing at his tall desk. I was ignored. When he had finished, he took me by the hand and walked me to the door, saying: "No one comes in here unless asked."

He always called me "Dear Heart", except when disapproval was registered. Then it was "Joyce". Maybe that is why I dislike the name!

As I write, many incidents come to mind about our life at Lew. This story I must tell, as it is a lesson for life. Diana and I had gone to his room as usual, to say goodnight, and asked: "Please, Grampy, can we do your hair for dinner?" He said "Yes", so, proceeding with many small pieces of pink and blue baby ribbon, which I had specially cut, we tied his hair up with little tufts all over his head. He promised us faithfully that he would go down to dinner and keep it thus all night. As usual, we walked down the Long Gallery to the head of the front stairs, where we kissed him goodnight, and said: "Promise!" He went down stairs and into the dining room.

At the end of dinner, the butler told him that he had shown two people into the drawing room, and added: "Your hair, Sir!" Nevertheless, Grampy kept his promise to us – neither excusing nor explaining his appearance – and, as promised, the bows stayed on until breakfast.

This was another lesson: always to keep a promise, come what may, and never pass on a child's secrets, however funny they may be. This, I think, may be the cause of children's mistrust of parents, when they learn that their secrets have been divulged, and promises broken, and they have not been treated seriously.

One last recollection: Diana either fell into the fountain at the front door, or I helped her in. I turned the water on – which was good fun until the water rose too high and no way could I turn it off. Diana was soaked and becoming frightened, but I could not get her out. We screamed and screamed. Grampy heard us from the library, and Florrie came running from the house. She seized the drenched Diana and bore her off. I went with Grampy. He was not angry, but quietly made me feel pretty small by telling me just what might have happened. I have heard from time to time that he had a temper, but I can honestly say that I was never aware of it – and he had plenty of reasons to have been angry with me!

When we left Lew for the last time, we went to Chagford to live with Aunt Mabel, so at last Diana and I were reunited with Molly. Dear Aunt Mabel! She was a wonderful mother to the three of us, as well as coping with her own three children.

Her eldest son and I were at boarding school. Grampy wrote to me there, and I to him, but I regret that I have only one of his letters. I don't remember ever seeing him again. We had gone to Brighton⁴ with my mother, and while we were there, we got the sad news of his death.

Joyce Rawstone

⁴ We usually went abroad in the winter holidays, but in 1924, we were taken by my mother to Brighton – I suspect because my Grandfather was failing.