

How My Childhood Dreams Of The Film '*White Christmas*' Became A Reality After An Unexpected Turn In My Career!



My favourite film during the 50s was *White Christmas* with Bing Crosby & Danny Kaye. I always dreamt that one day I would become another Rosemary Clooney. This was sparked off by my mother who was a professional pianist & my army father who was very keen on amateur dramatics.

We moved home to Guernsey after the war in 1951. Mother became a resident pianist for the summer season shows with the likes of Des O'Conner, Arthur English & Ronnie Corbett before they became household names. On the other side, my father was a Major with REME based in Bordon, Hampshire & my 2 brothers were serving in the Navy. So I was very torn between the two careers when it came to making up my mind as a teenager. I chose a drama school in Finchley, London which also ran as an agency. I managed a part in "No Hiding Place" & Principal Boy in pantomime in Tunbridge Wells at the great fee of 12/6 a week. But after 2 years of trudging around the audition circuit, I realised I wasn't going anywhere.

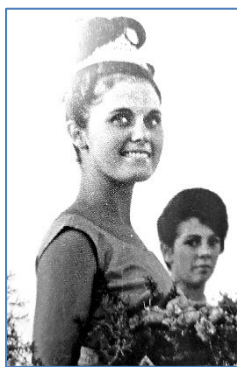
One Sunday as I was walking up Holborn Street, The RAF Recruitment office was open & to my parents' horror, I rang them up to say I had joined up! I have to say the CO at the time wasn't sure I would survive 'square bashing' being a bit of a 'lovey'! (But 4 years later when I remustered to WRAF Admin at Spitalgate, she was my CO & shocked that I had not only survived 4 years but had signed up for another 4 years!) I became a wireless Operator training down at Compton Bassett during that ice cold winter of 1963. But I never gave up my acting & joined the Compton Players & on my next posting to High Wycombe Bomber Command I joined the towns Operatic Society Playing Annie in 'Annie Get Your Gun'.

During this posting I applied to go abroad, somewhere like Singapore, Cyprus or Germany. They gave me Aden. I remember thinking "Gee thanks!" But within a few weeks of arriving in Aden I joined a combined services jazz quintet & started doing the circuits of Officer Messes, clubs in Khormaksar & Little Aden as well as Steamer Point

Moral was high amongst us WRAFs & I made some lifelong friends. My best friend out there & still is a good friend was Tina Evans (nee Hunter).

We both worked at the Comcen at Steamerpoint, she as a telephonist & I was a Wireless Operator. Once I started singing around the camps she would often come with me. One evening we were approached by the American Tobacco Company & asked if we would like to be cigarette girls at events at various officers' messes. Not only were we paid well but we had free cigarettes! So when I wasn't singing I helped her out. At some of these 'gigs' I was often picked up by a jeep & driven off to do a 15 minute cabaret act at other service clubs, then brought back to finish off at the Officers Mess. I was of course, given late passes as I often didn't get back till gone midnight! I'd never worked so hard even in civvy street!

But I loved every minute of it.



I then met up with a local jazz quartet, who were the resident band at The Rock Hotel in the town & I performed a weekly cabaret spot with them. Once again I had Tina involved doing a memory act with an Army Sergeant. I also entered Tina in the Miss Dhow competition & to our excitement she won. Not that I was surprised as she was a stunning looking girl. It was great fun having publicity shots taken which I joined in. When the Daily Sketch arrived in Aden, we were invited down to the beach for a photo shoot to give Aden a more glamorous side!

Then, out of the blue I was called into see my CO & asked if I would like to produce a show to take up to the Radfan Mountains to entertain the troops. They didn't have to ask me twice! I was taken off all duties while I gathered some very talented service personnel together plus 6 brave lasses I coached as a chorus line & I put together a cabaret act with the Del Turner Quintet. A month later we were all flown up to the desert.



What an experience. Our makeshift stage was draped with parachutes on blocks & the lads all sat in the 'auditorium' on benches stripped to the waist in the heat. An eye to behold for us girls and also quite frightening as they cheered on the chorus girls & laughed at the silly sketches the lads had written. But because we were all service personnel, they made us feel like stars as they greeted us all with extreme enthusiasm!

Following the shows (I organised another show a month later) we were asked to visit the sick bay & again we were made to feel like stars as we were introduced to the injured lads there. We were all awarded the Radfan GSM medal for services to entertaining the lads. What was a shame was this was the last time we would go up as the MOD in London decided to organise professional shows to fly out. When the lads came down to Aden for their R&R they told me our shows were best because we were part of them.

One day our PT instructor Di Brown (nee Shippe) approached us looking to make up a hockey team to fly to Kenya for a week. I hadn't played since I'd left school but for a free weeks holiday I was up for it. I started as a reserve but the ladies Indian team were vicious & our lot were dropping like flies, so I eventually ended up as Centre with a 'Don't mess with me look!' But they made us very welcome & I remember a wonderful trip out to the Riff Valley. There were stunning views & lots of wild animals. We were entertained every evening too, so it was a great trip for us girls!

Another memory of my time in Steamer Point was feeling really down one day when one of the nurses scolded me saying, "There are lads in the hospital injured with no visitors, why don't you go & cheer them up instead of feeling sorry for yourself?" So off I went & stood at the entrance of one of the wards, "Anyone want any visitors? I've got out of date newspapers & a reasonable fresh bunch of grapes!" A shout came from the ward and that's how I came to meet 3 naval lads who'd been injured from a grenade blowing up near them when they came off their submarine in the harbour. So much for a night out they told me! The nurse was right, it really cheered me up & they took me out for dinner when they'd recovered before they were flown home.

The only really sad memory I have was when 3 army lads I worked with in the Comcen were killed by an Arab throwing a grenade in the back of their jeep. We were all devastated and all went to the funeral at Silent Valley Cemetery. I will never forget the silence, the bugler playing & the wind blowing the dust across the grounds. It was the saddest funeral I have ever been too.

But despite that, for me even now in my dotage, the best memory was stepping out onto the stage & reliving the scene from White Christmas. I had achieved my dream, I was entertaining the troops