

1984, marvellous woman journalist asked me how I'd like to be remembered. 'As a scientist,' I said, 'but who had a family. It's important to have a human life.' I was privileged. Millions weren't. I knew back in the '20s that medicine would be my way of fighting poverty and injustice. Delivering babies in the slums, I found mothers with only newspaper to lie on. Defy anyone not to become a socialist! And a feminist! One man, opening the door to 'the doctor' said 'I'd rather have a black man than you!' Yes. I specialised in blood, haematology, and my Professor took the credit for MY new anaemia treatment. Extract of raw liver. Up to then they'd used arsenic - but I'd read up on this and determined to try. Raw liver! Got all my chums mincing. In Bloomsbury! Even commandeered a mincer from my second cousin, Virginia Woolf. Didn't work on dogs, so tried it on me – Eureka! By my mid-thirties I'd produced my first book, *The Anaemias*, and two gorgeous daughters. Oh, and a husband, my lovely, bemused David. He founded the Wayfarers' Travel Agency. Our hols were a dream.

By 1938 war loomed. I knew we'd need blood. Campaigning for Republican Spain I'd met a wonderful Spanish doctor who'd found out how to store and transport blood safely. I got colleagues together and we plotted in our flat over gin and crumpets. The Emergency Blood Transfusion Service was born. We rather 'bypassed' officialdom; one pompous chap called me 'a very naughty little girl'. I was nearly 40 – and tall!

AND when war came I was in charge of the North West Depot at Slough. We'd SEE the bombs drop, so our vans would hare off to the hospital nearest the raid even before the call came. We'd adapted milk bottles for the blood – someone called them 'Janet Vaughans' – and converted Wall's ice-cream vans. Marvellous girl drivers in great-coats – though one 'girl' was a dowager of 75 in pearls! Never short of donors. One man said, 'Blood was needed. I had some. Why not?'

At the end of the war – Belsen. I was sent to Belsen. Head of a team to study the effects of starvation. 'Doing science in hell'. Kindly Americans had pressed their rations on the wretched survivors, who promptly died. We wanted to inject protein, but these poor

skeletons screamed at us 'Nicht Krematorium!'. The Nazis had injected petroleum to help the fires burn better. Finally we found that just small amounts of food was the answer. Yes. Back in London I burned all David's striped pyjamas, and, they told me, shouted at him and our girls for a good month.

Life came back. I was made Principal of my old Oxford college, Somerville, an honour and a joy for 22 years. Found that I could get most of the admin. done by 9.30 a.m. and dash off to the lab! My new passion was Bones, and the effects of radiation thereupon. But I loved my Somervillians. We had Shirley later Baroness Williams – marvellous; Margaret later Thatcher, not so marvellous; and Harriet Proudfoot, who'd applied because I'd saved her life in the war, when she was so badly burned we couldn't get a vein so, last resort, I'd thumped the biggest syringe straight into her sternum and got the blood in that way. Blood and bone - yes! At Somerville I increased the number of girls doing science by 40 per cent, and campaigned to admit men (we did, but after me). Some dons frowned on outside activities, but I wanted our women to excel whatever they did. A budding actress – Modern Linguist - got a note from me once after a play: 'Saw you last night. Marvellous. So proud!' But when our very own Dorothy Hodgkin got her Nobel for chemistry, what a celebration we had in Hall with wine flowing – I think my hair came down!

I stayed in Oxford in 'retirement'. Published papers, books, sat on committees, commissions. Drove my yellow mini as long as I could, saw old colleagues – Enid Starkie, brilliant French scholar, always wore red and blue. Haunted the Bodleian Library, though they tell me my hearing aid would ping and whistle. Didn't like old age. Body lets you down. I should know. Darling David had died in '63, 30 years ago now. Feel a burden on the family. Had more lives than I deserved. Yes. Be realistic. Rational. Be a scientist. Yes. It's time.

Dame Janet Vaughan 1899-1993

Alison Skilbeck

