
Conservative policies. Having received what she described as a 'brisk' encouragement from the Prime Minister to differ whenever she wished to, she accepted. And she did indeed run into trouble with the Whips for her strenuous criticism of the government's policies towards the universities. Higher Education, and its needs, including student loans, were her first interest as a life peer and a continuing one. In 2000 she spoke eloquently in a debate on Higher Education, to dispel long-lasting misconceptions about Oxford's admissions policy. But by now her main interests were different and her membership of Committees and Sub-Committees correspondingly onerous. The interests included, besides Defence and Foreign Affairs, Northern Ireland, and she spoke on the Northern Ireland Peace Process when she was already seriously ill and only a few days before entering hospital.

I will end by returning to the beginning of Daphne's life peerage. She was moved to tears by the admission ceremony. At the time, I did not fully understand her emotion, though I felt moved myself by the matchless prose forming part of the ceremony. But now that I have read a piece written by Professor Anna Davies, after Daphne's death, I think I do understand, though I shall express the matter rather differently. Daphne was moved because she felt that she was once again a public servant, able to express her love for her country, and to do so now with no need for concealment. She was in her defining role again but in the open, where she had perhaps often wished to be in the past.

African Childhood

From the Profile of Daphne Park by Caroline Alexander,
The New Yorker, 30 January 1989

MISS PARK'S FATHER, John Alexander Park, while a young man attending Queen's University, Belfast, had contracted tuberculosis, and his family sent him to South Africa for a "cure" in the healthy climate. Within a very short period of time after his arrival, in 1894, he had given away all the money they had supplied him with. "What exactly happened to it I don't know, but he was fairly shortly working in the mines – perhaps not the best place for someone with TB" Miss Park observed dryly.

He later ran a store on the high veldt, then became interested in seeing a bit more of the countryside, and so walked north through what was then Rhodesia, settling in Nyasaland (now Malawi) in 1905, where he began to grow tobacco. When the First World War broke out, he became an Intelligence officer for the Nyasaland Frontier Force, and was eventually wounded and transferred to Roberts Heights, a hospital in South Africa. He had come from a scholarly family—his father, who held the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Queen's University, had spoken Latin, Greek, or Hebrew with him on their Sunday walks—and some years before the war, being lonely for intellectual exchange, had advertised in the Cape Times for a pen friend "interested in philately and philosophy" and had received a reply signed "A.C.G." During his convalescence, he wrote to his friend saying, "My dear chap, I'll come over and meet you," and they arranged to meet in Pietermaritzburg.

"I'm not sure at what stage A.C.G. told him that she was a woman—whether he knew before he got off the train," Miss Park said. "Anyway, she met him, and she brought along her daughter – my mother – who was very beautiful. My father fell in love with the daughter at first sight, and they were married six months later." John Park was forty-four, and his bride, Doreen Gwynneth Cresswell-George, only nineteen. Her father had come to South Africa from Britain in order to seek his fortune, the family's money having been squandered by his stepfather, who had a fondness for playing the horses.

The couple left the tobacco plantation to go to England for the birth of their first child, and Daphne Park was born in Surrey, on September 1, 1921. Before leaving Africa, her father had made arrangements with his partner, a defrocked Portuguese priest whom everyone had warned him against, to see to the drying, insurance, and shipment of his bumper tobacco crop. The tobacco arrived at its destination musty, totally ruined, and uninsured; Park returned to discover that the partner had made off with everything he could from the plantation. After debts had been paid, nothing remained to Park except his