C.S. Lewis

A biography of friendship

In memory of David Porter
1945–2005

C.S. Lewis

A biography of friendship

COLIN DURIEZ

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Preface

An Oxford student of C.S. Lewis's told J.R.R. Tolkien that he found his new tutor interesting. Tolkien responded: "Interesting? Yes, he's certainly that. You'll never get to the bottom of him."

There is a proverb in a number of languages that goes like this: "Tell me who your friends are, and I'll tell you who you are." You can learn a great deal about people by their friends – the company they keep – and nowhere is this more true than in the case of C.S. Lewis, the remarkable academic, author, popularizer of faith, and creator of Narnia.

Throughout Lewis's life, key relationships mattered deeply to him, from his early days in the north of Ireland and his schooldays in England, as a teenager in the trenches of the First World War, and then later in Oxford. The friendships he cultivated throughout his life proved to be vital, influencing his thoughts, his beliefs, and his writings.

My biography of Lewis focuses on some of his most important friendships, including members of the literary group associated with him, the Inklings. Along with the places and events of his life, as well as his writings, these friendships help us to understand just who C.S. Lewis was. What did Arthur Greeves, for instance, a lifelong friend from his adolescence, bring to him? How did J.R.R. Tolkien, and the other members of the now famous Inklings, shape him? Why, in his early twenties, did he share a home with a single mother twice his age, Janie Moore, looking after her for so many years until her death? And why did he choose to marry so late? What of the relationship with his alcoholic and gifted brother, who joined his unusual household?

C.S. Lewis was, in many ways, a remarkable enigma, as Tolkien intimated to the student. He guarded his inner life, yet attracted

his readers by his friendly, warm, and open tone. Even in his erudite scholarship, the reader feels they are being treated as an equal with whom Lewis's insights into ancient poets and writers are being shared. Lewis appears to assume you are a fellow learner, but wears his knowledge lightly. He does not intimidate, but draws you in. As the narrator of the Narnian stories, his voice is simply like that of a kindly uncle.

An atheist for much of his formative early life, Lewis became one of the most well known of modern popularizers of the Christian faith. Yet the scope of his varied books is not limited by age, creed, or nationality. He wrote books for children as well as for students and scholars, and successfully explored new genres such as science fiction and fantasy for adults. He breathed new life into the traditional world of theological writing, with his best-selling *The Screwtape Letters,* which put him on the cover of *Time* magazine after the Second World War, signalling an extraordinary impact upon America that has lasted to this day. Works of his literary scholarship are still in print half a century after his death, and he is a household name in the British Isles, mainly through his *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

My book is not aimed at the scholar, but the general reader who may have read a Narnia book or two, or perhaps *The Screwtape Letters*. Some readers may have dipped into his popular theology, such as *Mere Christianity*, or the record of his bereavement in losing his wife, *A Grief Observed*. Others may have seen the film *Shadowlands*, or an adaptation of a Narnia story.

Though my book aims first of all to tell the story of Lewis's life, and the part played in it by his friends, it draws upon the latest scholarship (suitably digested) and unpublished material housed at The Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Illinois, USA, and at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The Marion E. Wade Center in particular holds extensive writings by Warren Hamilton Lewis (known as Warnie), bequeathed by him to its archives, and oral history interviews from those who knew Lewis and have since died. The centre shares

copies of W.H. Lewis's manuscripts with the Bodleian. Scholars and others knowledgeable of C.S. Lewis to whom I'm indebted are too numerous to mention, but I must especially acknowledge previous biographers Roger Lancelyn Green, Walter Hooper, A.N. Wilson, George Sayer, Alan Jacobs, Douglas Gresham, and others writing from an Ulster context (David Bleakley, Ronald W. Bresland, and Derick Bingham). There are those too who wrote of Lewis's relationship with Joy Davidman (Brian Sibley, Douglas Gresham, Don W. King, and Lyle Dorsett) and the Inklings (Humphrey Carpenter and Diana Glyer). David C. Downing's *The Most Reluctant Convert* was also invaluable, as was K.J. Gilchrist's *A Morning After War*.

A special note of thanks must be given to Bruce L. Edwards for allowing me to adapt sections from my chapter in volume one of *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* (Praeger Publishers), and to the Paulist Press for similarly giving permission to adapt material from my book *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*. Always at my side was my *The C.S. Lewis Chronicles* (BlueBridge) – I must thank the publisher of that, my friend Jan Guerth, for persuading me to compile it some years ago. It helped me immensely in finding my way through the tangled terrain of the chronology of Lewis's life; he went through three conversions (to atheism, then theism, then Christianity), an enormous number of house moves, and much else. I also must mention the help of my publisher, particularly Ali Hull, Jessica Tinker, Margaret Milton, Sheila Jacobs, Miranda Lever, Jude May, Leisa Nugent, and Rhoda Hardie.

A note is needed about naming. With Clive Staples Lewis, I tend to call him Jack (the name he adopted when very young, and by which he was thereafter known by family and close friends) when writing about his childhood and teenage years, and usually Lewis after that. His family also called him "Jacks". With his brother, Warren Hamilton Lewis, I use the name by which he was almost universally known – Warnie.

An important preparation for writing this biography was my student years in the seventies at the University of Ulster, Coleraine,

in Northern Ireland. I stayed in various digs in Portrush, Portstewart, Downhill, and Castlerock. As I explored the north Antrim coast, the articles and other pieces on C.S. Lewis I was writing, and talks I was giving at that time, helped me to discover Lewis's close childhood association with that area and other parts of Ulster. I found I had already explored Cair Paravel, to give just one instance, in the Narnia stories; actually, it was Dunluce Castle, its ruins towering over the cliffs near sandy beaches in one direction and the Giant's Causeway in another. Over the years I revisited that area often, and other parts of the north of Ireland.

During a conference in Belfast in 1998 marking the centenary of Lewis's birth, a highlight was being shown around Little Lea, his childhood home, which remains a private residence. The whole experience was enhanced by friends I made in Ulster, such as John and Rosalind Gillespie. There is no doubt that the north of Ireland, along with County Donegal, shared the same status in Lewis's affection as Oxford: places in which he felt most at home.

Colin Duriez
Keswick, December 2012

1

A Northern Irish Childhood

Lessons of the day, given by their governess, Annie Harper, were long over. The weather had improved since then. Two small boys were returning home from a walk when the younger noticed a rainbow. His face alight with excitement, he pointed it out to his older brother, Warnie (Warren). The younger was convinced that the rainbow ended by their house.

Running nearer, the two saw that the shining arc seemed indeed to touch the ground in the middle of the path from the gate to the front door.

Always persuasive, the youthful C.S. Lewis convinced his older brother that they must dig there for the crock of gold. Jack, as he insisted on being called, reminded Warnie of stories their nurse, Lizzie Endicott, had told them about buried pots of gold at the end of rainbows. It was characteristic of the younger boy that he could convince the older, and also act on what gripped his imagination. When their cousin Claire Lewis sometimes visited, Warnie did not need persuading to join his brother and Claire in the large oak wardrobe carved by their grandfather. There, as they sat on its floor, Jack would tell Warnie and Claire (who was Warnie's age) stories of his own. In the gloom, Claire recalled years later, she and Warnie would listen silently "while Jacks told us his tales of adventure".[1]

Soon the two brothers were energetically digging up the garden path. The dense shrubbery hid their digging from watchful eyes in the house. As the dusk deepened, the boys had yet to uncover the treasure. Finally, they were forced to obey the summons for tea from the house.

It was not long before the front door was flung open and their dishevelled father burst in. In the twilight, smart-suited Albert Lewis had stumbled into the substantial hole in the path, the contents of his briefcase tumbling out. In his fury, Albert refused to listen to Jack's explanation, perfectly reasonable to the young boy, or to his older brother. Assuming his solicitor's role as if he were in a police court, but not measuring his anger, Albert accused his sons of deliberately creating a booby trap for him. Nothing would convince him otherwise. Their sentence is not recorded.

Clive Staples Lewis was born on 29 November 1898, on the wealthy fringes of Belfast in the north of Ireland, the second son of successful city solicitor Albert, and Florence (Flora), the daughter of a clergyman. His brother, Warnie, was three and a half years older than him. Belfast in 1898 and into the twentieth century was humming as a burgeoning industrial city. At its heart was one of the world's greatest shipyards. It was proud to have the largest gantry in the British Isles and launched the biggest ship, the *Oceanic*, and later its sister, the short-lived *Titanic*. As the leading city economy in Ireland, Belfast's prosperity grew, and privileged families, including the Lewises, prospered with it.

Jack's father was the son of an evangelical Welshman and engineer, Richard Lewis, who had settled in Ireland and been a partner in a shipping company in the nearby docks. Jack's mother, Flora, was considered to have the more cultured breeding, because of her aristocratic and highly intelligent mother, Mary Warren. Flora came from County Cork in the south of Ireland and, unusually for a woman at that time, was educated at Queen's University, Belfast (then the Royal University of Ireland), obtaining First Class honours in algebra, geometry, and logic. She sensibly avoided her mother's eccentric lifestyle. Jack Lewis remembered Flora as a "voracious reader of novels". She wrote short stories and other pieces, including "The Princess Rosetta", which was published in *The Household Journal* of 1889, and an accomplished parody of a sermon. Albert also had literary aspirations, including poetry writing, but it seems none of his verses were published.

As a growing and alert child, Jack soon noticed the contrast in their temperaments – Albert was passionate and emotionally unpredictable, while Flora was analytical and cool in her emotions. Sunny and stable, she was the young boy's dependable Atlantis (as Lewis later put it), a great island continent of peacefulness. Jack's early life was marked by the reassuring presence of his highly educated mother. Flora's personality is captured in letters she wrote to Albert (rarely) while he was away from home, or (often) while she was away on long summer vacations with their boys. When baby Jack was nearly eighteen months old, Albert had to be away in London on business for a while. She wrote of "Babbins": "If you ask where Daddy is, he says 'gone'." In another letter to Albert, in London, Flora mentions looking after "Babsie" and "Badgie" (Warnie) while suffering a headache. She tells Albert it had been a very stormy night, with hard rain. The next day her sister-in-law, Jack's Aunt Annie, had come around, bringing her second child, baby Ruth. Flora notes that "Clive is about, and was anxious to look at it, but objected to be asked to kiss it".[2]

Some months later in 1900, Flora took her sons, accompanied by their maid, for a long summer holiday in Ballycastle, on the north Antrim coast, where she relished the crisp air. Albert, as usual, remained behind, working. He hated any change in his routine, a trait that later would affect his relationship with his sons. Describing baby Jack to him in a letter, she observed, "Babsie is talking like anything. He astonished me this morning; Warren sniffled, and he turned around and said, 'Warnie wipe nose.'"

The precocious infant was not averse to creating words. Flora continued: "There are some nice girls in the house next to us who talk to him and Warren in the garden. Baby calls them the

'Joddies'." She remarked that Baby enjoyed the story of the three bears that Martha, the maid, was reading to Warren. It was some time after this that the toddler declared, pointing to himself, "He is Jacksie." Jacksie was later shortened to "Jacks" and then "Jack". Thereafter he refused to answer to any other name, according to Warnie. "Jack" turned out to be the name by which he was known to family and close friends throughout his life

Sometime probably in the following year, 1901, Warnie brought the lid of a biscuit tin into his younger brother's nursery. He had created a miniature garden or forest in the lid, from moss, twigs, and flowers. When he looked at it, Jack encountered beauty for the first time, an "incurably romantic" experience, or epiphany of what he called "joy", despite the crudity of the art.

> It made me aware of nature – not, indeed, as a storehouse of forms and colours but as something cool, dewy, fresh, exuberant. I do not think the impression was very important at the moment, but it soon became important in memory. As long as I live my imagination of Paradise will retain something of my brother's toy garden.[3]

Warnie was always to have a more heightened perception of the ordinary natural world than his brother, and one of the gifts to Jack of Warnie's friendship was to teach him to see more clearly the natural world. The experience of joy or longing that the adult C.S. Lewis speaks about, of which the toy garden was one of many pivotal examples, ran like a thread through his life, helping in his later return to belief in God and Christian faith from atheism in adulthood.

In June and July 1901, when Jack was two years old, he went on holiday with Flora, Warnie, and nurse/housemaid Lizzie Endicott to the small seaside resort of Castlerock, on the north coast of Ireland. Many years later, Lewis told his brother of his first experience of viewing the sea. In an unpublished memoir, Warren records that "when he first saw it he had not mastered perspective;

to him then, the horizon appeared only a few yards away, and so high above his head that the effect was like looking upwards at water streaming over a weir".[4] This amazing infant memory may perhaps have contributed to Lewis's beautiful imagining of the approach to Aslan's Country in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*, where the very world's end of Narnia is portrayed.

> It was if a wall stood up between them and the sky, a greenish-grey, trembling, shimmering wall. Then up came the sun, and at its first rising they saw it through the wall and it turned into wonderful rainbow colours. Then they knew that the wall was really a long, tall wave – a wave endlessly fixed in one place as you may often see at the edge of a waterfall.[5]

Beyond the unmoving wave, and behind the sun, the voyagers could glimpse the vastly tall, verdant mountains of Aslan's Country.

On showery days, Flora kept the boys near the railway station or the house in which they were staying, so as not to get caught in the rain. The station was as big an attraction as the beach, with the steam engines puffing through the small town and into the tunnel just by the station, heading in the direction of Downhill around the coast. Trains from the other way would dramatically emerge from the tunnel's darkness.

In one of her many letters, Flora told Albert that Baby had made friends with the stationmaster. The toddler went with her to pick up a newspaper, "and as soon as he saw him in the distance he called out, 'Hello, station master.'" Within a few weeks, Jack was insisting upon calling out, "Good morning Robert" every morning to the stationmaster, and getting a smile in return. Baby Jack continued to be "infatuated" with the steam trains stopping at Castlerock – Flora reported to Albert that if he saw a "siglan" down, he had to be taken back to the station.[6]

In another letter, Flora told a further railway tale about the toddler.

> Here is a story to amuse the old people. I took him to buy a [toy] engine, and the woman asked him if she should tie a string to it for him. Baby just looked at her with great contempt and said, "Baby doesn't see any string on the engines what baby sees on the station." You never saw a woman so taken aback as she was.[7]

The correspondence wasn't one-sided. A letter came for Flora from Albert that included a poem. She expressed pleasure at it in her reply, considering that it had real feeling in it, rather than (as usual with Albert, she felt) being "written for the sake of the verses". Poignantly – in the light of her early death a little over seven years later – Flora wrote about their love:

> I don't see that there is anything else to look to in this life for comfort or happiness, at least for you and me. I don't think either of us could ever find pleasure in outside things in which the other had not a part; it is going to be so with us always, isn't it dear?[8]

As the family prospered, it nevertheless took a great deal of time for Flora to persuade her husband to move house from their rented accommodation – he was pathologically averse to change, as mentioned before. By 1905, however, the young family was able to move to a larger, specially built house nearby, which they called Little Lea.

The often eccentric construction of the house is not evident in an estate agent's description over fifty years later, when structurally it still resembled the original house (though the lack of proper foundations presumably had been remedied by then).

Little Lea was advertised in 1957 as a "residence of distinction" with about two acres of land, and continues:

> This Well-Built Residence is situated in a secluded position on the Circular Road, convenient to Campbell College and Stormont, and is approached by two gravel drives.
>
> The Grounds are tastefully laid out for ease of management in lawns, rose beds, rock gardens, &c.
>
> Lounge Hall with Fireplace; 3 Reception-rooms; 4 Principal Bedrooms; 2 Secondary Bedrooms; Dressing-room; 2 Bathrooms; Kitchen (Esse cooker); Double Garage; Greenhouses. The Rooms are spacious and the excellent woodwork includes parquet flooring in the Principal Bedrooms and oak and maple floors in the Hall and Reception-rooms....

His new home was "almost a major character in my story", Lewis later wrote. The house was soon bursting with books, lodged into every conceivable space, even the attic. Jack was to explore unhindered, savouring books that were (he later said) suitable and unsuitable, but discovering authors connected by a hidden path that was to continue to run through his own writings. From the moment he could read, he gave his allegiance, he tells us, to books in which the horns of elfland could be heard – stories and poetry of romance, carrying tantalizing glimpses of other worlds, whether worlds of the spirit or imagined ones.[9]

The native stories told him by Lizzie Endicott reinforced this allegiance, rooted as they were, he tells us, in "the peasantry of County Down". County Down, in fact, was a fundamental source of the later land of Narnia. As well as explaining during a snowstorm that "the old woman in the sky was plucking her goose", the nurse told him folk and fairy tales of Ireland. The boy sat enraptured as she recounted stories of leprechauns and pots of buried gold, the sagas of Cuchulain, the champion of Ulster, and legends of the faery people and their immortal worlds, the Isle of Apples and Tir-na-nÓg, the Land of Youth.

Into this imaginative world of Lizzie Endicott's storytelling came Jack's discovery of the early Beatrix Potter books. Stories such as *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* and *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* told of talking animals, and were accompanied by exquisite

coloured illustrations. The stories were set in the Lake District in northern England. Squirrel Nutkin gave him a clear experience of beauty and what he later described as "the Idea of Autumn", which enchanted the young Lewis and connected with his growing sense of "sweet desire" or inconsolable longing, so important in his writings as an adult. Such an enchantment was also highlighted for him, and Warnie, by the outlook from their upstairs window in their house.

The site on which Little Lea was built had been chosen by Albert and Flora because of its view. The north side of the house looked down over fields to Belfast Lough, with the "long mountain line of the Antrim shore" beyond, while the south side faced the Holywood Hills, "greener, lower, and nearer" than the Antrim slopes. As the boys grew, they were able to walk and cycle around those Holywood Hills. Here Lewis's lifelong devotion to the countryside of County Down was shaped. From the hills one could see the expanse of Strangford Lough, gentle undulations of pasture land and woods, and, in the distance, the blue, majestic mountains of Mourne. Looking at these views afforded by the hills today, one seems to be looking southwards across Narnia to the mountains of Archenland in the dim distance, the Eastern Ocean to one's left.

Jack's new home was near to a suburb of Belfast called Dundonald, then a village. In later years, Warnie came across a description that evoked the view they loved. The description, in a novel by Agnes Romilly White called *Gape Row,* led him to think the place pictured was based around Dundonald: "Half-way up the hill they looked back and saw Slieve Donard peer over the shoulder of the Castlereagh Hills inquiringly, and at the summit, the long blue range of the Mourne Mountains huddled and linked together, came suddenly into view."[10]

The Lewis family was staunchly Church of Ireland (Anglican) and worshipped at nearby St Mark's, Dundela, where Lewis had been baptized as an infant, and Albert and Flora had married on 29 August 1894. Flora Lewis's father, Thomas Hamilton, was rector

of the church, and tears came easily to his eyes as he preached. He and his aristocratic, clever wife lived in a cat-ridden rectory, which was rank with the animals' stench. In contrast to her husband's views, Mary Hamilton happily employed Roman Catholic servants and supported Home Rule for Ireland. The doorknocker of the rectory was a lion's head, which the future maker of Narnia must have used many times. The traditional symbol of St Mark, Christ's apostle, after whom the church was named, is the lion. Through the services, the young Lewis became familiar with the liturgy of *The Book of Common Prayer* and *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

Jack had a number of uncles, aunts, and cousins living nearby. Flora had a sister and two brothers, one of whom, Augustus (known as Gussie), was a family favourite, as was his wife, Annie. Albert in turn had two sisters and three brothers, the nearest to his age being Richard, known as Dick. His father, Richard Lewis, lived with the family at Little Lea, having been widowed in 1903. In his youth, Jack, with Warnie, was gradually to develop a network of friends in the area, some of whom he kept in contact with throughout his life. But as children, they had no one nearby of their own age to befriend. Among his favourite relations was his mother's cousin and close friend, Mary, married to Sir William Quartus Ewart. Sir William was a wealthy Belfast linen manufacturer and one of the city's most prominent industrialists. The Ewarts represented the ideal of civilized life for the Lewis family. They lived in a large house called Glenmachan (called by C.S. Lewis Mountbracken in *Surprised by Joy*), less than a mile away from Little Lea, to which the brothers had an open invitation. The Ewarts' children were all much older than Warnie and Jack, but some still lived at home. Gundreda Ewart, ten years Jack's senior, was a favourite of his, and he later described her as "the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, perfect in shape and colour and voice and every movement", a view with which Warnie concurred.[11]

The frequent rain of Ireland's north was an important feature of Jack and Warnie's childhood. Parental wisdom of the time,

edged with the fear of tuberculosis, was to keep children indoors during showers. Warnie and Jack made good use of such rainy times, reading, drawing, and writing. During this happy period of his early life, Lewis, fluent with pen and paintbrush, began illustrating and writing a cycle of junior stories about "chivalrous mice and rabbits who rode out in complete mail to kill not giants but cats". These stories, he later observed, were his attempt to bring together his two foremost literary pleasures, which were "dressed animals" and knights in armour. In collaboration with Warnie, who was also writing stories that created a world, Jack developed the stories into an "Animal-land" with a considerable history, known generically as Boxen. In order to include Warnie in its creation and shaping, features of the modern world, such as trains and steamships, had to be built in.

Boxen's land of talking animals is strikingly different from the later Narnian Chronicles, being both full of a child's view of adult preoccupations and, in Lewis's words, "prosaic", lacking wonder rather than reflecting his emerging imaginative interests. In fact, in many features, the Boxen stories reflect the social history of early twentieth-century Belfast in its preoccupation with the issues of Home Rule versus Union with Britain and other adult concerns. Unlike *The Chronicles of Narnia*, therefore, the main focus is on this world, even though Boxen has talking animals.

Some of the dialogue reveals Jack's ear for the speech patterns around him, as in this extract from "The Sailor: A Study, Volume II" about events leading up to a railway strike.

> The foremost villain, who held a lamp, which revealed his fierce and bearded face, exclaimed, "Ah, have done with your talkin' an' pother! Come to something! Do you mean to strike or do you nut?"
>
> "We do," cried a chorus of hoarse voices.
>
> "Aye, an' its right ye are! In the old days, the raily men did what work they liked, & none more. Were they any better than we?"
>
> "No!" came the chorus.
>
> "No," repeated the speaker, refreshing himself from a heavy jug. "A thousan' times – No! An' we will nut do it, either. This new stashun master, has a wrong noshun. He takes his men fer beasts of the field! An' will we stan' it?"
>
> "No!" thundered the others.
>
> "Then strike! Let him know he cant do without us! Do we mind work?" – the chorus seemed disposed to return an affirmative but the orator continued – "No! But we mind tyrranny [sic]!!"[12]

At one stage the youthful author made a list of his writings:

> Building of the Promenade (a tale)
>
> Man Against Man (a novel)
>
> Town (an essay)
>
> Relief of Murry (a history)
>
> Bunny (a paper)
>
> Home Rule (an essay)
>
> My Life (a journal)

In 1905, at the age of nine, Warnie departed for Wynyard School in Watford, north of London, an event that deepened Jack's isolation from children his own age. Albert took a great deal of time deciding where to send his older son. An English boarding school was deemed socially superior to a local Irish one. After much deliberation, he chose a school that seemed to fit his criteria, but which in reality was in decline, its headmaster slowly descending into insanity.

Warnie said goodbye to Jack on 10 May, less than three weeks after the family's move into Little Lea. Thereafter they only had the school holidays in which to share each other's company, though they wrote to each other frequently, Warnie eager to learn

of Jack's latest activities, such as his explorations of the fascinating attic areas of the large new house. The boys had been given the "little end room", which gave them privacy and a haven of solitude, and which they would remember all their lives. In an early draft of his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis noted that the years he lived in the new house before his mother's illness were "very solitary", with Warnie away for most of the year. He added that he "loved solitude", but not after dark – an allusion to nightmares, perhaps, to which he was prone.[13]

In a jotting among his unpublished papers, Lewis reflects that he is unable to make up his mind whether his childhood was all but "supernaturally happy" or all but "supernaturally miserable", quoting William Wordsworth's line, "Heaven lay about me in my infancy" – but adding after it "and Hell".[14] The darkest moment in his life was to be the death of his mother, but there were many happy occasions before then. In the year following Warnie's exile to Wynyard School, 1906, a late part of the summer holiday was spent once again in Castlerock, on the north coast.

On 15 September, some weeks into the holiday, Flora wrote to Albert of a trip with Jack and Warnie to Dunluce Castle the day before.

> We went to Portrush again yesterday; they wanted to go to Dunluce and to the white rocks where there is a cave to be seen. We had a very nice day and they enjoyed it. The bridge you have to cross at Dunluce is quite a dangerous place without any climbing; it was there that Mr. Lanyon was killed. I did not like going over it at all, and I would not have taken the boys if I had remembered what it was like; however they were not nervous about it, so it was not so bad.

This excursion is notable because with subsequent visits remembered in adulthood, it is a likely source for Cair Paravel, the seat of kings and queens in Narnia that is found in ruins in *Prince Caspian*. The plausible source is not literal, but its setting

is imaginatively transformed in the Narnia tales. Dunluce Castle has well-preserved ruins, and is perched high on a cliff top by the Atlantic, with sandy beaches at the White Rocks not far distant between it and the resort of Portrush.

Nine years after the visit described by Flora, Jack recorded his memories in a letter to a Belfast friend, Arthur Greeves, who had written while staying in or near Portrush:

> I… certainly wish I could have been with you; I have some vague memories of the cliffs round there and of Dunluce Castle, and some memories which are not at all vague of the same coast a little further on at Castlerock where we used to go in the old days. Don't you love a windy day at a place like that? Waves make one kind of music on rocks and another on sand and I don't know which of the two I would rather have.[15]

Near the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* Lewis describes the Narnian castle in a way that particularly evokes Dunluce Castle.

> The castle of Cair Paravel on its little hill towered up above them; before them were the sands, with rocks and little pools of salt water, and seaweed, and the smell of the sea and long miles of bluish-green waves breaking for ever and ever on the beach. And oh, the cry of the sea-gulls! Have you heard it? Can you remember?[16]

Life for Jack continued in its happy but solitary way; Warnie's end of term returns from school were awaited with long anticipation. They could resume their activities, such as cycling in the hills nearby, or collaborating in creating more of the adventures of Boxen. There was a holiday in the seaside town of Berneval in northern France, to improve their French. At the end of 1907, Jack, who was reading far ahead of his years, attempted an account of his life.

In "My Life. By Jacks Lewis, 1907" the nine-year-old wrote:

> Papy of course is the master of the house, and a man in whom you can see strong Lewis features, bad temper, very sensible, nice wen not in a temper. Mamy is like most middle-aged ladys, stout, brown hair, spectaciles, kniting her chief industry etc., etc.

Jack adds that he is "like most boys of 9 and I am like Papy, bad temper, thick lips, thin and generaly weraing a jersy."[17]

He also recorded that he had told Maude (Scott), the housemaid, and Mat (Martha the cook) that he was a "home-ruler", that is, a supporter of independence from Britain.

Early in 1908, Flora's health suddenly began to cause great concern, requiring immediate medical advice. Albert Lewis noted in his pocket diary early in February, 1908: "[Drs] Campbell and Leslie, 1st. Consultation at Little Lea." On 11 February, Flora urgently wrote to Warnie, away at school in Watford, that she was to have an operation later that week, on the Friday. In fact, she underwent major cancer surgery at home under chloroform. Albert recorded: "Operation on Flora lasted from 10 till 12 o'c. Drs. Campbell, Leslie, and Fielden, a nurse. Horrible operation."

Despite the disruption of life, however, Jack's intellectual growth continued. In a tiny Letts's diary, he simply noted on 5 March that he had read *Paradise Lost* and made "reflections thereon". This is one of the greatest poems in English, an epic in twelve books by John Milton that daunts even sixth form pupils. Over the years, it was to be a major influence on Lewis, both in his future scholarship and fiction.

Flora's illness meant that Albert's father, Richard Lewis, was no longer able to stay at Little Lea, but was looked after by another relative. A little over a month later, on 24 March, Albert wrote in his diary: "My father had a stroke this night." Just over a week later, on 2 April, he died, five years after losing his wife, Martha. Albert's mother-in-law, Mary Hamilton, had been sitting with

him. Albert noted: "My father died at 1 o'c today, Mary and the nurse alone being present."

As part of her long convalescence, in late May Flora took Jack with her for a break in Larne, a harbour town north of Belfast Lough, close by Islandmagee. From the house at which they stayed, Flora noted reassuringly to Albert,

> Jacks has a great time watching the boats, there is a pair of opera glasses here that he looks out at them with.... Jacks and nurse were over on Island Magee today, I think Jacks thought the ferry the best part of the trip.[18]

The boy believed that his mother was doing well at Larne, but Warnie observed many years later, "... alas, it was only the final bright flame from the dying candle."[19]

Away at boarding school, Warnie frequently asked for news of his mother, sensing Albert's hesitation to upset him. In a letter in early June he asked his father: "From your letters you don't seem to think she is likely to live. Do tell me plainly next time you write." The last letter preserved from Flora was written to Warnie on 15 June. Composing it was a struggle.

> I am sorry not to have been able to write to you regularly this term, but I find I am really not well enough to do so. I have been feeling very poorly lately and writing tires me very much. But I must write today to wish you a happy birthday. (Warnie was thirteen on 16 June)

A few days later, Albert wrote painfully to Badge, as he called Warnie: "My dear son, it may be that God in His mercy has decided that you will have no person in the future to turn to but me."[20] It was sent on 24 June, from his solicitor's office at 83, Royal Avenue, Belfast. He also communicated with Wynyard School around this time.

In early July, Warnie returned home, before term ended, because of Flora's decline. All Albert, Warnie, and Jack could do now was

await the inevitable. In August, a few days before her death, she gave a Bible to each of her sons. Albert recorded some of Flora's last words in one of his notebooks:

> In the middle of the night of the 21st. August while at times she was wandering and at other times perfectly possessed, I spoke to her (not by any means for the first time – nor was it the first time by any means that a conversation on heavenly things had taken place between us – sometimes begun by her, sometimes by me), of the goodness of God. Like a flash she said, "What have we done for Him?" May I never forget that![21]

Two days later, on Sunday 23 August, she died. It was Albert's forty-fifth birthday. On his Shakespearean calendar for that date, the inscription ran: "Men must endure their going hence." Neither son forgot those words, and fifty-five years later Warnie was to have them written on his brother's gravestone.

Albert was soon hit by a further grief. Less than two weeks later he jotted in his diary, on 3 September: "Poor dear Joe died at 7 o'c this evg." Joseph was one of Albert's older brothers, born just a few years before him in 1856.

When his mother became seriously ill with cancer, Jack found it natural to pray for her recovery. Even after she died he fervently hoped for a miracle, but the corpse he was forced to view removed this hope. War was to confirm his view that the dead look more animal than human; that the ugliest man alive looks beautiful in comparison. In fact, that sight, and the subsequent funeral, fuelled his nightmares. The endless flowers, coffin, hearse, black dress, and other accoutrements of the rituals, he much later wrote, plentifully served to add furniture to his appalling dreams.[22]

Before that, the process of his mother's decline had filled him with fear, not eased by his father's uncontrolled emotions. Lewis's memories of this dark period are eloquently captured in Digory's story in *The Magician's Nephew*.

> Digory... went softly into his Mother's room. And there she lay, as he had seen her lie so many other times, propped up on the pillows, with a thin, pale face that would make you cry to look at it. Digory took the Apple of Life out of his pocket.... The brightness of the Apple threw strange lights on the ceiling.... And the smell of the Apple of Youth was as if there was a window in the room that opened on Heaven....
> "You will eat it, won't you? Please," said Digory.[23]

Albert Lewis did not realize that during Flora's decline, he was losing not only his wife but also his sons. In *Surprised by Joy,* Lewis observed:

> We were coming, my brother and I, to rely more and more exclusively on each other for all that made life bearable; to have confidence only in each other.... Everything that had made the house a home had failed us; everything except one another. We drew daily closer together (that was the good result) – two frightened urchins huddled for warmth in a bleak world.

With his mother's death, only sea and islands were left, he said; Atlantis had sunk. Nearly fifty years later, he wrote: "All settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life."

A mere four weeks after Flora died, Jack rode in a horse-drawn taxi with Warnie to Donegall Quay in Belfast to catch the night ferry over the rough Irish Sea to Fleetwood, in Lancashire. To Jack, England was a foreign country. They were on their way to Wynyard School, which Jack was to call a concentration camp and Belsen.