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Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born November 30, 1874, at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire. He was the elder of two sons of Randolph Churchill and his wife, the former Jennie Jerome. At the time of Winston's birth, Randolph was 25; Jennie was 20. The birth had been intended to take place at the couple's home in London, but a few days earlier while at Blenheim, Jennie had fallen--thus her confinement at Blenheim, the home of Randolph's parents

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– Lord Randolph Churchill, the 7th Duke of Marlborough and Frances Vane, a daughter of the 3rd Marquess of Londonderry.

The Churchills' aristocratic lineage traced to John Churchill, whom Queen Anne had made the first Duke of Marlborough in 1702 recognizing his distinguished career as statesman and soldier. An even older and equally potent strain in Winston's bloodline was that of the Spencers.* Indeed, fifteen generations earlier John Spencer had been knighted by Henry VIII.[1] As Churchill later wrote, "he had been born into one of the three or four hundred families which had for three or four hundred years guided the fortunes of the nation" [2]

Winston's mother Jennie was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1854. Her mother, Clarissa Wilcox, was believed to have had Native American roots from the Iroquois confederacy.[3] Jennie's father, from whom Winston got his middle name of Leonard, was a flamboyant and successful financier. Before the wedding, Randolph's parents had Jerome investigated and determined that he was "a vulgar kind of man," "a bad character," and "from the class of speculators."[4] (As a result, they did not attend the wedding.) That said, Leonard Jerome did found the American Jockey club, built a racetrack in the Bronx, for a time was a part owner of the New York Times and was a patron of the arts, particularly the opera. He had been enormously rich until he suffered massive reversals in the stock market crash of 1873. As a result, Jerome could only afford to give the newlyweds a stipend of £2000 per year ($315,000 in today's money) plus pay the rent on their house in London. This, along with the £1200 per year that Randolph's father contributed, should have been more than sufficient. However, Randolph and Jennie were notorious spendthrifts. As Winston would later recall, "We were not rich… I suppose we had about three thousand pounds per year and spent six thousand."[5] (In this regard,

[1] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 8
[2] *Companion Volumes* V /2 p.820 cited in Roberts p. 10 note 11
[3] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* pp. 15 – 16
[4] Letter to Lord Randolph from his father, August 31,1873 reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 19
[5] Birmingham University Archives, Avon papers 20/1/24

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the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. For most of his life Winston too lived on the financial edge. He may not always have had the money to do so, but he always lived like an aristocrat)

**The late Princess Diana (nee Diana Spencer) was a distant relative of Churchill's.*

Jennie and Randolph had been introduced at a British regatta in 1874 by the man who would become King Edward VII. Three days later, the couple agreed to marry. Lady Randolph, as she was known after the marriage, was an iconic figure among the English social elite; she was feted for her beauty, wit, and intelligence, and made little secret of her multiple love affairs. She did not play an active role as her sons' mother, both because those duties were expected to be handled by the nanny and because she much preferred the high life to the constraints of domestic responsibility. In Victorian England, upper-class parents rarely interacted with their children except when mother appeared for goodnight kisses. "Like popes granting audiences, they received the children at appointed times when the small ones, scrubbed and suitably dressed, presented themselves. The Churchills appeared to have omitted even those token meetings." [6] For all her beauty, charm, and social prowess, Jennie was no more cut out to be a parent than her promiscuity showed she was cut out to be a wife. As was the custom, when Winston was a month old the Churchills hired a nurse/ nannie – 43 year old, Elizabeth Anne Everest.[7] "Mrs." Everest who along the way Winston nicknamed "Woomy" and "Womany" would, during his youth, be the dearest figure in his life.* Indeed, her picture hung in his bedroom until he died.[8]

******Whether or not married, nannies, cooks, and housekeepers were called "Mrs."*

Nine months before Winston was born, his father had been elected to Parliament. Within six years he had become a leader of the Conservative Party. He championed "Tory Democracy," a concept originated by Disraeli, in which the traditionally patrician Conservative Party was urged to embrace positions designed to deal directly with the public welfare. He was also known

[6] Manchester, *Visions* p. 112
[7] Manchester, *Visions* p 111
[8] Manchester, *Visions* p 116

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for his eloquent and inspiring rhetorical ability, something which Winston both witnessed and inherited. Eminent Churchill biographer Andrew Roberts describes Randolph as "controversial, mercurial, opportunistic, politically ruthless, a brilliant speaker… and [someone who was] marked out as a future prime minister – as long as his inherent tendency to recklessness did not get the better of him."[9] As the next chapters will reveal, almost all of the above would also apply to Winston as well. He would also show a tremendous interest in social welfare.

In the time after Winston's birth, Jennie and Randolph were achieving great success in fashionable society. They had become members of a clique made up of the Prince of Wales and his friends.[10] But in 1876, Randolph earned the ire of the Prince when he appeared to be attempting to blackmail him as part of an ill-conceived effort to help his brother George out of a delicate situation.[11] Randolph asked Disraeli for advice as to how to untangle the mess. The Prime Minister said that the time had come for Randolph to leave London for a bit. To facilitate this, in January 1877, Disraeli appointed Randolph's father to be the Viceroy and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and urged Randolph to leave Parliament and serve as his father's unpaid secretary in Dublin.[12]

As a result of Randolph's "exile," from age 2 to 5 1/2 Churchill lived in Ireland. During that time he would have the first of the many serious incidents that marked his life. While he was riding a donkey in the park his nanny saw what she feared was an Irish Republican demonstration, and screamed. The donkey bolted. Four year old Winston was thrown off and suffered a concussion.[13]

The years in Ireland did little to improve Jennie and Randolph's parenting. Just as in England, there were "balls, theaters, dinner parties every evening, amusing friends to be made, and splendid steeple chasing, point-to-points and foxhunting."[14] Jennie became the darling of

[9] Roberts p. 8
[10] Manchester, *Visions* p.112
[11] See, Manchester, *Visions* pp.113-14
[12] Manchester, *Visions* p. 114
[13] Churchill, My *Early Life* pp.1-2
[14] Manchester, *Visions* pp. 115-16

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society and was the epitome of style – often wearing a diamond star in her hair. But things were different when it came to her child. Mrs. Everett, Winston's nanny, had to pester Jennie about getting Winston new clothes, saying that it was quite a disgrace how few things he had and how shabby they were. But shabby clothing was not the thing that troubled young Winston most. As he wrote years later, his mother and father "hunted continually on their large horses; and sometimes there were great scares because one or the other might not come back for many hours after they were expected." [15] Fearing abandonment, young Churchill cherished his relationship with Woomy. [16] As Winston's son would later observe, "the neglect and lack of interest in him shown by his parents were remarkable, even judged by the standards of the late Victorian and Edwardian days."[17] Apropos of this, Manchester makes several interesting observations about young Churchill:

- Even Woomy's unconditional devotion was not enough -- after all she was just a hired servant,
- Affection was something that had to be earned,
- While one might expect that he would be hostile toward his parents -- he wasn't. Not wanting to lose the little attention they showed him, he revered them,
- Instead, his parents' aloofness bred resentment of authority (particularly during his school years). [18]

A lesser person could not have withstood the emotional cruelty that Winston's parents showed him. His desire to succeed was huge.

Randolph's banishment ended in April 1880. Thus the Churchills returned to London. They came back just in time to see the Liberals regain control of the House and reinstall William

[15] Churchill, *A Roving Commission* p.4
[16] Manchester, *Visions* p. 116
[17] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.37
[18] Manchester, *Visions* pp. 117-18

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Gladstone as Prime Minister. Randolph soon ran for and was elected to the House where he fought against Gladstone's bill to give Ireland Home Rule. [19]

As for Winston, after returning to London, he had no playmates. He was a child who was either contemplative or constantly running and jumping with no concern at all about getting hurt. [20]

Churchill's oldest surviving letter was written when he was seven, most likely with help from Woomy. He had spent the holidays at his grandparents' home while his parents enjoyed Christmas elsewhere.[21] On January 4, 1882, he sent the following heartfelt letter to his heartless mother — "My dear Mamma, I hope you are well I thank you very much for the beautiful presents those Soldiers and Flags and Castle they are so nice it was so kind of you and dear Papa. I send you my love and a great many kisses. your loving Winston."[22]

The gift was very appropriate. Winston was exceedingly proud of his aristocratic heritage, and perhaps most notably of its military resume. His ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough, was an accomplished and admired warrior. As the leader of his own two-inch-high army of toy soldiers, Winston's imagination ran wild. One of Churchill's cousins later recalled that:

> His playroom contained from one end to the other a plank table on trestles, upon which were thousands of lead soldiers arranged for battle. He organized wars. The lead battalions were manoeuvered into action, peas and pebbles committed great casualties, forts were stormed, cavalry charged, bridges were destroyed.[23]

These battles were "played with an interest that was no ordinary child game." [24]

The gift of toy soldiers for which young Winston thanked his parents implies that his parents were being generous. But remember his parents had spent Christmas away from him. In

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[19] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.37
[20] Manchester, *Visions* p 121
[21]

[22] Gilbert, *A Life* p. 2 cited in Roberts p. 13 note 25_
[23] Sheridan, *Nuda Veritas* p. 14 cited in Roberts p. 13 note 26
[24] Brendon, *Churchill* p. 8 cited in Roberts p. 13 note 27

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today's society the persistent physical as well as emotional distance that Randolph and Jennie demonstrated would most likely be considered child abuse. In this regard, in diary entries spanning many months of 1882, Winston's mother documented having tea with one particular friend twice as often as she saw her seven-year-old son. [25]

Boarding School

St George School (1882-1884)

In 1882, Jennie and Randolph decided to send Winston to boarding school. Indicative of the Churchills' lack of attentiveness, it was five weeks into the fall term when Winston was enrolled at the St. George School near Ascot (about 25 miles west of London). St. George was a wretched place which young Churchill hated, although that was something he would never tell his parents.[26] One thread that runs through his heartbreaking correspondence home was that he desperately wanted visitors and constantly begged his parents to come visit.[27] But in the two years that he was at St George, they never came to see him once. Woomy and his brother Jack were his only visitors. Worse yet, the school was led by a sadistic Headmaster who wouldn't hesitate to lay up to "twenty strokes of birch on a boy's bare rump" for any infraction of the rules.[28] Because Churchill was rebellious, he was often beaten. A contemporary recalled that "[Churchill's] sojourn at the school [was] one long feud with authority." [29] As Winston's son, Randolph would write in Volume 1 of Churchill's official biography, "His pugnacious and rebellious nature never adapted itself to discipline."[30] (This could be said not just about his

[25] ed. Lough, *My Darling Winston: The Letters Between Winston Churchill and His Mother* 2018 NEED page NUMBER

[26] Manchester, *Visions* p. 124
[27] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.43
[28] Manchester, *Visions* p. 125
[29] Baring, *Puppet Show* p. 71
[30] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 43

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conduct as a child.) Examples of his naughtiness at St. George included taking sugar from the pantry and removing the Headmaster's straw hat from the hat rack and kicking it to pieces. Worse yet, his classmates did not seem to sympathize with him. [31] The two years of abuse that he suffered not only inflicted pain but also damaged his health.[32] When Winston could no longer take it, he fled home to Woomy Everest. When she saw the welts on his back and bottom she advised Jennie, who took him out of the school immediately.[33]

The Brunswick School (1884-1887)

In the fall if 1884, the 10-year- old Winston was enrolled in the Brunswick School, an institution run by two maiden sisters named Thompson in the seaside town of Brighton (located 47 miles due south of London). The new school was a marked improvement over St. George. But Churchill continued to be a discipline problem. In each of his first two terms he ranked near or at the bottom of his class in conduct. Much of this naughtiness seems to have stemmed from a yearning to "draw attention," something not common in children of the era.[34] Yet owing to some kind treatment and understanding from the Thomson sisters, after a time Winston began to respond and even began to enjoy school.[35] It was also about this time that he began reading every newspaper he could find.[36] With his father's career on the upswing, Lord Randolph was in the news all the time. Winston clipped stories and cartoons of his father and memorized his speeches.[37] ** Winston also started collecting stamps, autographs, and goldfish, and began to share the interests of the other boys.[38] While his parents never visited, teachers and relatives would take him on trips to see plays, and so forth. [39] As Manchester puts it, " Jennie had her

[31] Baring, *Puppet Show* p. 71
[32] Roberts p. 15
[33] Manchester, *V*isions p. 127
[34] Roberts p.14
[35] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 63
[36] Manchester, *V*isions p. 128
[37] Manchester, *V*isions p. 139
[38] Manchester, *Visions* p. 128
[3936] Manchester, *Visions* p. 128

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priorities to consider," and, while Winston "was not at the bottom of the list, he scarcely led it."[40] Jennie and Randolph did come to Brighton in the early spring of 1886 when Winston came down with a life-threatening case of double pneumonia (temperature 104 degrees) and propriety gave them no choice.[41] *** " [She] had been scared and was doubtlessly relieved when Winston recovered, but if gratitude meant changing her lifestyle, she wouldn't have it."[42] Put differently, " behind Lady Randolph's vivid beauty there lay an essentially selfish and frivolous character."[43]

*** Notwithstanding, what can charitably be called Lord Randolph's disinterest in his son, Winston idolized his father. and would do so forever.*

****Of course, Woomy was there, although Winston's doctor placed such a priority on quiet and sleep, that he feared the effect of Winston's excitement at seeing her. That said, she was barred from his sickroom for a time.*[44]

During his years at the Brunswick School, young Churchill constantly begged his mother to visit -- sometimes promising her "billions of kisses" if she would. But she never could find the time. When he had the lead role in a class production he asked her to come and see him perform, adding that "I shall be miserable if you don't." She didn't. Later, when he asked her to come down and see a production of the Mikado in which he was appearing, he wrote, "Please come, I've been disappointed so many times."[45] She still did not come and this was not the last time that she would disappoint him.

Sadly, Winston's relationship with his father was not as good as the one he had with his mother. Randolph – disliked him.[46] Indeed, one Sunday Randolph had an appointment in Brighton. Even though it was only a short walk from Winston's school, he didn't stop in to see his oldest child. When Winston found out, he wrote to his father saying, "I cannot think why you

[40] Manchester, *Visions* p. 134
[41] Vale and Scadding, 'Pneumonia" p.2
[42] Manchester, *Visions* p. 133
[43] James, *Failure* p.10
[44] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 71
[45] Manchester, *Visions* p. 134
[46] Manchester, *Visions* p. 135

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did not come to see me on Sunday while you were in Brighton, I was very disappointed…" He then added "but I suppose you were too busy to come." [47]

1885 and 1886 were busy years in Randolph's career. In June 1885, Liberal Gladstone resigned and a new minority Government was formed by Lord Salisbury, the leader of the Conservatives. Lord Randolph was appointed Secretary of State for India. This was done because of his political talents (and his ability to cause trouble) not for any Party loyalty he showed. * After a general election in December 1885, the Liberals achieved a plurality and Gladstone was reinstalled as the P.M. Another general election was held in July 1886. In it the Conservatives, who had entered into an electoral pact with the breakaway Unionist wing of the Liberal party, won a majority of seats in the House. Lord Randolph's eloquence was a key factor in the coalition's victory.[48]

` In recognition, in August 1886, Randolph was promoted to Chancellor of the Exchequer, [49] a position from which many prime ministers had ascended. Unfortunately, his term in office lasted only 5 months.

** As describe in ensuing chapters, Winston's capacity to be loyal, particularly to the party of which he was a member, would likewise be frequently found wanting. This would, however, change profoundly after the start of WWII in 1939.*

Used to being a critic of the opposition party, Randolph found the job at Treasury to be dreary and he started to take interest in the affairs of the other ministers. * In October 1886, without consulting Salisbury, Randolph delivered a speech to 14,000 people at Oakfield Park, demanding: more sovereignty for local governments in England; closer ties with Germany and Austria–Hungary; and stiff protests against Russian influence in the Balkans. Unfortunately, each of these positions clashed with the views of the Prime Minister.[50] Soon after, Randolph continued his insolent ways. He prepared an astonishing budget which proposed to reduce taxes and military spending (two ideas on which Gladstone and the opposition Liberals had run in the

[47] *Companion Volumes*, I /1 pp. 105,127,113 cited in Manchester Visions page 134 note 36
[48] See, Randolph Churchill, *Youth* pp. 65, 73
[49] Manchester, *Visions* p. 146
[50] Manchester, *Visions* p. 147

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recent elections.) [51] Lord Randolph was staging a coup "to take power from the Prime Minister Salisbury. When Salisbury rejected the budget, Randolph, thinking himself indispensable, submitted his resignation. Salisbury accepted it. [52] ** Moreover, not one cabinet minister raised any objection. During the remaining 8 years of his life, Lord Randolph never served in Government again. Despite Randolph's public humiliation, Winston still idolized him.[53]

**This was a trait the Winston would not only inherit but greatly expand on. Whenever he was in Government, Winston was simply incapable of keeping his nose out of the business of other Cabinet ministers.*

*** Young Winston learned never to resign from Government unless he was prepared to go into the wilderness or did so along with several other people capable of bring down the Government.*

During the summer of 1887, Randolph spoke with his sister's husband, Edward Marjoribanks, about a suitable public school for 12-year-old Winston. The Marjoribanks had just sent their son, who was slightly older than Winston, to Harrow, one of the greatest public schools in England. As an indication of the distance between young Winston and his family, he was unaware that Churchill boys (including his father) had, since 1722, all attended Eton (Harrow's archrival.) [54] Winston would break tradition. The decision to send Winston to Harrow was because it sits high on a hill near Wembley while Eton is near Windsor in the misty Thames valley. Doctors believed that Winston, with his propensity for lung problems, would not fare well in the climate at Eton.[55] * Although Winston studied for weeks before the Harrow entrance examination, when it was administered, he froze. Even so, he was accepted—after all, his father was the former Chancellor of the Exchequer. [56]

**Churchill was prone to bronchial infections his entire life.*

At Christmas in 1886 during his last year at the Brunswick School, Winston wrote his mother about coming home to celebrate the holidays with her and his father rather than staying at

[51] Manchester, *Visions* p. 147
[52] Manchester, *Visions* pp. 147-48
[53] Manchester, *Visions* p. 154
[54] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 93
[55] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 93
[56] Manchester, *Visions* p.151

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school. But before he could have known it, his parents were off on a seven-week holiday to Russia.[57] (The trip likely was a response to P.M. Salisbury's having accepted Randolph's resignation just before Christmas.) Winston would spend Christmas at his parents' house with his younger brother Jack, looked after by Woomy.[58] Unfortunately, during the holidays Woomy contracted diphtheria, a disease often fatal back then. His grandmother whisked the boys off to Blenhiem for the rest of their school vacation. On January 12, 1887, Winston wrote this to his mother that "[Woomany] is much better… My holidays have chopped about a good deal but… I do not wish to complain. It might have been so much worse if Woomany had died." [59]

Harrow (April 1888 – June 1892)

Winston entered Harrow in April, 1888.[60] He was 13. In time he would say that Harrow was the place where he "spent the unhappiest days of his life."[61] During his time at Harrow Winston's conduct remained problematic:

- He often talk back to the headmaster.
- He wasn't generous.
- He was not liked by his schoolmates. and
- He was bullied. [62]

Moreover, his parents still visited only rarely even though he continued to beg them to do so. [63] He was miserable most of the time. This no doubt affected Winston's academics. As his housemaster put it, "As far as ability goes he ought to be at the top of this form whereas he is at the bottom."[64]

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[57] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 94
[58] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 95
[59] *Companion Volumes*, I /1 p. 152 cited in Manchester visions, p. 131 note 30
[60] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.105
[61] Colville, p. 444
[62] Manchester, *Visions* p. 153
[63] See, *Companion Volumes*, I /1 p. 227 cited in Roberts p. 23 note 89___
[64] Letter of H.O.D Davidson , July 12,1888. reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.109

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One of Winston's contemporaries at Harrow later recalled that Churchill was often beaten because he broke almost every rule and constantly talked back to his teachers [65] * Roberts writes that nevertheless "Churchill was somewhat of a success at Harrow." [66] Churchill became accomplished in fencing, admired Napoleon, and relished learning about famous battles. He also took great interest in and derived great pleasure from the School Rifle Corps. Among other things, it was at Harrow that Churchill developed courage. He was willing to stand up to his teachers (and even correct them if they misquoted Shakespeare).[67] He also ignored the snobbish jeers of his schoolmates such as when he escorted Woomy around the campus. Churchill would not let anything or anyone hurt the only person that ever really showed him love.[68]

** Worse yet, while at Harrow. Winston suffered several illnesses and injuries -- toothaches, a concussion from a bike accident, severe fever, measles, and an incipient hernia.[69]*

During his time at Harrow written communication from his parents, which was poor to start with, seemed to get worse. Not only did he write four letters for every one he received from them, but their letters were almost always filled with remonstrations. For example, his mother wrote -- "Father is very angry with you for not acknowledging the gift of 5£ for a whole week, and then writing an offhand careless letter." [70] About school work -- "Your father and I are both more disappointed than we can say… Your work is an insult to your intelligence… I must say that you repay [your father's] kindness to you badly."[71]

In September 1889, 14-year-old Winston joined the Army Class at Harrow. There the boys took special lessons aimed at helping them get admitted to one of England's military academies. This involved extra work in the evenings and half holidays, which made it difficult for them to achieve a high class ranking. Winston was not all that good in mathematics. Thus, it

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[65] ed. Eades, *Contemporaries* p. 19
[66] Roberts p.20
[67] Roberts pp. 20,21
[68] Roberts p. 21
[69] Golland, *Not Winston* p.31
[70] Letter from Lady Randolph to Winston June 12,1890 reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 124
[71] Letter from Lady Randolph to Winston June 12,1890 reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.125

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was decided that he would not seek admission to Woolwich, the military academy for artillery and engineering officers. Rather, it was thought best for him to apply to The Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, which was for infantry and cavalry officers.[72]

In his last year at Harrow, (1891-92), when Winston was asked what he planned to do upon graduation he said, "The Army, of course, so long as there's fighting to be had. When that's over, I shall have a shot at politics." [73] He was elated that his father supported his desire for a military career. He believed that Lord Randolph "with his experience and flair had discerned in [him] the qualities of military genius."[74] (Sadly, several years later Winston learned that his father's support of an Army career stemmed from his belief that Winston lacked the cleverness to succeed in anything else.)

Later in that final year at Harrow, Winston's relationship with his parents went from bad to worse. Jennie was getting exasperated with the now 17- year- old Winston, who continued to do poorly, particularly in French. As Christmas approached, Jennie told him that he would spend the holiday in France working on the language at the house of one of Harrow's French masters, rather than at home.[75] Winston begged his mother not to do this, but she was unmoved and responded quite sternly. In his response, Winston upbraided her for being "so sarcastic to me since it is I not you will have to make the sacrifice… I am required to give up my holidays – not you… You were asked to give up a short part of the year to take me abroad – you promised – refused & I did not press the point… Please do have a little regard for my happiness."[76] She returned his next note without comment. When he wrote again and asked why, she wrote back: "I have only read one page of your letter and I send it back to you -- as its style does not please me… My dear you won't gain anything by taking this line." [77] In his reply, though still castigating his mother while seeking to secure her pity, Winston wrote:

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[72] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 121
[73] Gardiner, Prophets p. 235
[74] Churchill, *My Early Life* p.24 cited in Roberts p. 26 note 105 ok
[75] Manchester, Visions p. 171
[76] Letter of December 9,1891, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* pp. 154-55
[77] Letter of December 15, 1891, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 156

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> "Never would I have believed that you would have been so unkind. I am utterly miserable. That you should refuse to read my letter is most painful to me. There is nothing in it to give due grounds for rejecting it… Oh my Mummy! Next: I am more unhappy that I can possibly say… Darling, if you want me to do anything for you, especially so great a sacrifice don't be so cruel to Your loving son Winny. "[78]

In a follow-up two days later he added an apology--

> Don't let my silly letters make you angry. Let me at least think that you love me… Please write something kind to me. I'm very sorry if I have "riled" you before, I did only want to explain things from my point of view.[79]

Even so, none of this availed Winston in the least. Jennie was unmoved.

From France, he wrote his mother every day. Even though she'd promised to write three times a week, in his time in Versailles he'd received one letter and it was from Woomy. [80] Jennie was at the remote ancestral home of Lord and Lady Howe, and could not receive or send mail easily.[81] To add insult to injury, before Winston had left for France, Jennie had promised him that upon his return from Versailles, he could take a week off from school so that he would at least have some sort of a Christmas vacation. Lord Randolph would, however, have none of it. He believed that every moment that Winston spent in school was important particularly with the entrance examination to Sandhurst looming in June. [82]

The incidents described above notwithstanding, young Winston still idolized his father and adored his mother. In the first volume of his acclaimed autobiography written in 1930, Churchill explains that his mother Jennie "shone for me like the Evening Star. I loved her dearly"— but, he added, "at a distance."[83] Neither of his parents, was, however, equipped temperamentally to impart to their son a true sense of being loved and valued. Moreover, owing to Randolph's political career and Jennie's active social life they had no time for him. Some of this distancing may have been inherent in an aristocratic life, where child-rearing often was

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[78] Letter of December 16, 1891, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 156-57
[79] Letter of December 18, 1891, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 158
[80] See, Letter of December 27,1891, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 164
[81] Manchester, *Visions* p 173
[82] Manchester, *Visions* p 175
[83] Churchill, *My Early Life* p. 5

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delegated to hired help. His father was uniformly harsh in his assessment of his son's early capabilities and pessimistic about how successful his son might become as an adult; and he did not shield his sensitive son from these disdainful emotions. Winston's childhood friend F. E. Smith* wrote later in life that Winston's father "discerned nothing remarkable, nothing of singular promise in a very remarkable and original boy."[84]

**Later in life Smith became Lord Birkenhead.*

The Road to Sandhurst

Sixteen- year-old Winston was one of twelve (out of 29) Harrow candidates who passed all subjects on the November 1890 preliminary exam for Sandhurst.[85] To no one's surprise, Lord Randolph did not even congratulate his son on the achievement. Owing to this snub, Winston "temporarily lost interest in the military and even thought briefly about joining the clergy." [86] While he had breezed through the preliminary exam, he would not pass the main exam for admission to Sandhurst in **June 1892.** Nor did his second attempt in **November 1892** go well. Winston was by now tense, distraught, and admittedly depressed.[87] So, when Jennie's sister Lily offered the Churchills the run of her large estate in near Bournemouth for the winter (of '92-'93), they accepted. Winston, Jack, and Woomy spent the Christmas holidays there. During that stay, while playing a game with Jack and a 14-year-old cousin, to avoid being "captured" Winston would once again risk death when he jumped off a 30-foot-high footbridge hoping that the branches of the trees below him would slow his descent. They did not. When he hit the ground he suffered another concussion, a ruptured kidney, and a broken bone in his back. The doctors ordered him to stay in bed for 3 months. Problem — Winston's last chance to take the entrance exam for Sandhurst was looming in June 1893 and he had hired a tutor who specialized in the Sandhurst exam (a "crammer"). But, the doctors said that Winston should not return to hard study during his period of bed rest.[88] That was out of the question though. The cramming thus

[84] Quoted in Roberts p. 27
[85] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 129
[86] Manchester , *Visions* p.176
[87] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 178
[88] *Companion Volumes*, I /1p.365 cited in Manchester, Visions p 180 n. 110

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proceeded, but, Winston's casual manner and inattentiveness persisted.[89] This was due mainly to the fact that at the same time Lord Randolph was making what would be his final attempt at a political comeback.

Nonetheless, as the June exam date grew closer, Winston, knowing what was at stake, buckled down a bit. He still resisted doing all the lessons laid out by the crammer. Instead, he would spend much time, much to the crammer's dismay, reading English history for pleasure. (Of course, Churchill outscored all other candidates on the History portion of the exam.[90])

After the exam, Winston immediately set out on a hiking trip to Switzerland with his brother Jack, and J.D.G. Little, a young master at Eton. In Lucerne he learned that he passed the exam but not by much. Indeed, he had not scored high enough to become an infantry cadet as his father had wanted. Young Churchill had been admitted to the cavalry. Winston received congratulatory telegrams from his grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and the headmaster at Harrow but did not get one from his parents. Randolph had gotten his friend, the commander-in-chief of the Army, the Duke of Cambridge, to agree to find a place for Winston in the crack Sixtieth Rifles once Winston had been commissioned as an infantry officer. Now, not only would Randolph have to bear the costs of horses, but one day he would also have to go through the humiliation of telling the Duke that his son was too stupid to get into the infantry. Jennie sent a warning to Winston in which she said that "I'm glad of course that you have got into Sandhurst but Papa is not pleased at your getting in by the skin of your teeth and missing the infantry …. He is not as pleased by your exploits as you seem to be!" [91] A week later a blistering letter from Lord Randolph arrived. Winston was stunned and depressed by his father's words.[92] In a reply letter, young Churchill said that he was very sorry that he had displeased his father and that he would try to change the elder Churchill's opinion by his work and conduct at Sandhurst.

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[89] See, Randolph Churchill, *Youth* pp. 182,184
[90] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.186
[91] Letter of August 7,1893, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.191
[92] See Letter from J.D.G Little (Winston's and Jack's companion in Switzerland) to Lord Randolph, August 19,1893, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.192

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Winston ended the letter saying, "Thank you very much for writing to me. I'm very sorry indeed that I have done so badly." [93]

Winston almost didn't get the chance to prove himself at Sandhurst because of a boating incident later that summer at Lake Geneva. Winston and his brother had rented a boat and rowed it out about a mile. After they stopped to take a swim, a light breeze came up and started to blow the boat away from them. As Churchill wrote in *My Early Life,* "the rising wind… continued to carry the boat away from us at about the same speed we could swim…[and] [u]naided, we could never reach the shore." Swimming for his life, Winston finally caught up with the boat and rowed it back to pick up Jack.[94] Once again Winston had had escaped a close brush with death.

When Winston arrived back in London, there was a letter waiting for him from the military secretary. Several boys who had achieved higher scores than he had on the entry exam had dropped out and Winston could become an infantry cadet if he chose. He declined.

Sandhurst

Winston Churchill became a cavalry cadet at Sandhurst on **September 1, 1893.** At Sandhurst he was considered a Junior[95] and would graduate after three terms spread over 16 months. (At which time he ranked 92nd in a class of 102.) After a few weeks, he began to love military life. He enjoyed studying tactics, topography, military law, military administration, and fortifications and also took to horsemanship with relish and became accomplished. [96] He also became Sandhurst's second-best writer. No longer having to deal with subjects that he hated, such as Latin, French, and Mathematics, Winston was finally enjoying school. After the long dreadful years of being bullied and taunted, he was accepted at Sandhurst as a comrade and he rejoiced.[97] Only seven weeks into his son's tenure at Sandhurst, Lord Randolph wrote that

[93] Letter of August 14,1893, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.192
[94] Churchill, *My Early Life* p.34
[95] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.199
[96] Scott. *Churchill at the Gallop*, passim
[97] Farwell, *Kipling* p. 145

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"[Winston] has smartened up. He holds himself quite upright and he has got steadier… Sandhurst has done wonders for him…"[98] His father's view of him even improved to the point that he gave Winston a gold pocket watch. [99] But several months later, when Randolph learned that the gold watch had fallen out of Winston's tunic pocket and had been severely damaged, he reverted to form calling Winston stupid and telling him that his brother Jack was vastly his superior.[100] Ten days later Lord Randolph had calmed down and in a letter to Winston said, "You need not trouble any more about the watch. It is quite clear that the rough work of Sandhurst is not suitable for [such a fancy watch]"[101]

Throughout 1893 Randolph was having serious money problems. He and Jennie sold their house in London and moved in with his mother, Duchess Fanny, in her London mansion. With Winston at Sandhurst and Jack at Harrow, Woomy became a housekeeper for the Duchess. Unfortunately in short order the Duchess was forced to economize and fired Woomy Everest.[102] (Woomy was 62 and had been with the Churchills for almost 20 years, during which time she was able to save little.) Winston did not learn of her departure until 3 months after she was gone. When he wrote to his mother about the firing she said it was none of his business. He would not, however, let go of the matter, writing in response that "… if I allowed Everett to be cut adrift without protest in the manner which is proposed I should be extremely ungrateful … She is an old woman – who has been your devoted servant …At her age she is invited to find a new place and practically begin all over again… I am very sorry but I cannot bear to think of Everest not coming back much less being got rid of in such a manner. If you can arrange with the Duchess and persuade her to let Everest stay till after Christmas – I should feel extremely relieved."[103] Lord Randolph sent Woomy 17 pounds and after that she received other "presents" from time to

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[98] Letter dated October 24,1893 reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.206
[99] Manchester, *Visions* pp. 187-88
[100] Letter dated April 21,1894 From Lord Randolph to Winston reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.211
[101] Letter dated May 1,1894 reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.214
[102] *Companion Volumes* I/1 p. 419 cited in Manchester visions p. 190 note 130
[103] Letter dated October 29,1893 reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p.207

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time. But otherwise she had been "discarded like a shabby cradle."[104] She would continue to write to Winston and Jack and, despite her meager finances, she would also remember them with little gifts on their birthdays and Christmas.[105]

As Winston neared graduation he was selected as one of 15 seniors to compete for the school's annual riding prize. He would finish second. He wrote to tell his father, who by that time was so ill that he was in no condition to express pleasure or displeasure. Winston knew two things: first, anything to do with Winston's riding would reopen the subject of whether he would join the Sixtieth Rifles or enter the cavalry and second, he did not want to join the infantry. [106] Winston graduated from Sandhurst. in December 1894. He was 20th in his class.

Lord Randolph's Death; The Death of Woomy Everest

Just after Winston's birth, Lord Randolph started visiting doctors about an illness which over a twenty-year period would grow increasingly debilitating. Theories abound that Randolph was passing through the stages of secondary syphilis and then tertiary syphilis although that thesis has been questioned.[107]

In any event by 1892 Randolph's condition had worsened — paralysis had started to set in, and his speech had become slurred. Jennie, who was nursing her husband, wondered what to tell 17- year- old Winston and 12- year- old Jack. Because they rarely saw him, neither boy knew that Lord Randolph was seriously ill. [108] By 1894, Randolph entered the final stages of his disease. Still, in June, Jennie and Randolph left on a round-the-world tour which she told her sons was being taken on the doctors' recommendation that their father take a long sea cruise. Jennie and Randolph were accompanied on the trip by a young doctor, Dr. George Keith.

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[104] Manchester, *Visions* p. 191
[105] *Companion Volumes* I/1 pp. 424,425 cited in Manchester, visions p. 191 n. 131
[106] Manchester, *Visions* p. 201
[107] See John H Mather, M.D. "'Keeping the Memory Green and the Record Accurate' Leading Churchill Myths (6) ' Lord Randolph Churchill Died of Syphilis." Finest Hour No. 117 Winter 2002-03
[108] Manchester, *Visions* p. 203

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Unsurprisingly, the trip turned into a six-month ordeal. Winston had managed to get the doctors to tell him the true facts about his father's condition. He had never known how bad things were and he feared the toll that the situation might be having on his mother.[109] In India in late November, Dr. Keith ended the trip. Lord Randolph's condition had deteriorated greatly and the Churchills would return to London.[110] At that point, the doctors advised Winston that his father would soon be dead.[111]

After a month's journey, the Churchills reached London on Christmas Eve. Lord Randolph died a 30 days later, on January 24, 1895. He was 45. * Three days later a memorial service was held for him at Westminster Abbey. Churchill would say afterward that his father's passing left him prostrate with grief for a whole day and night. So began Winston's life-long effort to vindicate his father's memory.

** Winston Churchill died 70 years later to the day. He was 90 and had lived twice as long as his father did. Given that his father died young, Churchill had always believed that his life would be short and relied on that fact to explain "his own thrusting nature."*[112]

1895 was the year of funerals for Winston. After his father's death, Jennie's mother passed away just a few months later. Then he learned that his beloved Woomy, Elizabeth Everest, had been stricken with peritonitis, which can be serious even with today's anti-biotics. When her condition deteriorated, he hurried to her bedside and held her hand until she passed. He then organized the funeral, and paid for both the headstone and upkeep of the grave. He wrote his mother "I feel very low … and find that I never realized how much that poor old Woom was to me." [113]

Winston's Military Career

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[109] See letters from Winston to his mother dated November 2 and November 8, 1894, reprinted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth* pp.228,229
[110] Randolph Churchill, *Youth* p. 227
[111] Manchester, *Visions* p. 208
[112] Roberts p. 31
[113] Quoted in Manchester, *Visions* p.216

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Shortly after Randolph's death, Jennie, still young and beautiful, successfully negotiated Winston's release from any commitment to join the Sixtieth Rifles.[114] In mid-February he joined the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, a regiment that in 1854 had participated in the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War. Churchill loved every aspect of being an officer in the cavalry, including the horses, the distinctive uniforms, and even the drilling. But what he consciously sought was a war he could join.

Over the next four years he would serve in Cuba, India, the Sudan, and South Africa, with a brief interlude to run unsuccessfully for a seat in the House of Commons in June 1899.

Cuba

With his well-connected mother pulling strings, in 1895 Winston got his wish to be assigned to a region of conflict: the Cuban war of independence. In November 1895, financed in part by his mother and in part by becoming a war correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*, he landed in Cuba, where rebels were waging a guerilla war against Spain. Winston did come under fire, likely inadvertently, and in *My Early Life* he described the incident breathlessly:

> …(S)uddenly, close at hand, almost in our faces it seemed, a ragged volley rang out from the edge of the forest. The horse immediately behind me --not my horse—gave a bound. There was excitement and commotion. The bullet had struck the horse; …blood dripped on the ground, and there was a circle of dark red on his bright chestnut coat about a foot wide. He hung his head, but did not fall. Evidently however he was going to die…. I could not help reflecting that the bullet which had struck the chestnut had certainly passed within foot of my head. So at any rate I had been 'under fire.' That was something.[115]

"Something" good, it seems. Indeed, Churchill's experiences in Cuba did not dissuade him from later seeking to immerse himself in even more conflict-laden situations.

India

After Cuba, in the fall of 1896, he persuaded a senior commander to make sure he would be in a position to see action and he was sent to India. Churchill's social standing and political

[114] Manchester, *Visions* p.210
[115] Churchill, *My Early Life* p.84

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connections could have ensured that he would NOT be assigned any post that would have put him in harm's way, especially since Britain at that time was not actively engaged in warfare imperiling the Empire, let alone the Homeland. But he would have none of that. An added inducement for Churchill to seek out battle was his growing notoriety as war correspondent, something which proved to be an entirely separate means for him to link war with personal recognition.

While in India, Winston started writing dispatches for *The Daily Telegraph*, and he soon developed into a prolific and admired writer, -- one who would go on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953. Throughout his time in politics, this side career gave him the money he sorely needed, and provided him the exposure he craved with the British people.

Indicative of his continuing willingness to gain attention by risking his life, in 1897 he wrote his mother about a battle in which he'd participated in the northwest of India. Churchill said he "rode on my grey pony all along the skirmish line where everyone else was lying down in cover. Foolish perhaps, but I play for high stakes and given an audience there is nothing too daring or too noble. Without the gallery," he summed up, "things are different." [116] Almost immediately afterwards, Churchill began to turn exploits from the subcontinent into the first of his 43 book-length works (72 volumes), published over the next six decades of his life and, posthumously, another two decades later. The first six books, which included his only novel, were about war.

The Sudan

In the summer of 1898 Churchill again furiously pulled strings to be assigned to the Cairo headquarters of soon-to-be- famous Lord Kitchener. In the final days of August and the initial days of September, Kitchener's army, greatly outnumbered, engaged tens of thousands of Dervish warriors in furious fighting in the Sudan.

[116] Churchill Archives at Churchill College Cambridge ,Churchill's *Annual Register* 1874 p.94

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Churchill's feelings about confronting such a fearsome army? He was relieved his efforts were not fruitless. A little more than a year later, Churchill finished a two-volume memorialization, nearly a thousand pages long, on the Sudan conflict in which recounted the grim details of the campaign in riveting detail.

Churchill resigns his commission and runs for Parliament.

At the end of April 1899, Churchill resigned from the Army to pursue a political career. The Conservative Party was, and for some time had been, firmly allied with the Liberal Unionists led by Joseph Chamberlain* (The group that had left the Liberal Party in 1886 to oppose Gladstone's proposed legislation to give the Irish Home Rule.) There was hardly a more divisive issue in Parliament than Home Rule. Indeed, the Conservatives' opposition to Home Rule is what kept Tory Democrats like Lord Randolph and his son Winston members of the Party. In a letter to his mother in 1897, young Churchill revealed that: "Were it not for Home Rule—to which I will never consent [**] — I would enter Parliament as a Liberal." [117]

**The father of future Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his older half-brother Austen also powerful Conservative MP*

***In future years, Churchill would, however, agree to a form of Home Rule for Ireland.*

In June, Churchill accepted the invitation of the Oldham Conservative Association in Lancashire to run for Parliament from that district for the Conservatives/Unionists. Oldham had been represented by two Conservative MPs; one had retired and the other had passed away. Thus the need for the by-election to fill the empty seats. Churchill lost, finishing a close third in the election which was won by two Radical Liberals.

The loss, however, proves the point that things happen for a reason (even if one doesn't know what it is at the time) — had Churchill won a seat in Parliament, he would not have been

[117] Letter of April 5, 1897, from Winston to his mother, excerpted in Randolph Churchill, *Youth*, 305, 306

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able to go to South Africa to cover the Boer War a few months later where he would become a British hero.