On November 30, 1874, Winston Churchill was born in Blenheim Palace. Over the next twenty-five years, Churchill was involved in battles in India and Africa. He was a war correspondent and an officer for Britain. Churchill was a writer, historian, and artist and even won a Nobel Prize mainly for his work entitled *The Second World War*. Winston Churchill was a man with an 18th century mentality who went on to save 20th century Britain. From riding a bicycle through enemy territory to being ever excited about war and battle, this very peculiar man was preparing himself for a mission that many thought would be impossible... saving Britain. Understanding his first twenty-five years is the key to understanding Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill.

These first years shaped everything that we know of as Winston Churchill today. The way that he thought of nannies, his worldview, his personality as a whole was shaped by his childhood and early adult years. In order to delve into one of the most prolific and peculiar men in history one must go back to the beginning.

Randolph Churchill and Lady Jeannette Jerome met in Cowes in 1873. After an extremely short courtship, only three days, he proposed and Jeanette accepted. The Duke of Marlborough, Mr. Churchill’s father demanded that there be a probationary period. At this, Jeanette’s mother took her back to Paris. It was only after the young Churchill won an election in Woodstock that both families agreed to the marriage.¹

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Churchill’s maternal grandfather was an American, and his grandfather was the seventh Duke of Marlborough, thus young Winston was both an American and English citizen by birth. This could give some explanation to his personality. He was a man who was very set in tradition (his English ancestry) but was very much in the here and now (American ancestry).

As was the custom in Victorian England, young Winston was given to a nanny at one month old, no sooner or later. Young Mr. Churchill’s nanny was Mrs. Everest. Mrs. Everest would become Winston’s confidant, protector, and friend. He would tell “woom” (derived from an early attempt to say woman) all of his troubles and would remember her until his last days. Her picture hung by his beside until his dying day. She had so profound an impact on his life that, after reading Gibbon’s Autobiography, Churchill wrote: “When I read his reference to his old wet nurse: ‘If there be any, as I trust there are some, who rejoice that I live, to that dear and excellent woman their gratitude is due,’ I thought of Mrs. Everest; and it shall be her epitaph.” He also immortalized Woom in his book Savrola. Although it is not expressly stated, the hero’s nanny has many of the same characteristics of Everest. Anthony Storr said of a particular section in Savrola “Churchill is showing surprise at being loved, as if he had never felt he was entitled to it.”

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2 Carter, Intimate Portrait, 11.
3 Ibid., 12.
6 Ibid., 116-117.
7 Manchester, Last Lion, 117.
Churchill’s parents, like most Victorian parents loved their children from afar. Churchill’s parents, however, went to an even further extreme when it came to Winston. Most parents saw their children only when there was an “appointment”. Churchill’s parents rarely even made these appointments, as this would have cut into the time that they had for pleasure.\textsuperscript{8} Jennie Churchill wrote that: “We seemed to live in a world of gaieties and excitement. Many were the delightful balls I went to which…lasted till five o’clock in the morning.”\textsuperscript{9} At these balls, being a striking woman, several men noticed Jennie and commented on her countenance and her jewelry, noting that she wore diamonds in her hair. This is in stark contrast to poor Winston. Mrs. Everest begged of Jennie to get the boy some new clothes. She said that the things that he had were too few, and these few were awfully ragged.\textsuperscript{10} Mrs. Churchill wore diamonds while her son wore worn out garments. Lord Randolph and Lady Jeanette put their pleasure at the top of their priorities but rarely had time for anything resembling connection with Winston until Lord Randolph died.

Despite all of the negativity that he received from his parents, Winston idolized them for the simple fact that he prized what little attention was bestowed upon him by his oft neglectful parents.\textsuperscript{11} Winston himself claims that he saw his mother as a “fairy princess”, “a radiant being…of limitless riches and power.”\textsuperscript{12} He “loved her dearly- but at a distance”\textsuperscript{13} Churchill does not say much about his father, the few times he references him, he talks of how he wanted

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\textsuperscript{8} Manchester, \textit{Last Lion}, 112
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 118.
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to take over for his father in government, and also of how his father never treated him as an equal. He also writes that he had had only a few real conversations with his father.\textsuperscript{14} He tells the tale that the reason that he went to the army was because his father saw him playing with several of his toy soldiers in the nursery and asked his precocious son if he would like to be in the army, to which Winston quickly said yes. His father thought that Winston was too dumb to do anything but serve in the army.\textsuperscript{15} It is strange that in his own book, he devotes only half of a page to the death of his father; this was the man that Winston had come to idolize and idealize, yet when it came to Randolph’s death, Winston passed over it very casually.\textsuperscript{16}

His father’s death instills in Winston a feeling that he might die young. Several in his family had either died in infancy or around forty years old. Winston was also in bad health for a great number of his youthful days, just like his father had been. This fear of dying young prodded Winston on to defend his father’s memory and to prove himself according to Martin Gilbert.\textsuperscript{17}

At the age of seven, Winston started attending St. George’s (he calls it St. James). He spent two years here “learning” all of the things that young boy were supposed to learn at the time, such as Latin and Greek. The Headmaster at this school would often take boys into the

\textsuperscript{12}Winston Churchill, \textit{A Roving Commission; the Story of My Early Life} [New York: C. Scribner, 1939], 4.


\textsuperscript{14}Churchill, \textit{A Roving Commission}, 31.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 62.

\textsuperscript{17}Gilbert, \textit{Churchill}, 49.
library and beat them until they bled, during this time, the rest of the children sat and listened to the screams. This was a form of punishment and deterrent.  

It was only after Winston’s health deteriorated seriously that he was taken from this school. His doctor at the time practiced in Brighton so his family decided to enroll him in a school there so that he could be under constant care. Winston was much happier at this school, and he regained his health, not entirely undue to the fact the school was situated by a body of water. It was at this school that Winston began learning several things, chiefly French and Riding. It is only later that these two take shape as very important in his life. Riding is very important because Winston finds that he loves polo. Several times in his book he states that the day is very serious, then goes on to tell of a polo tournament of some sort. By learning French, he saved his own life. While in South Africa Winston had to ride a bicycle through unfriendly territory, he spoke few words to his companion in French that eased an armed Boer’s suspicions.  

Churchill then attended Harrow where he was introduced to the dreadful world of examinations. The headmaster accepted Winston’s Latin prose paper that consisted of the Roman numeral one in Italics (I) and a “blot and several smudges” after two hours of work. It was his “stupidity” here that turned out to be Winston’s greatest advantage. Because he was the last of all of the students in rank, he and the other “stupid” children were taught to write their own

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18 Gilbert, *Churchill*, 12.
19 Churchill, *Roving Commission*, 118, 120, 156, 207
20 Ibid., 347-348.
21 Ibid., 15.
language instead of Greek or Latin.\textsuperscript{22} The teacher was very good at teaching children like Winston; therefore the young man quickly learned the language that would help him become a prominent member of English society once he began publishing books. He attended Harrow for four years, the last three of which he spent in the army class.

After Harrow, Winston attended Sandhurst. It took three attempts to get into the school mostly because of Winston’s lack of knowledge of Latin. The three required tests to get into Sandhurst were in Math, Latin, and English. One could then choose two other subjects on which to be tested. Winston chose French and Chemistry. Of the five Winston was sure that he knew English and Chemistry well enough, but he needed proficiency in at least one other subject in order to get into the school. It was because of this that Winston decided to learn math in a brief six month period.\textsuperscript{23} Cramming and a little luck helped him gain the points that he needed to get into the school.

Once in Sandhurst, Churchill became engrossed in the drills. He loved the faux action of blowing up fake bridges and reconstructing them from wood, making maps, forming picket lines. According to William Manchester, it was like Churchill was back in his nursery playing with his tin soldiers with his brother.\textsuperscript{24} He graduated from Sandhurst eighth out of one hundred and fifty. He said himself that this showed that he could learn “…the things that mattered.”\textsuperscript{25}

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\textsuperscript{22} Churchill, \textit{Roving Commission}, 16-17. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Carter, \textit{Intimate Portrait}, 16. \\
\textsuperscript{24} Manchester, \textit{Last Lion}, 191-192. \\
\textsuperscript{25} Churchill, \textit{Roving Commission}, 59. 
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On January 24, 1895 Lord Randolph Churchill died. In June of 1894 Winston had visited his father to see Randolph off on a journey around the world. Churchill later said “I never saw him again, except as a swiftly-fading shadow.”

Mrs. Everest Died on July 3, 1895. Winston learned that she was sick from Mrs. Everest’s sister. He went to visit her, but she was only concerned about him and his wet socks. After the funeral, Winston wrote to his mother about how many people were there, he also bought a headstone for her grave. Historians think that at least some of his political work was not done for those who needed it but for Mrs. Everest. One example of this is the structure of pensions and insurance. Violet Carter wrote “Who can doubt that…it was not the anonymous, destitute millions but Mrs. Everest who was in his heart and mind?”

Several people who Winston knew very well died in 1895: his father, grandmother, and Mrs. Everest all had passed away. He wrote his mother commenting on the solace that he felt after leaving the funeral for Mrs. Everest and journeying to the grave of his father. Manchester states that the solace was from the links to his past being broken. Everything that happened in his childhood had pained him, save Woom, but had made him strong. Now he was ready to meet his challenges. Ms. Carter states that “He was now his own master.”

In March of 1895 Churchill joined the fourth Hussars, a cavalry brigade. He spoke of fear of there not being any more wars. The fear that he would not get to see the fun of fighting

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27 Ibid., 72.
29 Manchester, *Last Lion*, 216.
drove him to go to Cuba, a place where a real war was going on. He decided that he could see the action firsthand and get the taste of war that he had been wanting for so long. Thence he sailed for New York at the beginning of November. After staying a week in New York, he took a train to Florida, then a ship from Key West to Havana.31

When he got to Cuba, Winston received his wish. He was shot at several times; even stating that he had had enough close calls from bullets to satisfy him for a while. By staying close to Spanish General Valdez, he put himself in the most dangerous place that he could have as the General stood out in his white coat.32 Sometime during the early part of December, Winston left Havana for England.

In the spring of 1896, Winston sailed for India. It took him nearly a month to get there; therefore everyone on the ship was very excited to hear that they were in India. The officers got to get off the boat first and therefore Winston was one of the first off. After just a few days, Winston had already hired a dressing boy, a syce, and a butler. He was amazed at how hard these people worked at their positions and for how little. He stated that “Princes could live no better than we.”33

It was during the winter of 1896 that Winston began to crave education again. He found that he was using great many words without knowing their meanings. Terms such as “Ethics” and the “Socratic Method” had no meaning to him, but he wanted to learn. He remembered his father being angry that once Winston had not been able to answer a history question, then

31 Gilbert, Churchill, 58.
32 Ibid., 59.
33 Churchill, Roving Commission, 103.
Winston had not seen why it was such a big deal, but now he wanted to learn why. He started into intense studies of the Social Sciences, writing his mother to ask for books of this sort.\textsuperscript{34}

It was only during this time of intense study that Winston began to become envious of those who had been in the upper classes and had had the opportunity to learn all of the things that he was just now getting the chance to pore over.\textsuperscript{35}

In May of 1897 Churchill sailed for Italy. He stayed there a fortnight doing mostly tourist things. The thing that he wanted to do the most was to see Rome. He had read Gibbon’s work on Rome and wanted very much to see the city himself.\textsuperscript{36}

In September of the same year, Winston read of a new revolt going on in India. With this news, he went hastily to India. He joined with Sir Bindon Blood. He had only five days in which to completely prepare himself for battle and therefore received several articles of clothing from comrades who had recently been slain. On September 16, he saw his first real action as an officer in the Mamund Valley.\textsuperscript{37}

In the winter of 1897, Winston wrote his first book: \textit{The Story of the Malakand Field Force}. Rather than wait two months for the book to be edited in India, Winston asked an uncle, who was also a writer, to edit it for him. The Uncle did not do very well at this task as several sections had misprints or jumbled punctuation. Even with all of the errors, the book was a smashing success. Interspersed with the snickers about the misprints, Winston received praise

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\item \textsuperscript{34} Churchill, \textit{Roving Commission}, 109-111.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 113.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 121.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 122-132.
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from several different newspapers. Here was a man who, all his life, had been referred to by negative adjectives from schooldays till the present receiving resounding praise for a piece of work that he himself had made. Churchill even received a letter from the Prince of Wales congratulating Winston on his work.\textsuperscript{38}

Very soon after the fighting stopped in India, there were war clouds over the Sudan. Winston, always wanting to be in the action, immediately signed up to fight in Africa. He found himself blocked out of joining by the Sirdar of the Egyptian Army, Sir Herbert Kitchener. Kitchener repeatedly told Churchill, through various means, that he had enough officers. It was at this time that Lord Salisbury, then the Prime Minister asked Winston for a meeting to discuss parts of \textit{The Story of the Malakand Field}. After speaking at some length with the Prime Minister, he left with the offer of any kind of help that he would need being available to him. Winston naturally asked if Lord Salisbury could somehow get Churchill into duty in Africa, and was told that the Prime minister would do what he could. Winston was shocked to hear that even Lord Salisbury could not get him into the Sudan.\textsuperscript{39}

It was only when the Adjutant-General Sir Evelyn Wood stepped in that Churchill got his commission. He was attached to the 21\textsuperscript{st} Lancers and was to leave for the Sudan at once. Winston also agreed to write for the \textit{Morning Post} for £ fifteen a column. One week later, Winston arrived in Cairo, Egypt.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38} Churchill, \textit{Roving Commission}, 154-156.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 166.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 167.
When Winston finally arrived in Egypt, he found that the troop that he was supposed to lead had instead been given over to another officer. The fact that it took him so long to get to Egypt, coupled with the questions of if he would even be able to go, caused this most fortunate change of plans. The man who took over, a Mr. Robert Grenfell, was killed when the troop was mauled on September 2, 1898. After the battle of Omduram was decisively won by the British, Mr. Kitchener almost immediately sent the expensive cavalry away.\(^\text{41}\)

While sailing down the Nile on the way home, Winston kept company with a Dick Molyneux. Molyneux had been cut with a sword just above his right wrist and the doctor onboard the ship thought it best that skin be placed over the wound as soon as possible. After trying to cut a strip of skin from one of the nurses, the doctor told Winston that the skin would be taken from his arm. Churchill had no choice but to agree and sat there as the doctor sawed a shilling-sized piece of skin from Winston and transferred it to Molyneux. Winston said later “I…keep the scar as a souvenir.

Winston planned out the year 1899. First, of course, he would “return to India and win the Polo Tournament.”\(^\text{42}\) (He did, in fact, do this, even with a bad shoulder.)\(^\text{43}\) He would then leave the army, write his new book, and look for an opportunity to enter Parliament.\(^\text{44}\)

His first attempt at running for Parliament ended with a defeat. He had run for a seat from Oldham, but made the mistake of going against the Clerical Doles Bill. The leader of the House of Commons, Mr. Balfour, said “I thought he was a young man of promise, but it appears


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 199.

\(^{43}\) Manchester, *Last Lion*, 287.

he is a young man of promises.” He was heavily criticized in several party papers, all of them saying, in effect, that they had been foolish to back such a young and inexperienced man.

When the Boer War broke out in October, Winston was offered the job of a lifetime, principal War Correspondent for the *Morning Post*. He was guaranteed £250 for four months with all expenses paid. More importantly, he would have full freedom of movement and opinion. He accepted the offer and boarded the first steamer headed for Africa on the eleventh of October.46

On November 15, Winston accepted an offer from Captain Haldane to ride in an armored train for the purpose of reconnaissance. It was this decision that would put Mr. Churchill in the position to soar in popularity. After the train had traveled fourteen miles or so, it was ambushed by the Boers. Churchill was only a journalist, with no commission to the army and therefore took no part in the intense fighting that occurred. He was helping the conductor free the train from the terrible jam that it was in when he left the engine truck and walked back to meet the infantry that was supposed to be walking alongside the engine truck, using it for cover. Here, two Boers approached and started shooting at him. While he was running away, a Boer on horseback (Later identified as General Louis Botha) captured Winston and made him a prisoner of war.47

Less than a month later, Winston made the move that launched his popularity to new heights. He was moved to Pretoria at the State Model School. Here he stayed with several other

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46 Ibid., 230.

officers. While they were there it became clear to them that an escape would be very simple as they were guarded by a force numbering half of the British officers. One day Winston jumped a small wall that surrounded the school, walked no less than five feet from a guard, and simply strolled out of the camp.\footnote{Churchill, \textit{Roving Commission}, 271-272.}

Churchill decided that he would sneak aboard a train just after it had left its station. He happened upon a train that was not a passenger train but a goods train, carrying coal sacks back to the colliery. He decided that he would need to leave this train before daybreak to avoid detection from the conductor or discovery during off-loading. He went to the back of the train and jumped rolling into a ditch, but not injuring himself.\footnote{Ibid., 274.}

After he had hid out for a day and waiting on a train most of the night, Winston began to walk, determined to gain at least some ground in his journey. It was with a stroke of luck that he came upon the one hospitable house for twenty miles, that of Mr. John Howard. Mr. Howard was very generous in his aid to Winston, even while knowing that he would be shot if these acts were found out.\footnote{Ibid., 282-283.}

A friend of Mr. Howard, Mr. Burgener, was going to freight out two or three trucks worth of wool. He offered to leave some space in the middle and allow Churchill to get in this space for the journey into friendly territory. Churchill was nervous, and eight days after his escape from the school, he boarded the train that was to take him from captivity. After he was settled, Churchill noticed that they had given him, among other things, a revolver, and several pieces of

\footnote{\textit{Roving Commission}, 271-272.}
\footnote{Ibid., 274.}
\footnote{Ibid., 282-283.}
food for his sixteen hour journey. Once he finally caught sight of Portuguese authorities, Winston was overcome with happiness he even “fired my revolver two or three times in the air as a feu de joie.”

Winston boarded a steamship bound for Durban the day that he had gotten off of the train. In Durban, he was received as a hero, and on December twenty-fourth he rejoined the army. He soon discovered that his quarters were only one hundred yards from the place where he had been captured.

As soon as he could, Winston asked to serve in one of the corps which was being gathered. He was allowed to join on the condition that he not get paid for his military services. There had been a great number of people who had complained of officers writing for papers at a time when they are supposed to be focused on fighting. One of the main people they attacked was none other than Winston Churchill for doing the two roles in India and the Sudan. The War Office had finally said that no soldier could be a reporter, and that no reporter could be a soldier. The fact that he was under contract with the Morning Post made Churchill ineligible to serve, but the decision to not pay him made this a moot point.

In his last military operations in Africa, Churchill served as an important link between Sir Hamilton and Lord Robert who were split by the enemy city of Johannesburg. A young Frenchman convinced Churchill that it would be very easy to ride through the city by bicycle, if only they were to wear plain clothes. This young man led Winston through the city himself.

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51 Churchill, Roving Commission, 289-293.
52 Ibid., 295.
53 Ibid., 297.
54 Churchill, Roving Commission, 304-305.
scare came when they had to push their bicycles up a steep street. While they were doing this, an armed Boer rode up alongside of them and stayed for “an uncommonly long time.” After this slightly alarming scene, Winston had no difficulty in delivering all of the information that Lord Robert wanted.

Winston returned to Oldham and was warmly received by both conservatives and liberals. It was here in Oldham that Winston ran for office for the second time. At twenty-six, Winston was elected to the House of Commons by a mere 230 votes. He wanted to take his seat during the early days of December, but he was obligated to speak in the U.S. and Canada. When he was done making speeches in the U.S. and Great Britain, Churchill had amassed almost £10,000.

In researching the topic of Churchill’s early years, one can see that his very extreme upbringing taught him that he was the cause of his parent’s negligence. It was as though Randolph and Jennie saw their children as a necessary evil. This is evident by the aforementioned reference to Jennie having diamond in her hair while Winston was in poor clothes. While he was in the school his parents rarely, if ever, visited. By being alone most of the time, Winston probably gained most of his independence which would get him in trouble at said schools.

His one mainstay was his unfailing friendship, for indeed this is what it was, with Mrs. Everest. She cared for his basic needs and protected him, but more than that, she was his friend. His deep love for this woman is shown by the many references to her in his own writing. The

55 Ibid., 347-348.
56 Ibid., 353-361.
social reforms that he made for those living in similar conditions to Mrs. Everest also received, unknowingly, proof of the undying respect.

His time at school was probably the worst in terms of showing Young Winston’s personal character. As brilliant as he was, he refused to do the things that did not interest him, and instead made a mockery of them. He was proud that no one had ever made him write a Latin phrase.

His time in the military in India prove to be more about relaxation than war. It is here that he begins to tell how much polo means to him. It is also here that he reads at his leisure four or five hours a day. He was living the good life and doing very little good, save for a single battle.

His time in Africa proved to be much more about why he was there. During these campaigns, one hardly ever reads of anything but his job as an officer and a news correspondent. This, for all intents and purposes, is where he grew up and proved to be the person that his father did not believe that Winston could be. It is here, in Africa where Sir Winston Spencer Churchill began the transformation into who he is known as today. Without his experiences of near death, Churchill might have been relegated to a life of mediocrity. These experiences thrust him into manhood and thence into his public career.

With this Churchill ended his first twenty-five years. He had seen many things and was headed for many greater things. He had gone from a nothing in school, where he was last in rank, to being a hero in Africa and England. The deaths of his father and Mrs. Everest had steeled his resolve to prove himself as a person. The deaths of his comrades during battle provided the excitement that would entrench his views on warfare. It cannot be argued then in

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any other way that Churchill’s first twenty-five years are the determining factor in this “Man of the Century.”

58 This refers to the fact that Winston Churchill was voted by the editors of Reader’s Digest the Man of the Century.
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