

A Lifetime

I have known that from time to time, one or the other of my five sons have said to their mother, 'Dad never tells us very much about himself or what he has done in his lifetime, mum' and when she has passed such a remark on to me I have in the past given it but little thought, mainly because I thought there was little to tell, and in telling, the story would not be glamorous, and may very well cost me something in prestige, for every son at one stage in his early life tends to think of his father being the world's hero, and to tell them I am just an ordinary human, full of fault, and with some badness, some weakness, and hopefully just a little good in me, might disillusion them, held me back.

Perhaps this was the coward in me, for I am proud of all my sons and their love for me and their pride in me is of inestimable value, and I wouldn't like to lose that.

However since those days, and now when only the youngest boy asks mum the same question, I realise that time is running short and if I say nothing of my life it will all be lost and be as though I was never here...

and I have made so much effort in my present sixty two years to get someplace from the moment I was here, that it does not seem right that it all should go out like a snuffed candle.

How does one start on an apparently colourless life story... where does one begin and what highlights should be chosen, what secrets should be hidden, what failures left unspoken... Suppose that in writing I feel that I am doing so in order that the experiences I have met along my life's path are recorded so that they might act as a guide to my sons... then perhaps I should just let my pen roam over the whole tapestry... they might find value therein and if so something will perhaps be accomplished... I WILL DO JUST THAT.

The Synopsis

Born January 1913 in a house behind a shop, No 11 Kensington, Liverpool I believe it was. Later the family, that is mum and dad, moved from Liverpool to live in the Rossendale valley at a place called Edenfield, and another place called Rawtenstall, and sometimes near to a place called Bacup... that was a little village called 'Touch in Tack'.

Dad was employed as an oil extractor, working for the firm of Bibby's and in a small plant that lay directly on the railway side between the small village of Edenfield and Rawtenstall. Doris was born 20th December 1915 and both of us grew up beyond the toddling stage in that cotton mill district.

It must have been shortly before the end or after the end of the 1914/18 war that my parents moved back to Liverpool only now they were disunited and whatever the quarrel was over it was sufficient for mother to seek and obtain a legal separation and we then went to live with Grandmother and Grandfather Prossor in 34 Kensington.

Later, when mother found life hard and it was possibly anything but peaceful in the Prossor household, Doris and I were put away into first the Belmont home (workhouse?) and later Doris was taken home again and I was sent to Fazakerley home for children.

Somewhere around that period, it may become clearer to me just when as I unfold my memory, I was sent to live with an 'Aunt' (probably a foster parent) living in Birmingham and later still I was sent to live with 'grandmother' Heys back in Rawtenstall, and then with Aunt Elizabeth (Lizzie) in Crawshawbooth.

My life during that time must surely have been unsettled and mother but a faint and aching memory... later I came back to Liverpool and lived with my dad and there followed a most harrowing time for my memory of those times is acute. I played in the streets of dockland and probably saw my first ships funnel above the warehouses and heard the sounds of the busy Mersey.

Later mother having married Len Cairns a lodger at 34 Kensington, we as a family knew more security and I was brought home at last to live together once more with mother and Doris.

Some years later probably tired of living in 'rooms' at my Grandparent Prossors house we moved to Reynold Road, Knotty Ash... I was now 12 years old and already mother was wondering what should happen to me for boys left school at 14 years of age and mother had more ambition than I had brains and it was with despair that she tried to encourage me to 'make' something of my life... something better than that of my father who was now dead.

I was placed aboard the training ship INDEFATIGABLE anchored in the Mersey at Rock Ferry and I spent two and a half years in that useless purgatory in sheer misery and learned nothing, or so I thought!

March 1929 I joined a ship called the ASTRONOMER of T&J Harrisons Liverpool and so started my sea career.

1935 saw me ashore, defeated after the Depression and learning to become a ladies hairdresser... 1936, I was back at sea... In that time I had had my first love affairs... Doris Atkin... Nancy Orme... and at last Rita Margaret Unwin.

We were married and Frank was born 1939. By this time I was quarrelling seriously with mother and this went on during the best part of the war years.

Leslie was born... Eric was born... we lived in Harwich... David was born.

We bought our first house 542 Main Road. William was born and Rita became very seriously ill with cancer of the womb.

I can now move back for you all know the rest of the story, and I will try to fill in with more detail... I will go back as far as I can remember... and that is to the oil extracting plant near Edenfield and the railway tunnel where they stowed empty and part-empty paint drums.

How far back can ones memory go, and how reliable can it be?

The pictures formed in memory of ones childhood are not necessarily correct ones and may very well be ones that were conjured up at the time that were favourable to oneself, they could be factual, or fantasy, or even downright lies, but however they became imprinted on the mind at the time, and went into the 'computer bank' so they remain.

I now know this to be true and know that in my childhood I told some whopper stories, some harmless, some which caused strife amongst my relations, the elders. This was when it paid off for myself to say the things I did and in a child's mind one cannot see the implications.

My first recollection of childhood is of living in the village of 'Touch in Tack' a small group of houses somewhere on the road from Edenfield towards Accrington and Haslingden. The houses grouped around a farm holding and were approached from the road by an unmade lane which ran through the farmyard to the cottages beyond.

I was with mother and as Doris is not in my recollection one must assume I was but a mere toddler aged about eighteen months or even two years. Perhaps mother was at that time 'carrying' Doris, and this would explain why in my mind she appeared tired and walked slowly up the incline towards the farmyard and the 'two bar stile' which led to the first house in the 'village group' beyond the farm. She was holding my hand and dragging me along... I was tired and was crying... there were some hens in our way to the stile... perhaps mother was frightened of hens... perhaps this was because of her 'condition' anyway she slowed down upon approaching them and a large cock, feathers all a bristling came running at us with head down making a furious noise... to me it seemed like it was a bird ten foot high and with a beak all red and twenty feet long. Mother cried out and grabbed me to her and I can remember to this day the protection afforded by her long black skirts... she scooped up handfuls of dirt from the pathway and hurled it at the bird, then it was close and she was beating it with her hands... its claws were digging into my back and its beak hammered on my unprotected head... and I was aware of blood for the first time as it flowed freely from a gash the bird had succeeded in making above my left eye.

I recall a man shouting... probably the farmer aroused by the screams mother was letting out, coupled with my own yelling and the cocks victorious cackling.

We were taken into the farm and I was given some fresh cows milk... it was lovely.

I have the little scar above my left eye now at the age of sixty two.

Perhaps you wonder why that incident is spoken of, for it is of no importance... but then what is important?

To a little child being attacked by a bird is important... fairy stories about hens, cocks, sheep, lambs, cuddly teddy bears etc. suddenly take on a new look... these things can now bite and that isn't a pleasant thought to any youngster... and of course it is an important point that is at once fed into the human computer, the brain, and there it remains for all time.

Remembering that point also fixes the date approximately for Doris was not yet born and so that date must have been summer 1915 and there was a war being fought.

I have often wondered why dad was not in any fighting unit... I never did find out.

That he eventually died of acute lung trouble... consumption as it was known as, might very well have been the reason for deferment.

At this time he was employed by the Liverpool firm of Bibby's... they made fatty substances such as margarine from the oil extract of ground nuts, another commodity was cattle cake, it had a most unpleasant smell and that smell pervaded the whole of the little red brick building which housed the oil extraction plant down by the railway line close east of the Edenfield railway station.

I was often taken there by dad and would spend hours gazing out of a large window that overlooked the railway line and watch with fascination the 2.4.0 steam engine with the large smoky funnel pouring out black smoke and white steam as it pulled its three rickety coaches into the station beyond the factory.

Nearby there was also what I know now to be a sewerage 'farm' and I would toddle over to the high wall that surrounded the plant and watch the huge sprinkler arms rotating in the circular pads spraying water.

I do not remember much about our circumstances in those days, not in the days when later together with Doris I went to school near Rawtenstall. I recall we had a very long walk... but then all walks in childhood

were 'long walks'. When one re-visits the scene ones idea of distance seems to have shrunk.

I do not even recall the school at all and could never locate it again when years later I went back to look over the scene. I was never able to locate with any accuracy the village of Touch in Tack, but I was told that it had existed and was in actual fact a group of 'tied houses' belonging to the farm and that the rents were very cheap. This seems to indicate that we were not very well off and that dad's wages must have been minimal.

I best recall a low bridge over which ran the railway line as it left Edenfield and meandered towards Ramsbottom. There were a lot of empty paint drums stowed under that bridge, possibly belonging to the railway and of course these interested me, and I can recall that one Sunday dressed in my best bib and tucker and with Doris we made a thorough investigation of those paint drums and they spilled their contents all over us.

This incident is remembered because I recall it was my first tanned behind... these grew more frequent as I grew older and dad had a hefty 'south paw' and could wield his belt with some effect. I recall being blamed for smoking... some neighbour had seen me with another boy from school imbibing and without any questions dad assuming my guilt promptly burned my hand with a glowing cigarette and then belted my behind and sent me to bed for the weekend.

Doris was an accomplished liar in her babyhood and all she got up to was blamed on me. For instance, Doris couldn't walk let alone climb at her tender age of three and when cakes stowed on the top shelf in the high kitchen cupboard were wanted to disappear it couldn't possibly be Doris... and so another tanned behind for William... until a neighbour hearing my screams during one such administration told dad that Doris was the culprit and that she could not only walk but could climb too and that she used to bring the cakes and sweets she had stolen from the cupboard to share with her friend next door. I got another tanned behind for good measure for not looking after Doris... she might well have broken her neck I was told and it was up to me to look after her.

I think I can recall the moment that we all left the valley and returned to Liverpool. I can remember walking down to the station at Ramsbottom with mother and dad and Doris. We were thrilled because we were going for a train ride. What I think happened that moment was that dad and mother were going back to Liverpool for a holiday and I do not think mother ever returned to the valley again.

I can recall a long, long walk back from Liverpool to Rawtenstall... it took days and days... and when later in life I asked questions about that walk I was told that dad out of work had decided to return to the valley in search of work back at the oil plant.

Mother would not come and she kept Doris at home with her mother (Grandma Prossor) at 34 Kensington and dad took me with him. I am told we took a tram from Low Hill to Prescott and walked to the terminus of the St Helens tramway and hence some fifty miles back to Rawtenstall riding on trams from terminus to terminus and walking in between terminus's to the outskirts of the next town and its tramway.

I can only recall the misery of sore and tired feet and of dad vague these many years in my memory coaxing me on and on sometimes carrying me sometimes showing impatience and dragging me along. The date for this is fixed for near the end of the long journey we got caught up in an air raid by Zeppelin. It was somewhere between Bury and Bacup and we had to run along a road... dad carried me and we went into a hedge and lay in the field in the wet grass. I can recall the loud noises from the Zeppelin and of seeing thousands of bits of paper come fluttering down from the sky... long ribbons of paper... later on a tram came along and we got on it... it was in darkness because of the presence of enemy aircraft... and when we got off that tram dad took me down a lane to a little house and Auntie Lizzie was there and she sat me at the table using two square biscuit tins instead of a chair. Lizzie was dad's sister and she worked in a cotton mill near Ramsbottom.

That night I slept in bed for the first time in a long time. I can recall the oh so comfortable feeling even now. I do not know who else was in that bed for I was made to sleep at the bottom and I can recall loud snores... and a ticking clock... and candlelight and a smell of camphorated oil.

The date was 1917 and it must have been just after the winter for I recall that when walking along the road just prior to hearing the roar of the approaching Zeppelin and seeing the streams of paper dropping, it was daylight and it was dark before we got up out of the grass behind the hedge and stood waiting for the approaching and darkened tram coming down the hillside. Was it all a dream? I used to think that perhaps it was and so later on I asked about the incident and I was told that indeed a Zeppelin had made a raid on the valley early 1917 and although no bombs were dropped the Germans had scattered leaflets over the countryside which informed us of some very heavy defeat suffered by the allies that spring.

The Zeppelin was brought down eastward of Burnley. I do not recall much of that war for I was only seven years old when it ended, but I do recall dad reading newspapers and seeing in them some map inserts which no doubt outlined the Western Front as it was from day to day.

Aunty Lizzie was 'going' out with a soldier who had been wounded and his name was Uncle Walter. He showed me how to make beads from tightly rolled Woodbine packets. These packets which held five cigarettes were of paper and one cut them open and rolled them tightly from the corner after inserting a needle through the centre. A thin layer of Gloy ensured the rolled paper stuck fast. When the needle was withdrawn, it left a hole down the middle of the bend through which the cotton was threaded thus with several of the rolled Woodbine packages one could make a string of coloured beads. Aunty Lizzie wore such a string of beads. She smoked and sometimes her breath smelt of tobacco. Her face was yellowish and she had coarse lips. I recall that mother was much prettier than Aunty Lizzie. Lizzie was kind to me sometimes, sometimes however she would shout at me and I never understood why for it hurt to have her angry for she was the only woman on my horizon just then for apart from her and dad and Walter and some American soldiers from a nearby hospital no other women were near me or spoke to me.

Dad had an awful cough and when he took some medicine from a very small bottle it smelled very strong though not unpleasant.

I cannot remember the actual ending of the war, which is I suppose only natural when I was too young to be really affected by it, but I think that period was one of general upheaval in our lives, I think it was a period when a more vital war was being waged in my own domestic world, a war between mother and dad. I did not know dad very well and memory of him is very vague. I think he was a strict person, but in this theory I am only guided by the incident of the treatment I received when I was accused of smoking and he burned the palm of my hand with a cigarette end, to emphasise a lesson.

I cannot ever associate him with raising his voice in anger, neither can I remember any domestic quarrels between mother and he. But such quarrels no doubt took place and they were of a serious nature and eventually they led to final parting and legal separation.

My picture of him is therefore of a very mild man, slow to anger, and not a very intelligent person. I would say that mother was the strongest of the two and was most certainly better mentally than he was, no doubt she had been given the benefit of better education for the Prossors family had money and could be considered better able to afford such a luxury.

Dad's family were miserably poor and no doubt his education suffered as a result. Perhaps this difference was such that brought about animosity between the 'son in law' and the better off daughter and Prossor interference with the marriage, for I feel that the Prossors exercised a superior attitude to the Bramhills and they were perhaps angry that the match was never affected.

This is only surmise however and no evidence remains to disprove the theory. Much evidence remains however to support it if only it was our intermittent journeys between Liverpool and Rawtenstall during the war years, for when in Liverpool we lived at 34 Kensington with the Prossors and this no doubt brought about friction.

I can recall comfort in Liverpool when at 34 Kensington and only sheer poverty when back in the valley of Rossendale and on our own. I suppose it was a period when in addition to rations and shortages brought about by war, dad was not equipped for a more remunerative job other than that of labourer. He called himself an 'Oil Extractor'. (This appears on the marriage certificate and on my baptism certificate), but I do not think it meant much and was a title more from pride and usefulness and reward.

I think however that dad did try hard to make a go of it and he did manage to provide a home for us albeit a poor one and I cannot recall that we starved. I feel perhaps he was conscious of his poor background and was fighting hard to rise above it.

Perhaps the Prossors did not give him a fair chance and their interference bred discontent between the two, hence the constant shuffling about between Liverpool and the valley, perhaps each shift marked by conflict. I can never recall dad working in Liverpool and perhaps the eventual shift back to the valley was a gesture of pride on dad's part, he no longer wanting to remain at 34 Kensington, beholden to the Prossors and he would return to work once more in the valley and thus win back some self respect... what was it that brought about that long walking journey from Liverpool to the valley... was it a return to an environment that brought dad the only content he knew... a return to work he knew and a return to pride and self respect?

Obviously to travel like we did money must have been woefully scarce. That mother and Doris went by train seems to indicate her journey was financed by the Prossors and that dad refused to accept this for himself. That journey stands out as a salient feature in my young life... the St Helens tram at the terminus as that also of the Wigan tramway looms large in my mind.

I would have loved to have known dad better... and I often even at the age of sixty... feel a sadness that I never knew him and that memory of him is but the vaguest shadow.

If we can find out the time when the song 'Bells of St Mary' was top of the pops, then that date will mark

the period when dad and mother came home finally to Liverpool and set up home in a flat in Boundary Street near the Rotunda Theatre. The flat was over a dentists and I can vividly recall the evening we went into it for the first time and dad and mother were busy getting the place to rights.

Dad was placing lino on the stair landing and we must have been very happy for we all were singing that song. I must have been very small, for I recall standing looking down the stairs through the banister rails at mother nailing some carpet to the stair treads.

Whenever I hear that poignant tune... I recall feeling happy myself at that moment, and I think it was because it marked a period when both parents knew some joy together and perhaps it was a silver lining to some very dark clouds that had hung over the relationship.

I went to school from there... it was a school at the top of a hill... dirty and nightmarish, being in my imagination peopled by uncouth bullies who forever came at me and ragged me for my 'Lancashire' accent. I hated their uncouth Liverpool dialect.

I must have been a difficult child in the early days going to that school. I hated it, and can recall very vividly mother literally dragging me along up the hill to the school gates, and once dad took me to school and thrashed me as we walked along because I was protesting about going. I never did find out what school that was.

All I can recall of that period now is having a toy, which consisted of a piece of tubular tin about three inches long which was attached to a string and one had to whirl this around and it produced a high pitched whistling noise. I recall too that mother had the task of keeping the dentists room clean... perhaps part of the payment for occupying the flat above... houses must have been scarce even in those days.

Mother used to get me to take the dentists bin down to the small backyard toilet and I had to empty the bins bloody contents down the pan... I can recall watching the red swabs and teeth falling into the pan and my having to stand on the toilet seat to pull the chain to flush away the horrid mess.

Another horrid mess was to develop at this stage, and I never really knew what it was about, but it resulted in the final break up of the marriage between mum and dad and of the period I can recall being on a tramcar with mother going along Scotland Road and alighting at the Rotunda Theatre and walking along Boundary Street to the flat.

When we went in we found all the furniture gone... the windows without curtains... mother sat on the bare windowsill and was crying... I was running about the empty room and she shouted at me for making a noise.

We left the flat and walked back to the tram stop and rode back into town and mother put me on a No.10 car telling the conductor to put me off at Low Hill, Kensington. She was then working in an office near the Shipping Office in Canning Place and when she left me this is where she was going.

I must have got home to 34 Kensington alright but it must have taken me a long time for when I got into the house Grandma Prossor was in a right state, wringing her hands and crying, and grandfather was trying to comfort her.

They asked me where mother had left me, and how did I get back home by myself... I told them mother had put me on the tramcar in charge of the conductor, who had forgotten me and must have put me off the tram some distance from home hence my being late in for I can recall it was a long walk from the tram stop to 34 Kensington.

Uncle Charlie was putting on his overcoat and he hurried out of the house into a taxi. Taxis were complete luxuries in those days and only an emergency warranted their being used. It turned out that it was indeed an emergency for the police had informed my grandparents that mother was in the Royal Infirmary... she had taken ill at work I was told... I learned in after years that she had gone to the little office in Canning Place after she had left me on the tramcar and she had made an attempt to take her own life by trying to cut her throat. One can imagine the horror that such news wrought at 34 Kensington and why there was such a fuss going on when I arrived home.

Mother was in hospital I believe for several days and possibly the police were very much in evidence but I cannot recall seeing them or any of the disturbance that must have resulted after such shock news.

That event was to mark the beginning of a nightmare experience for me for after it was over I was sent to live with dad in a mean little street off Vauxhall Road... a street that is indelible in my mind... No 22 Midghall Street... terraced houses... two up and two down.

On one side of that street were huge warehouses that towered above the mean houses. I used to sit in the one room window and watch bags of sugar being hoisted from horse drawn drays and swung into lofts high above the house rooftops. A sickly smell of molasses and hides permeated the atmosphere... the sun never reached the house windows because of the frowning warehouses towering above them.

In the house lived Uncle Alf, Uncle Tom, Auntie Lizzie and of course my dad. There must have been precious little money available for there was never anything much to eat. What meals I did have were

served at an ugly wooden table and sometimes Aunt Lizzie would put newspapers on it to act as a tablecloth... invariably it was without even this adornment... I recall the table was always covered with flies and two big sticky fly catchers hung above the table... sometimes dead flies dropped off the sticky mess on to the table and I would push them down the cracks in the boards with my knife.

If the nightmare of that mean little room made a lasting impression upon me it was nothing to the nightmare of the little bedroom I shared with Uncle Alf. He was a dirty yellow faced mean character... he smelled all the time... his clothes were always dirty... he never wore a collar... his best adornment was a tatty old scarf which he always had wrapped around his neck and tied in a typical Liverpool overhand knot and on his head, a greasy old cap.

I had to sleep with him in a single bed in the smallest of the two bedrooms. The bed was placed against the wall and it was next to this wall that I was placed.

The wall stands out in my memory like nothing else in my whole life and I still shudder when I think of it, for behind the creases in the tatty wallpaper lived colonies of bugs and these filthy creatures would come crawling out and down the wall and on to the bed.

I would crush them with my hands trying to keep them away and they made a horrible mess on the wallpaper especially if they had just succeeded in biting me and were full of blood.

That stinking bedroom smelled of Uncle Alf, bugs and Keatings powder, the latter having been scattered liberally by Aunt Lizzie to keep the pests at bay, a task which it never managed to accomplish.

My body was covered in sores from the bug bites and my fruitless scratching. Aunt Lizzie would keep scolding me for scratching myself... Folk will think your lousy she would say... as though all who lived in that mean little street in those mean little houses well knew couldn't help but be true.

The toilet was outside in the dirty backyard which always smelled of foul sour refuse. I used to dread having to go downstairs at night time for the toilet for to do so I had to pass through a dirty ill kept kitchen and when I held up the candle to see where I was going (electric light was practically unknown) I would see scurrying beetles on the drain board and side table.

Uncle Tom and dad slept downstairs on a double settee and Aunt Lizzie occupied the other bedroom all to herself. She was loudmouthed and uncouth and at times I hated her, I never knew either Tom or Alf go out to work, they would sit around the wooden dinner table talking or playing cards and smoking hundreds of cigarettes... Woodbines in a paper packet five a time... the table always held remains of meals, dirty dishes, old newspapers.

Lizzie would keep shouting at the two men calling them lazy good for nothings and howling because they never cleaned themselves or helped clean up the eternal mess the place was always in. She herself always sat close to the fire, chain smoking... she smelled vile at times. There was no bath in the house and to get such a luxury one had to go to the new public baths about half a mile away in Bevington Bush... but the Bramhills never seemed to have the money for such an indulgence.

I cannot recall seeing much of dad in those days he was scarcely ever at home during the day or early evening... perhaps he was the only one who did work and got some wages.

Friday was a big day... we got a real dinner that day and it was my job to take a big basin over the main road which I know was Vauxhall Road to a mean little café and queue with other kids at a counter and get the basin filled with Irish stew.

I remember the shop well... it had a rich warm cooking smell and my mouth would be watering as I watched the old lady behind the counter ladle the stew out into the many basins presented to her. She was a kind lady and she would give me a slice of bread to go with my basin and tell me to take a dip in before I left the shop and 'get some warmth in yer body lad before yer go out in the cold' she'd say.

When I got home with the basin full of stew the men would be sitting in their places at the table, which for such an occasion was decorated with a newspaper tablecloth for Friday was a high day... wage day I suppose... and they would snatch the basin off me and empty it on to their plates greedily, only Aunt Lizzie's intervention stopped them from taking it all and leaving some for both her and myself.

I went to school from the house in Midghall Street... it was the school in Moorfields and years after the nightmare was long over I used to pass that old building and think of the many hours I spent in its dark dreary classrooms. I remember very well the small triangular playground... it must have only been about twenty feet around each wall and it was hemmed in by the backs of office buildings... I must have had free meals at that school for I remember travelling from the school at dinner time to some other building near by and sitting at a long table with many more children eating something for which I gave a green ticket.

This place was dirty and smelled sour... but the food was good and I was always hungry, hungry and cold... and in bare feet... one Empire Day... perhaps it was May 24th 1920, I was walking home from school and taking a short cut down a back entry or in Liverpool language 'back jigger' when I kicked a small package and bent down picked it up and it was full of gold... GOLD... bread and butter

sandwiches... I ate them all up greedily... then looking further along the 'jigger' I found some brown locust bean pods... and ate them too. The bins had just been emptied that afternoon.

I shudder even at the age of sixty two, when I think of that incident, and it is lodged so firmly in my mind because being Empire Day I remember I had been in school that afternoon singing patriotic songs and waving a little Union Jack... one song was 'Land of Hope and Glory...' My only land of hope and glory at that time was apparently when the bin men had been around and emptied the bins carelessly enough to leave some discarded food scattered around... I was only one of the thousands of hungry little bare footed brats in the slum land of Liverpool... and what of the other great cities in the land in that year of 1920? Can I be blamed when I view talk of the great British Empire with some cynicism... who was it great for? Certainly not for the denizen of Scotland Road.

Uncle Alf and Tom never seemed to do any work... they always seemed to be at home sitting around the dirty fireplace. Alf always wearing his greasy cap and scarf... I was forever in trouble with them and more often than not was sent up to the mouldy little back bedroom where I would wile away the time either gazing out of the window watching the unloading of the drays parked on the other side of the road under the frowning warehouse or turn my attention to the killing of bugs who seemed to sense human presence in the room and come out of the hundreds of folds in the wallpaper to weigh up the prospects of an early 'meal'.

Only if you have ever experienced the presence of these loathsome creatures and crushed them and have smelled the incredibly awful stink from them can you visualise the true horror... that smell remained with me all the time... many years later I was to encounter it again in equal force in the forecandle of a Leyland ship the DELINIAN.

If I got into trouble with the men and with Aunty Lizzie, I suppose to some extent I was deserving of it for in the many months I lived in that pig hole I soon got to playing out in the dirty streets and moving about with urchins as dirty and unkempt as I was myself and getting into untold mischief, when a gang of us would enter some vacant warehouse and steal sugar from the huge vats inside or grab ourselves handfuls of African groundnuts, and run like hell when the 'scuffers' (FUZZ in the modern term) came after us.

I became adept in escapism and could run along the precarious tops of the backyard walls with expertise in efforts to avoid the law.

One of our main preoccupations was to make a good 'cadge'. This was done by encountering a likely adult, the better dressed the more the opportunity... and in a put on whining voice one or two of us would tell him some hard luck story and invariably we would 'pull at his heartstrings' and he would give us a couple of pennies to buy some food.

Needless to say we would spend this money on sweets and my favoured was 'sticky lice' which could be bought at the herbalist in Tithebarn Street. This was a peculiar wooden stick which one could chew and suck and which gave off a sickly sweet taste. It lasted a long time.

Another dodge we got up to was to roam down Hatton Gardens and along Dale Street picking up fag ends and placing these in small tin boxes. We would hoard the contents up until we got hundreds and then we would 'peel' them and get a big box of cigarette tobacco from them and this would be sold to any buyer for a few coppers, which again went in sweets and more 'sticky lice'.

Uncle Alf became my number one customer, and soon learning what I was up to he used to send me out especially to collect fag ends for him and he did not always pay me.

I can remember my 'round' was Hatton Gardens and down to Dale Street where I would cross over the busy road by the Kardomah Café and walk up the gutter on the left of Dale Street towards Castle Street, turning along there take the left hand and walk towards the Victorian Monument at the top of Church Street and the left side of Church Street down to Whitechapel, along to the Haymarket, still keeping rigorously to the left gutter and back up Manchester Street to Hatton Gardens.

It was important I kept to the left for the right side of this round belonged to other boys bigger than myself and they would beat me up if I was caught on their side of the 'pitch'.

This 'forage' would commence every evening when we were let out of school through the little arched doorway leading out into Moorfields.

The nightmare of such an activity did not occur to me until many years later when once more with my mother and living a more stabilised existence I became more civilised. Years later, when a young man, I would walk up Moorfields and stand at that arched school gate and then I would walk slowly around my old 'pitch' and feel the horror of it all... doing this was like flaying myself and it served to urge me on to get back to my school books and understand mother's perpetual bickering at me that I must work hard to bring about an improvement in my knowledge at school so that I could 'make' something of myself and become somebody worthy.

There was no better way to spur me on than by walking along that awful memory lane.

However the trip down memory lane as yet belonged to the future and I was still in the nightmare of my early childhood living with my dad (not that I ever remember seeing him) and with the uncles and Auntie Liz who always seemed to be largely on my horizon.

I must have been very conscious of my mean existence for I can recall thinking of the orderliness of 34 Kensington and memory of the warm clean kitchen with its bright fire and with Grandma Prossor ever fussing about caused me some nostalgia. I must have been very small and very ignorant for I had no idea where this 'paradise' was.

Kensington to me was at the end of the earth and was therefore just a dream and unobtainable, until one day standing at the bottom of Hatton Gardens just having been let out of school and about to roam my 'pitch' for pickings when I saw a finely dressed man standing waiting for a tramcar to come along and I decided to try a 'touch' on him in hopes of a penny to spend.

He listened to my story and evidently took pity on me for he gave me the world's wealth... a shiny sixpenny piece.

That night I had more sticky lice than I could ever hope to eat and what is more I got a thrashing from Uncle Alf for I had abandoned my 'pitch' in the face of such wealth and had brought home no fag ends. Flushed with success from that adventure I took up my stand at the foot of Hatton Gardens the next night and there was the same gentleman waiting for the tramcar to come along and I approached him again for another 'touch' but this time he questioned me more thoroughly and asked me where I lived.

I must have been frightened to say 22 Midghall Street and instead for some obscure reason I gave him 34 Kensington.

He was amazed and naturally so (in hindsight for nearly three miles separated the two addresses). He must have wondered what on earth a little scruffy boy like me was doing so far from home. He promptly took me into the police Bridewell which was by the tram stop and handed me over to the policeman in charge.

I was given a big enamel mug of scalding tea and the kindly policeman asked me how I had come so far from home. I must have been very scared to give my proper address for I still maintained that I lived in 34 Kensington and so I was put in charge of another policeman and was taken on a tramcar and so at long last I was going home again.

I can remember most vividly the horror on Grandma Prossor's face as the policeman handed me over to her when she opened the door to his knock. I recall I was literally terrified and could not decide whether to tell the policeman I had lied or to face out my grandma's frowning displeasure. Perhaps it was just as well I could not speak for what I took to be displeasure on her old lined face was in reality horror at what she saw. I must have been literally filthy dirty and my feet were black and full of sores... I must have smelt to high heaven, and I had peed myself with fright. She shooed the policeman away and took me indoors... How the memory of that long warm passage that led past the dark stairway and down to the warm kitchen stays with my memory... I was in heaven... and I was scared stiff... (This was 1921 hence I was only eight years old). Mother was in the kitchen and I can recall her horror and her 'My God, my God what have they been doing to you child' repeating this over and over again like a litany until grandma losing patience with her thrust a big 'butty' into my hand and sat me down on the floor on some newspapers.

I learned afterwards that I was so dirty and lousy that she wouldn't let me near the chairs nor the carpets spread so invitingly over the floors. I was promptly taken up to the bathroom and placed in a warm bath and scrubbed almost till I bled and that was easy enough seeing I was covered with old and new bug bites... I was put into a warm nightgown and then into a warm, warm, warm, warm bed.

The nightmare was over and I was with grandma and with mother again... funny thing my memory never brings up Doris my sister in all this. She stayed at home in 34 Kensington with mother all the time... I cannot ever remember seeing her at this stage maybe being only six years old she was cosseted and kept out of my sight. I stayed with grandma for a long time after that and saw my dad only twice more... and on the second time he was dead.

The sequence of my life at this stage is mixed up and may not be in strict rotation so far as events go but nevertheless I will speak of them and perhaps the jigsaw will fall into place as I continue to jog my memory. It matters little whether I succeed in getting events into proper order... it at best will help my sons to know of my childhood and perhaps to realise that if they thought they were badly off, they literally lived like 'kings' in comparison to myself at their age.

Home from Midghall Street and the ever vivid memories of that awful house and its filth and bugs, of my rags and bare feet... of my eternal hunger... and loathing for all it represented. The year must have been about 1921-22 when I came back to 34 Kensington and lived for a while with mother and grandmother and Grandpa Prossor.

Grandmother must have been feeling hard times, but with some hindsight and knowledge that a great deal of wealth eventually passed to Charlie and his family following grandpa's death, I suspect that it was

because grandpa was a tight purse, and typical of the Victorian age, when the man of the house was indeed the man of the house.

I suspect he was very secretive about his means even from his wife (grandmother). She was obliged to take in lodgers to make ends meet and if there had ever been any 'skivvies' in the household of the Prossors they had departed and had been replaced by a daily help and of course my own mother.

She helped with the chores brought on by the house being let to a series of lodgers... I recall a Mr McManus... a dark genial man with a huge walrus moustache... his job was very vague... he travelled around business houses making up a business directory and when it was made up by the firm for whom he worked it was his job to keep that directory up to date and this entailed typing information on many little strips of paper which he laboriously pasted on to cardboard and placed in a file.

These files covered one of the walls in the 'second best' parlour and McManus lived with us for many years.

Why do I recall his activity... well it was because those papers he did not use, ie not file, were waste paper and he threaded them on string and they served as toilet paper in the downstairs (outside) toilet. I used to sit on the huge toilet for hours at a time reading (perhaps for the first time) the information from each strip of paper which hung from a nail in the wall adjacent to the toilet pan.

I made a poem up about him. 'Mr McManus... his dog had no manners... it got on our step and laid two bananas...' I must have recited that within hearing of adults at one stage for I recall being 'sentenced' to a week in bed on hard rations and mother was indeed a very hard unrelenting gaoler.

If she sentenced me to a week in bed... it was indeed a week in bed... and up in the top attic... I used to listen to the lemon lady coming on her rounds around the back entry with her raucous cry of 'Oranges and lemons six for a penny'. Her singsong Liverpudlian dialect still haunts me even at sixty two.

She had a rival who came around later in the morning shouting with equal vigour 'Rags and bones and bottles and jars...' One could not distinguish each separate word... it was rather the singsong voice that sorted out which one it was banging on the back door each morning.

The man... that is the rag and bone man... wore a greasy suit and an old cloth cap, with a muffler around his neck... his eyes were big and hungry looking... the woman wore a black shawl around her shoulders, and an old cloth cap adorned her tightly tied back hair, the 'bun' peeping out at the back supported the greasy hat at a rakish angle... her voluminous black skirts trailed in the filth of the narrow back entry.

I must have been an unruly character at that age... probably my 'Midghall Street' taint and a leftover of the rough and tumble life I had just quit... Mother must have found me a right handful.

Life must have got harder for her, for separated from dad she must have received very little maintenance from him if any at all, and she had to keep both Doris and myself now, and work for women in those days was practically unheard of. No self respecting husband would send his wife out to work... it cast a doubt upon him re his ability to run his own home... Women had worked during the war in munitions and in offices replacing the men who had gone up to the front in France or in the wider fields of that terrible conflict, but now they were back and the country was in economic chaos and jobs were few and of course mainly for the breadwinner, the man.

Helping gran to run the lodgers at 34 Kensington at least ensured she had a roof over our heads and food for our mouths.

She must have met dad at various intervals during that time however, for I have memories of their meeting outside a small tobacconist shop at the foot of Prescott Street, near to the crossroads made by London Road, Prescott Street, Daulby Street. A picture house called the Majestic was nearby and I would wander over the road to see the adverts as to what was on that night, whilst they stood and talked.

I do not know whether it was to collect some maintenance off dad that they met... I feel that rather was it to just talk and I feel too that at that time dad was out of work and already unwell. Mother was always sad as we left him and walked back slowly up Prescott Street to Kensington at the top of the long sloping hill which even in those early days of my life were edged in on either hand with slum dwellings.

I often wish I had been allowed to know what it was that deprived Doris and I of a dad and mother a husband... I feel somehow that at this particular time it was because of his growing ill health and his inability to get a job that made being together again impossible... from what I can remember of his dress on those evenings he was down at heel and I feel that his face was a sad face. He would ruffle my unruly hair on parting and ask of me to be a good boy for 'your mother'.

Aunt Lizzie, dad's sister, comes into the picture now, once more and for a while she and mother got along alright she was 'in service' (a maid) at a pub nearby and was double timing her husband Walter by going out with a man called Waltmire.

Walter I had not yet met, but he would never come to Liverpool from his home town Rawtenstall and of course as money was scarce and jobs few, Lizzie worked in many towns as a maid in various pubs and the

like and would send the money home to Walter (if she had any left), for she was a high flyer and still thought the war was on and good times still to be had by all.

I remember her arrival at 34 Kensington for I opened the front door and was confronted by this yellow faced apparition upon whose head rested an enormous flower bedecked hat... she smelled of scent and gin and... horrors... Midghall Street.

She must have told mother a good hard luck story for they put her up for the night, and next day she left for her new job in the Coach and Horses pub in Low Hill. Being near at hand we saw a lot of her in the succeeding months and I remember this period very vividly for it was to lead me to another period of separation from mother and home.

After about six months of her being in evidence at 34 Kensington the inevitable happened and she was in child to her fancy boy Waltmire and like all good fancy boys during this period of depression and poverty, he disappeared and Lizzie was left literally 'holding the baby'.

She lost her job and stayed on with us at 34 Kensington whilst she got over the rigours of back street abortion. Mother then convinced her that she should return home and Lizzie hit upon an idea that if I was to come home with her, her husband's wrath might not be so great and being a kind hearted man Walter her neglected husband would never let a youngster see violence done.

It was with a very heavy heart that once more I said my goodbyes to mother and Doris and the grandparents and whilst at this time I could have been not much older than seven years of age, I can recall with sharp clarity the dirty smell of Exchange Station and watching with acute pain the engine bedecked with the insignia L&Y pull the coaches into the platform and then we were off... and mother was gone.

I know that as adults we never stop to think of the hurt we can cause our children and this was a hurt that lives in the recesses of my mind over half a century after.

Mother of course can be understood I suppose. It must have been a blessing to her to have one less mouth to feed... on the other hand perhaps she could have tried more to keep her family together and not so easily take the easy way out.

With me out of the way mother could now look for some work for grandma would look after Doris but not the two of us... who am I to judge... I did not know the troubles my adults were in I did not know what poverty meant... but I knew sadness very early... too early.

How do you measure time when you are a youngster? Time moves on wings when you are happy and when you are sad time drags each second along as though they were clad in Lancashire mill clogs.

The stay at Crawshawbooth was not so bad as it had been at Midghall Street. Uncle Walter was a kind but impatient man, whilst Lizzie was just a harridan.

They had a son Jim just five years of age... we got on well... but being older I found I was also in 'stuk' for the deeds little boys will get up to... and of course beatings became a part of daily life... Beatings were always followed by being sent to bed and locked in the one bedroom for literally hours on end, or if my crime was worse I was put into a noise some cellar beneath the kitchen and the door locked on me.

I would scream for hours on end but to no avail... it was an old fashioned cellar with thick stone walls and must have been nigh soundproof. The memory of that cellar is vivid and a dripping tap going 'plop' plop... into a bath or wash basin will revive the memory in my brain, for at the foot of the steep stone steps that led down from the heavy wood door which separated the cellar from the living room, was a fresh water well which was fed by a small culvert from which water always dripped steadily and frighteningly... it was always dank and dark... I would sit at the top of the stone steps for hours listening to this kerplop kerplop and the scurrying of mice.

If my crime was not serious I was imprisoned in the one and only bedroom and would spend the entire day alone in the house locked in. There was an aspidistra plant on a stand in the window... I often think of it when I hear Gracie Fields' song... 'The biggest Aspidistra in the World' for this was exactly that... for I was obliged to use that receptacle for a toilet during the long day and that plant most certainly thrived.

Some many years later... about 1959 in think... I visited Reedsholme... that was the name of the village in which stood my 'prison' and the house had gone. It was just a bare space... a heap of rubble... and I walked over it searching for something to recognise and I saw a large flat paving slab covering the hole where once had been the cellar and the small well... It may have been fancy but I swear I could hear 'kerplop... kerplop'

I experienced many happy days there too... I can remember going with Uncle Walter over the moors, and the long and enjoyable climb up from the Rossendale valley and down into Edenfield. Sometimes he would take his son Jim and I just to the top of the moor and we would sit for hours looking down into the valley towards Rawtenstall or northward towards Crawshawbooth.

I got to love that valley... after all I had spent best part of my young years in it. The abject poverty of it all was hidden from the top of the moor... one could only see the smoking chimneys of the various cotton

mills and from that height you could not see the pollution on the small stream that a little further down the valley became the Irwell.

Being in the valley and in the mills was different however... there was no beauty there... only constantly roaring machinery, the click clack of the looms and the swishing of countless leather straps over huge wheels... to a little boy all very frightening... what stayed in my memory most was the grey faces of the workers... pinched faces... no smiles... clogs, shawls, a seven day week for thirty bob (£1.50)... or a workhouse... the houses consisted of small cottages... one up and one down... if you can think of the latest television play 'Sam' you get the true atmosphere... pint mugs... well scrubbed deal topped tables, rocking chairs and the kitchen range with its water boiler at the side from which you drew your hot water for washing... outside toilets... which were nothing better than a huge bucket slung under a well scrubbed wooden seat... the buckets emptied once weekly when a special horse drawn vehicle would come around the houses during the small hours to empty what became known as the 'midnight soil'. At such times the smell was appalling and lingers over fifty years in the memory.

In 1959 when visiting the valley one sensed but little change. I visited Edna, she was Walter's sister... older now of course but with the same pinched haggard face.

I do not think I would have liked to have been an adult in those years... life must have been very hard... and we were supposedly a great Empire... the richest nation in the world... at £1.50 per week one couldn't say they were rich could they?

Crawshawbooth had changed very little... unless it was that one noticed the absence of clogs which used to be worn by both male and female... now shoes were worn... once such luxuries were only for wedding days and funerals... the black shawls had gone but the faces were the same.

Life in the valley was always a struggle... and now with many of the countries of the eastern world turning out cheaper cotton goods... the valley will feel the pinch and the mill chimneys will cease to smoke.

A Mrs Cole lived next door, with her son and daughter... I think she must have been a widow, for I have no recollection of a man about the house. Mrs Cole was very kind to me and I think she was aware of the situation wherein I was left alone in the house next door for considerable periods of time.

She must have spoken of this to Aunt Liz and have been told to mind her own business. Bert Cole, the son, became my constant companion, and we spent many hours playing in the narrow lane above the village.

That our 'play' consisted of making mud pies which we sold to other children of the village from a make believe shop, serves to fix my age at that time and indicates that I was as yet a very small boy.

It is a period that is partially obscure in my mind, for I cannot remember attending school at all. I can recall going up the road to the Reedsholme Mill to see my Grandad Heys who worked amongst some roaring machinery in the cotton mill and he was a very kind man, large and frightening, as indeed were the surroundings in the machine shop, but he was soft spoken and I would spend hours sitting in a corner watching with fascination the whirring belt drives and listening to the slap, slap the belts made as they moved over giant wheels that in turn drove the looms in the adjoining buildings.

At the back of the machine shop meandered the dirty tributary of the River Irwell, only a very small brook at this stage but already full of paint discoloured boulders and its shallows littered with every conceivable type of rubbish.

Grandad Heys would make me a line tied to a stick and I would sit on the river bank with my back propped up against the machine shop wall, and with my bare feet dangling in the dirty water I would 'fish' for hours in the bright warm sunshine, until it was time for grandad to stop work and he would then take me home with him up to Crawshawbooth, which lay about a mile and a half up the main road towards Burnley.

Grandma Heys' house was always spotlessly clean but like all the houses I was acquainted with it was not without its mark of poverty and the furnishing consisted of two rocking chairs and a large deal table that was scrubbed smooth and startlingly white. Newspapers were religiously placed on its surface during meal times to keep it clean. The fire grate was pitch black and polished with shining steelwork and the fender was always covered with newspapers to keep its shining surface clean.

It was uncovered on a Sunday and the table on that day was decorated with a red chenille cloth. Both grandad and grandma wore their best clothes on that day. Edna was their daughter, Uncle Walter's sister, and was allowed to lay in on Sunday because Saturday night was always a late night for she then went into Rawtenstall to the pictures and no doubt met a boyfriend or two.

She was a very pretty girl with a beautiful head of red hair that reached down past her waistline and when she finally got up on the Sunday morning she would spend hours brushing it and combing the long bright tresses. She was not aware of it but she stirred in me my first sex attraction and I would dream of her in a confused but delightful way. She smelled very nice and was soft to touch... she never smiled... but I recall it was her very sulkiness that set my little heart beating and caused me to always want to be near her to touch her.

I saw her again in 1959, when with Rita I visited Crawshawbooth to recall memory. She was still sulky and in a way pretty, even though her face by now had lost its youthful bloom and poverty had written its story on her face. She never married. I would assume she must have been about sixteen when I write of her... I wonder what went wrong... why she never met a boy and got herself married... she was very kind to me and I feel from hindsight that she must have possessed qualities that would have made her a good wife and mother. In 1959 I recall she was embittered and her once pretty face reflected this bitterness. She hardly spoke to us... recalling the thrill I had once known in her presence. I was disappointed and felt I had lost a beautiful memory... an island of peace and something nice in my otherwise dreary childhood. Every Saturday morning I had the task of taking Grandma Heys some bundles of firewood that Walter had collected from the lanes and the dirty riverbank and had sawn up into little pieces which he placed in a big sack and gave to me to take up to Crawshawbooth. I never went to grandma's house along the main road, but over the meadow and over the stile that led into the little road that led uphill to her house. I would enjoy that weekly walk through the meadow carrying the heavy sack across my shoulder, until one day I drew the attention of the resident bull and was chased all the way to Crawshawbooth. I cannot imagine the chase was serious for that bull could easily have caught me as I struggled along with the heavy sack on my back... but fear gave my feet wings and probably the bull in reality just stood his ground and growled at me... that was sufficient to propel me along the remainder of the meadow at the rate of knots, and I would arrive at grandma's panting and crying with fright. The large pint mug of tea I received from grandma that day was the best and sweetest I can recall ever tasting... seeing pint mugs today could remind me of many other things in my life, things that were not always pleasant, for instance... paper tablecloths... dirty windows... flies falling from an overloaded flycatcher above the table. Midghall Street... but it doesn't... it reminds me of the time when a frantic bull chased me from Reedsholme to Crawshawbooth over a mile and a half course and into grandma's house and up the stairs and under the bed... some bull... but then being small, bulls were big and moved fast and their horns were sixty feet long... always just hovering near the seat of your pants when you ran like hell. Yes the tea in that pint mug tasted heavenly and the comfort in front of the black leaded fire grate... is a memory not to be forgotten. Jim Heys, Walter's son, hence my cousin, lived at Reedsholme with Liz his mother and Walter... until some time during that period, things must have started to go wrong for Jim left and went to live in Crawshawbooth with his Grandma Heys, and I recall that Quarrels between Walter and Lizzie became more frequent... Walter was not so kind anymore and failed to comfort me when returning home from work he found me locked up and hungry. I cannot remember whether Lizzie worked at that time but I do know that most days she was out and I was left alone in that house, sometimes locked in the upstairs room with the aspidistra or downstairs in the cellar with he dripping water and the mice. I realise that as a youngster one tends to exaggerate and possibly I was not alone for very long and it only seemed a long time, but commonsense tells me that aspidistras do not grow large on one watering per day and I most certainly visited that novel toilet many times in a day. I do know I was horribly lonely and I used to dream of Edna and find comfort in her imagined presence... possibly this was the first stirring of sex in me... the comfort came from dreams that Edna would place her dress over my head and was strongly aware of her particular brand of perfume. I could not have been more than nine year's old. Lizzie must have left Walter and returned to Liverpool about that time for shortly afterwards Walter had me sent home to Liverpool and Jim went along with me. We travelled alone for the first time and I can distinctly recall the train passing through Sandhills station on its way to Exchange Station and Jim and I were singing the then popular song, which will give a date to this stage of the story perhaps... the song was 'I want to be alone with Mary Brown' and 'A'int she sweet, see her walking down the street...' Jim and I parted at Exchange Station... I do not recall how or where Jim went or if he was met by Lizzie... but somehow I was now back at 34 Kensington and with mother, grandmother and Doris again and once more knew happiness and Grandma Prossor's Windsor soup. The correct sequence when one tries to recall events in childhood are not necessarily in order and I know this because whilst my story has now reached the stage where I was to know for the first time some felicity in my life, I am aware that I have not spoken of my 'Aunty in Birmingham', nor can I fit into proper sequence the period I spent in the Fazakerley cottage homes when I suffered from a dirty scalp disease called ringworm (I can smell Oil of Sassafras strongly at this moment). I suspect that 'Aunty in Birmingham' was a foster parent type, for try as I may I cannot fit her into the family tree. I think that the fact that I spent some six months with this dear fat old lady and her miner

husband was evidence that mother caring for two of us and without her own home, living with her parents (Grandma and Grandad Prossor) was finding the going very difficult and whilst she could manage with Doris, she could not manage with two of us. How can I condemn her for such a decision to keep my sister and I apart, when I do not know the story of the causes... suffice to say that particular period in my life away from home and mother was lonely but was happy too for 'Aunty' was firm but doting... so long as I peeled my quota of six pails of potatoes weekly and took all the eyes out of them too.

They lived in a little one up and down in Hartington Road, Lozelles. It was nearly a slum but aunties vigorous cleaning programmes that commenced with monotonous regularity every morning at six o'clock when Fred her husband had departed for his mining shift at the pit over near Walsall, kept down the dirt from the mean but respectable street and kept the rats at bay. These creatures took up abode in an outside shed and Fred showed me how to fire a catapult at them when he would walk down the little garden at the rear of the house each morning before he left for the mine.

I was obliged to peel my pail of potatoes in that shed and I always kept my catapult handy I can tell you, for any rats were big 'uns to a youngster and anyway it was fun to see them scurrying off with a hard pebble up their bottoms.

I always used to enjoy Saturday for that was a day when Fred received his week's wages and to obtain them he had to go to the pithead office. He would dress up in his Sunday best and we would set off across the fields back of Lozelles Park towards Walsall, first moving along a canal bank and then over the top of a railway embankment... I can remember reading the railway notice board telling me that it was the LNWR line. This made my heart a little heavy because I knew I must be in L&Y country to be on a line for Liverpool and home I did not know that one could get a train from Walsall to Liverpool, that LNWR ran into L&Y and indeed into L&M territory, I just thought the train ran until it came to a wall at the end of its country and you couldn't get over this wall unless you had a lot of money, and I never had more than a Saturday halfpenny... the rate for spud bashing was very low.

On our walk to the pithead we would pass through a rather dense wood that was thick with stinging nettles and Fred would carry me so that my legs would not get stung. We would stop in a small coppice and listen to blackbirds and other winged creatures.

Fred showed me some blackbird nests and when the breeding season came he would take some of the eggs from the nest and carefully place them in his pocket and take them home, where he had a series of nesting boxes and two tame thrushes. These birds would or would not take to the eggs and if they did do Ted was delighted with the success and within a very short time he would proudly exhibit to me some blackbird chicks which he would then proceed to rear until they could fly off themselves.

Feeding these little creatures was a task which fascinated me and it stays in my memory, their scruffy feathered necks outstretched and wide red mouths grabbing for the worms Ted would bring them every evening.

It was a long walk to the pithead and when I arrived I was happy to sit on the canal bank in quiet content and await Fred returning with his wage packet. I was certain to get some sweets on such days, but with hindsight I would suggest the poor fellow could scarce afford to do so, most certainly we had to walk the six miles back through the wood, along the railway embankment, down by the canal towpath and back into the Lozelles Park and so home, because he couldn't break into the precious wage of £1.15s which represented his reward for an arduous week's work (shades of the present day miners claim for £100 per week... who can blame them in reality after such out and out exploitation such as Fred's generation suffered).

Saturday night was picture night and Fred and aunty would take me along with them and we would sit on the next to front row, right in front of the pianist who jingled his piano non stop and whose skill with that instrument conveyed the drama of the film to the watchers indicating grief, happiness, joy and high drama with the heroine left tied to the railway track and a thundering LNWR coming right at her, the music rising to a wild crescendo as the hero thundered along on his 'modern' safety bicycle to draw ahead of the whistle screaming (high C on the keyboard) monster and snatch her from doom at the last minute.

This period can be dated by the current tune 'Here you are then, there you are then, there you are then you naughty boy'... that being the top of the pops for the period.

Bath night was Friday night and was taken in a huge zinc bath which was hauled in from the garden shed and placed on the rug in front of the kitchen fire and filled with hot water from the washing copper which was part of the combined fireplace and as equally shining with black lead and polished steel as was Grandma Heys' grate in Crawshawbooth.

Being little, aunty towered over me like a huge kindly elephant and grunting she scrubbed my tender hide until it glowed red from the friction. A towelling down with a course bath towel afterwards ensured the red glow would remain until the morning and a cup of steaming hot cocoa would ensure my eyes would scarce

remain open and I was more than ready for my bed on the paliasse on the floor in their one and only bedroom. I never saw these two amiable folk bathing, but I knew bath they did once I was safely tucked away in bed.

Whilst I cannot date this happy period in my life I do know that I started school at that time once more and was in an infant class. Singing 'Cherry Ripe' and 'Come lasses and lads' at the top of my little voice must have indicated my happiness and content.

I never forgot that period in my life nor my 'Aunty' with her beaming happy face and her reddened forearms which were always uncovered and were as thick as a leg of mutton.

She was a hard working angel and during my life afterwards when I met her like, I would flatter them by saying they were like 'My Aunty from Birmingham' I never met anybody who knew who she really was... I never remember our final parting... but I do remember her and Fred too... they were good folks... who knew how to be happy in poverty... but rich in happiness. For that brief but remembered childhood happiness... God bless them.

Memories of what happened after I got back from Birmingham and became established once more at 34 Kensington with mother, Doris, grandma and grandad are vague and do not fit into any pattern.

Grandma died of cancer and lay in a coffin in the best parlour for days. She had pennies on her eyes to keep them shut. I could not look out of the parlour window on to busy Kensington for the immense coffin was across the window on a table, and the curtains were drawn, the room dismal and grey. I could hear the heavy Foden steam wagons passing the door and the clump, clump of horse drawn vehicles mixed up with the accelerating whirring of the electric tram from the stop at the top of Low Hill as it moved along noisily to the other stop at Kensington Street opposite Achesons the grocer and Lunts the baker.

A Mrs Parsons kept a sweet shop opposite the house and I used to like going in there because she gave me an extra sweet or two. I think she was the first shopkeeper who I knew with a sales promotion scheme, she used to issue small bill heads bearing the name of her shop and under the heading was a column of football clubs and matches to be played that week... perhaps these were indeed the forerunners of the football pool coupons.

Mother would tell me to go and bring one of Mrs Parsons coupons and she would write down who she thought would win. A winner would get a box of candy or a small portion of bacon for Mrs Parsons also sold groceries mostly on the slate'. Corned beef was 4d per pound... brawn was 3d... matches were a halfpenny, Woodbines in a paper packet 2d for five... Comic Cuts was a halfpenny and the Boys Magazine was 2d. Park Drive cigarettes were 4½d for ten and Players 6d for ten.

Mr Cairns was a lodger living in our house and he smoked the latter ones and was so deemed to be 'posh'. He was a tailors assistant working at Alexanders in London Road where men's suits sold for £2.10s some even cheaper at 'Thirty bob'.

He was a tall, dark serious man... he was with hindsight... about thirty one years old at that time. He had been active in the war in the RAMC and I can recall listening to him telling Mr McManus the other lodger we had about some of his adventures carrying casualties on stretchers and in rickety ambulances behind the front lines on the Somme.

He was always very neatly dressed in dark well tailored suits, whereas Mr McManus was like a veritable rag bag fitting his genial character.

Somewhere about this time mother had news of dad's death and I remember I went with her to see him in his coffin. He was at a mean dirty house in Springfield, a most inappropriately named street in the slums at the back of Islington.

I recall we stood in a dark mean bad smelling room and I looked with awe upon the coffin which was on a table in the middle of the dirty room. It was late evening and dark outside, inside the illumination was from a gas bracket that was without its mantle and it spluttered and gave off an eerie bluish light that flickered erratically in some draught that blew through an ill fitting door. The wallpaper was peeling from the walls and in the corner was a bed, unmade and the bedclothes tumbled from recent occupation.

The occupant was Uncle Alf but he was not there when mother looked down on dad's dead pinched face. He looked so very thin laying in the coffin the face yellow and drawn. There was a slattern of a woman who spoke to mother I heard her saying ghoulishly 'They've tuk away 'is insides they have, at the inquest'. Mother stood silently and tearlessly looking down at the pitiful remains of the man who had been her husband and whom in the last years she had rarely seen. She must not have known he had been ill... and not being able to bear the slattern's horrid description of dad's ending she took me by the hand and fled from that awful room and together we ran down a street that led to Islington and from there to London Road where we caught a tram to Kensington.

When mother got home she sat down in the kitchen without taking off her street clothes and I never heard such dreadful sobs... I tried to comfort her... but she shook me off and told me to go to bed in a choked

voice. Now with hindsight I know that moment must have been dreadful for her... she had been alone for years but dad was living and she occasionally saw him... now he had gone forever and that pitiable figure in the coffin was a sorry epilogue to a sorry sad unhappy life... I wonder what really went wrong... I wonder where lay the blame for so sad a finish... what had all the struggle been for... there had been love and some laughter... mother at a piano playing the 'Bells of St Mary' or the End of a Perfect Day... the moment of happiness for us all waiting at the station in Ramsbottom for the train to come and bear us mother, dad, Doris and myself on a rare holiday to Liverpool... that was the only moment I can recall dad's laughter... I am sure he was laughing at mother's new hat... it was awfully big and had around the brim enough imitation flowers to fill up the garden, and she had a muff which smelled of moth balls. With dad's death, all contact with the past seemed to vanish. Life as lived in Midghall Street faded to just a nasty memory and it was as though that past buried itself with dad's pitiful remains. I never knew where he finally rested although I believe it was in a paupers grave in Anfield. I did at the time declare I would try to find out, but I never got around to it and mother left me no information... perhaps if there is another life and those on that side can see the results of their having been in this life, dad need not be so disappointed in what was achieved for he would see his son now as a captain and perhaps would consider that the Bramhills had risen from the depressive days of the early part of the century and with five grandsons he never lived to see he could well be a very proud man, as I am indeed a very proud father. I would like to think he could see that something came out of those awful days he and mother went through together and didn't survive the strain. At least we are assured the Bramhills will move into the twenty first century.

Are there any other Bramhills about that can be said to be of our branch of the family of man that bear this name? I am not aware that there are, and if there are they can only be the offering of Tom Bramhill. You will recall I earlier wrote of there being three brothers and two sisters Sarah and Lizzie. Dad we now know of, Alf, he whom I detested, and whom was nothing but a lazy layabout died unmarried in a workhouse that was situated at the foot of Brownlow Hill, but of which there is no trace now, unless it be that it was on the site of the Catholic Cathedral.

I do not know what became of Tom. I liked him, but memory of him is vague. Of the occupants of Midghall Street the family home, I can recall only Lizzie, Alf and dad and just very vaguely Tom. He would have been about 25 years old then I reckon, being about two years younger than dad. Alf was 23 years old and must have been about 25 years old on his death (about 1923)... I think dad died 1922. Lizzie died in Croydon hospital about 1969/70.

If Tom did not marry it means I was the only male offspring and Frank, Leslie, Eric, David and Billy are the sole remaining branch of the Bramhill family, perhaps a very strong and invigorated branch... I would like to think so... most certainly all the boys have got on well and the future bids to be fair.

After dad's death mother was free to marry again and I think that a romance of sorts had in fact commenced between herself and the lodger Len Cairns. Most certainly his proposal to mother must have been a glorious relief to her for she had been on her own trying to keep her small family intact and happy for so long on so little money that the future must suddenly have looked glorious.

Just before the marriage to Len, Doris and I had been sent to the Fazakerley children's home... I do not recall the circumstances that brought that about, but it must have been a desperate one for mother to have let Doris go to, previously it had only been me that was shelved and Doris remained home with mother. I can recall vaguely being at a children's home in Belmont Road... I suspect it was almost a workhouse type of place, and there we both contracted the scalp disease of ringworm and were transferred to the home in Fazakerley (it still exists today) and I can recall being out on the veranda of that cottage home... a veranda that faced into the little country lane that was to become the eastern extension of Longmore Lane. I used to build aeroplanes from the wooden chairs in the ward and play for hours in such contraptions... obviously still very young. I can recall I was allowed to walk up the lane towards the bridge where mother after a visit to us would take the tramcar at the terminus that was on the other side of the bridge.

I can recall that bridge very strongly, and see in my minds eye the type of tramcar that was in use. It was a double deck affair, and no doubt boasted of being modern in that the top deck was covered in, whereas earlier models had been open on the upper deck, much the same as I was to see some forty years later plying the seafront at Clacton on Sea, built purely for the convenience of holidaymakers who wished to ride along the seafront, later buses were used, being similarly constructed on the upper decks.

The tram of the 1922 period was probably the first to have an enclosed upper deck, the access stairway however was still uncovered and wide open to inclement weather, as indeed was the driver and conductor. At the top of the spiral like stairway was a sliding door, through which the passenger went to gain the shelter of the inner 'cabin' he could however still remain seated outside if he so wished, for the part at the top of the stairway possessed a half round seat which seated about four persons.

Later models still retained this 'open ended' idea, except that they were improved in that the roof of the tram extended completely from forward to aft (see rough diagram).

Later models eventually came out wherein the entire portion was completely covered and the stairway to the upper deck was completely protected and the upper section at the fore and aft stairway became part of the whole upper deck (The 'Green Goddess').

Back to my recollections of the bridge at Fazakerley. It is only of recent date (1971) that that bridge was reconstructed, and in its old form it represented a bottleneck for the ever growing volume of traffic that used the road, which by 1971 had become bounded on either side with rows of houses and shops and Kirkby previously a village dominated by the tower of the church of St Chads had become a teeming built up area with high rise flats dominating the skyline.

At the time I talk of, the bridge which spanned the railway line from Liverpool Exchange station through to I believe Wigan and Bolton via Prestons Road and Kirkby was literally 'out in the sticks' and the lane on the north side of the bridge was a very narrow country lane which swept downwards and northwards towards Kirkby and the conspicuous tower of St Chads church.

I cannot remember there being any building of any kind on the east side of the lane, but the Fazakerley homes were about three quarters of a mile northward of the bridge at the bottom on the incline.

At the time of writing this, 1975, it is only four months since Pop Unwin died in the Fazakerley Hospital and this is a series of buildings on the east side of the lane... I cannot recall that on those days in 1922 such a group of buildings existed, and it would thus appear that the 'homes' on the west side of the lane were the original 'Fazakerley' Hospital group.

To talk of this feature is of course only a matter of interest and detracts from the main theme of my story. I can recall a day when mother visited Doris and I in the homes and we walked back with her to the bridge and sat on the bridge coping waiting the arrival of the tramcar. Its terminus was on the immediate south side of the bridge. It was a very hot day, and I can distinctly remember mother was happy for she had just told us both we would be coming home in another week and that we had a 'new' father... This was of course Len Cairns.

I suppose she had reasons for such happiness for that day was one of many that marked the end of a depressing era for her and the future stretched ahead with security for the first time in some six years of unhappiness.

One must understand the abject role of the women of those days and draw comparison between that age and the emancipated period of 1975, the year of the crowning of the success of the Women's Lib movement. In 1922 it was extremely difficult to obtain a second chance of marriage.

That mother won the love of Len Cairns must have been an achievement in itself and what a wonderful relief it must have been in that it brought her once more precious security from struggle and want and the hope that at long last 'her' family could be reunited again.

Doris was the first to go home back to 34 Kensington but now to what must have been a far different clime. Len was well established in the home before the marriage and its event changed but little the routine of daily life.

Mother, now secure, and with a wage coming in that was their very own could no doubt now dictate some of the terms of her staying on at 34 Kensington and she as no longer just a 'servant' to the successive lodgers, but must have come to regard herself as free and almost part business partner. However together they could not have been very well off for they remained at 34 Kensington for many years and it was not until 1925/6 that they broke the ties with 34 Kensington and went into their first home of their own, at Reynold Road, Knotty Ash, a then new estate just being built.

Once home together again, Doris and I became established at Rathbone Council School situated at the top of Saxony Road, Kensington and life became normal with not much left to recall it by except my first 'fight' with schoolboy Bradford in the 'jigger' between Kensington and Guelph Street... it was a most inconclusive affair but I must have come out of it well for after the incident I became 'accepted' to the boys at the school and from that time onward knew days of extreme happiness.

My ability as a 'storyteller' won me some recognition at the school and I became the 'pet' of my very young and beautiful teacher, Miss Qualtrough. I did not know she was 'young' however in those days... a boy of twelve regards all grown ups as being 'oldies' but knowing her now, having in the interim years 'found' her again in the Isle of Man, she must have been barely twenty years old and she won my heart completely and was indeed my 'first love'.

With hindsight, the period of a boys first experience with the mystic feeling called LOVE is something precious and wonderful. Too young to know the relationship that really exists between man and woman, and more especially in those days when we were kept entirely in ignorance right up to and beyond marriage, the feeling was the more wonderful.

I would verily have given my life for my Miss Qualtrough and indeed my one and only bout of fisticuffs was because she was under attack from the obnoxious Bradford, who was wont to always quote a particular dirty piece of doggerel about her and a supposed relationship she was said to be having with 'Wally' a hairy old teacher 'Down in a valley, where nobody knows; Lies Miss Qually without any clothes; Along come old Wally, full of beans and zest... and places his **** inside her chest.

The stinging dirty rhyme burns me up even now... and it left my paragon soiled and dirty in those days when I was literally worshipping the very ground she deemed to walk upon... 'Without any clothes ... I was of a tender ignorant age when this didn't mean anything but vulgarism and like a knight in shining armour I went to her aid and slew her oppressor in the 'jigger' of Guelph Street and sent him home with a bloodied nose... mind I received a most glorious 'shiner' myself but knowing it was for HER I didn't mind... I sat proudly in front of her desk next morning and ecstatically bathed in her sympathetic gestures. She gave me the cane for fighting... that was natural. She gave Bradford the cane too... she never knew the cause of the fight... I never enjoyed a caning so much... she had lovely legs... It was strange I should find myself thrilled at such a sight... when I did not know what for.

School in the 20s was not a very cheerful period, as can well be seen when one looks at the group pictures of the scholars, to wit the one that I carry about with me to this day, showing the Rathbone Council School Class 4 of 1925, and what a scruffy bunch we look.

One can see and almost smell the poverty in the group of boys standing in a group, clad in wool jerseys and patched trousers.

Seen from 1975, one asks of that period... what of our Empire... we were supposed to be a rich Nation, with a third of the world British... it is not illustrated to advantage when one considers that many of the boys in that picture carried a free meal voucher in their trouser pockets, and those that did not went home to a not very sumptuous repast... certainly much less than one could expect of a rich country and now a country said to be fit for heroes to live in in that our dads had just fought the bloodiest of wars, and many of the boys in that group picture had no dad left.

Indeed we were at that time hurtling willy nilly towards one of the deepest trade recessions of all times, the 1930s was just around the corner.

In the moment of that picture, the rich were living high in Monte Carlo and places on the south France coast... The 'Jet Set' in London were swinging high.

The working population were grubbing for a daily meal... already work was becoming scarce and the smell of Midghall Street was everywhere.

The valley in Rossendale was closing its cotton mills... shipyards on the NE coast were on short time... miners were on the poverty line... We sang 'Crazy words, crazy tune'... and did the Charleston although our dance steps were becoming slower and those who could afford to dance were already growing less... the average wage was thirty bob a week... (150 new pence).

Probably six hours after that picture was taken I would be found in Achesons grocery store on a message for my mum for a quarter pound of bacon and a quarter pound of corned beef for Pop Cairns tea time... on the way to school in the mornings Doris and I would visit Lucas's the bakers in Kensington Street and if we were lucky we would get a free packet of broken biscuits for a halfpenny... said to be 'free' to school children who called early... the halfpenny went to the baker foreman and helped to swell his diminutive wage packet... we never 'snitched' on him for this sly practice, for we who could have a halfpenny to spend always managed to get to the head of the hungry queue and so be assured of our quota of broken biscuits.

Some of the prices are worth quoting... a tin of condensed milk (Unfit for babies) was 4½d, corned beef was 8d a lb, brawn was 6d a lb... butter was 1/8d a lb bread was 4½d a loaf... cigarettes were 5d to 1/- for twenty... the new fangled object called washing up powder... 'Lively Polly' or Hudsons soap powder was 5d a small packet... these items were the forerunners of the great tide of detergents that was to come in later years.

It was in such an atmosphere that my love for my teacher grew... I found I could tell good stories and was often brought before the class to tell these stories, products of what must have been a rich imagination... it was a half hour of sheer bliss to be able to stand at the side of Miss Qualtrough's desk and whilst she marked books I kept the class in spellbound order telling them of some fanciful adventure or another. She wore a most interesting perfume... and had a lovely graceful head... she did not know until 1969 that in those far off days she had a devout lover... she never married... when I told her of my boyish first love one day when on holiday in the Isle of Man she gave a quiet chuckle, and said... 'yes Bill I remember how you used to blush when I spoke to you... just what were your thoughts about me?'... I was at a complete loss for words... just how can one describe an innocent boys thoughts on love when he doesn't know what love is.

In the year 1925, I was twelve years old, Doris was just touching ten..

A boy aged twelve in this year of grace 1975, knows much more of life than did boys of twelve in 1925, for the subject of sex was completely taboo.

The generation of that age drifted into marriage in complete ignorance... the children of the age remained ignorant, and some who obtained any information at all only did so 'from other children who lived in the gutters' and nice children we were told do not mix with that sort, or believe the dirty things they tell one. I often wonder if the children of today with all their knowledge will when growing up and reaching the 'boy meets girl' stage experience the same utterly sweet inexplicable feelings as we did.

I recall visiting my teacher's house one day after school and in her bathroom I saw her toothbrush... my heart turned over at the sight and I experienced an utterly sweet sensation that made my heart race and left me well nigh breathless with inexplicable delight... Miss Qualtrough was my sweetheart... and here was her toothbrush.

There was a mystery somewhere... and such a sweet mystery... not long after the incident of the toothbrush I was to begin to learn and it was from Mona, a young girl whom mother took in to look after Doris and I.

This girl who may have been any age between seventeen to twenty opened the first page of the Book of Life for me, and now in 1975 I write of the sweet interlude... and give the result an 'X' certificate.

I suppose every child thinks mother's bed the most heavenly place on earth, and be it 1925 or 1975 this has not changed; William now aged sixteen hates his own single bed, saying it is too hard, and that mother's is soft and most comfortable and if he can wangle a night therein he loses no opportunity.

When you have spent a happy day resulting from having been made a fuss of by a winsome young girl and as a nightcap she springs upon you a most delightful surprise of saying you can sleep in mums bed for being such a good boy you are mighty happy and spare but small concern for your sister who normally gets such a pleasure more often than you do, but who must tonight go to her own bed and what's more, go earlier than usual... a punishment for sulking because her brother was being granted favours for a change. Mona was very severe with Doris that night and just after seven she was given her cocoa and bundled off in disgrace with not a few tears which went in the main ignored.

Soon the house was quiet and I was sitting on the sofa before a glowing fire and Mona was reading to me... not from my usual school book, but from a paperback book of her own which illustrated a man and a girl kissing.

It was called 'Pegs Paper' and Mona always read it every week. It was a soppy book about people getting married, and kissing, but tonight I didn't mind her reading to me from it. I didn't want to upset her and have her bundle me off early like she had done Doris.

'Do you like my book Willie?' she asked, looking down at me curled up, my eyes on the glowing fire.

'It's always about kissing' I said, not able to hide my contempt for such a soppy occupation. 'Only girls think about kissing, and they are all daft... except you Mona' I added hurriedly, eager not to spoil this wonderful 'bonus' I was being treated to 'I don't mind you reading about kissing'.

She gave a low kind of chuckle, and placing her arm around my shoulder drew me close in to her side. She was lovely and soft, and smelled very nice. My head was resting on her breast and her hand came up to my face and pressed it close into her softness.

'What do you know about kissing?' She asked, fondling my cheek, and pressing my face harder to her.

'Have you ever kissed a girl?'

'Mother makes me kiss Doris sometimes when I have made her cry' I said 'and I think it is daft.'

'I don't mean just kissing your sister' laughed Mona, 'I mean any other girl, there must be lots at your school, and what about the party you went to last week, didn't you play 'Postman's Knock' and kiss all the girls?'

'I did not' I cried with indignation. 'I pretended to cos that's the game, I licked them and they were mad at me' I said with a laugh, suppressed in the softness of her bosom.

'Would you like to kiss me?' She asked moving slightly away from me and looking at me questioningly, and with a little laugh. 'I am sure you wouldn't lick me.'

'I would I cried', drawing further away with a little alarm, and then realising I might make her mad at me I added 'Well just a little one, because I do like you a lot, and you have made me happy today.'

I reached up to her, and with my arm moving around her neck I placed a quick kiss on her ear. She half turned to face me and drawing me close to her placed her lips over mine and kissed me long and deeply. I tried to push away, but then I relaxed and found I was liking the experience and when she drew away I cried 'That was very nice... much nicer than Margie Atkins at the party. Can I kiss you again?' I reached up and gave her a quick shy peck on the lips.

'That wasn't a real kiss silly' she laughed, and again half turning to me and leaning over me she again

covered my mouth with her lips and this time she was pressing a little harder and it seemed as though it was never going to end and I had to push her away hard so that I could breathe. I was liking this very much, and when she again placed her lips to mine hard she pulled me over to lean heavily against her breasts, and she was half laying on the sofa with me above her. It was a delicious experience and when she stopped and looked up at me I started kissing her of my own accord so much that she had to tickle me to make me move away but not for long, and laughing softly she drew me close again and this time she kissed me differently by putting her tongue into my mouth.

That frightened me a little bit and I tried to pull away but laughing more and very quietly she held me tight to her and I couldn't move. The book had fallen to the floor, but it went unheeded by her as she pulled me further over her. She was all red and her hair was over her face when I finally gave a big push from her and got free.

She had become vexed with me and within another few minutes she had sent me up to bed and so ended what was at that time a most exciting and perplexing episode. I was well aware of liking every moment of the experience, but I couldn't say just why. It was obviously something not quite right for she had instructed me not to tell my mother, nor anybody, and although she had said if I did she wouldn't let me kiss her again I instinctively knew she too was fearing some disciplinary action had I opened my mouth to either Doris or anybody and it got back to mother.

Mona Davidson was her full name. She had been employed by mother to help with the lodgers at 34 Kensington and later when we went to live in Reynold Road mother took her with us and she helped in the home and looked after Doris and I when they wished to go out for the evening.

She was a very pleasant girl, not over pretty and she possessed what would be termed in those days, a romantic nature. Mother used to pull her leg about her various boyfriends and according to her she had very many but not enough nights off in the week to see them, for being in 'service' and earning only about ten to fifteen bob a week plus keep, such employees were literally bound to the job and only allowed one night a fortnight off, with one afternoon every other week.

It must have been a rotten job for a girl in those days and the opportunity to meet the opposite sex was limited... what else could a girl of eighteen to twenty do, but read her 'Pegs Paper' and dream of her lovers... and of course it must be remembered, just as I was in complete ignorance as to life, in reality a girl of twenty knew only what she picked up from others and what she could think up herself.

Meeting the man of ones dreams was in those days 'to live happily ever after...' there was no thought of problems for it was supposed that the marriage state was one of everlasting bliss full stop... not knowing exactly what the bliss was made of the dreams of it all the more exciting and thrilling.

I would go so far as to say of the more sophisticated youth of today, that knowledge must surely have taken some colour from such roseate dreams and perhaps with such a clinical outlook on love and marriage the thrilling prospects, the mystery is lost.

It would seem however at twenty some dim knowledge was known, and it was probably due to instinct rather than that from a source of proper information, hence the mystic surrounding the subject made it the sweeter to contemplate.

One hears that such ignorance brought in its wake fearful complications, the least of which was pregnancy. Unwanted pregnancies could scarcely be avoided when the participants were ignorant of the facts of life and lived in a society which was hypocritically supporting anti abortion, hence encouraging the back street operator with all the sadness and high death rate which was inevitable.

As a generation we suffer from the ignorance that was rife. We were brought up to think sex dirty and we never really thought it otherwise for many years after reaching adulthood.

Even now some of the generation feel guilt and do not like to hear bawdy stories... some of us believe lovemaking is our private world and we fear to be seen kissing, let alone being more intimate, and that feeling has been known to mar married life and the participants go through life with a guilty conscience. At the same time whilst advocating knowledge, I cannot help but think that in some ways the mystical relationship having lost its mystery has lost its sheer beauty and is regarded by many as a mere animal instinct.

Could a knowledgeable boy of 1975 thrill to the nearness of a girl he is attracted to as I did? Would he not know why he thrills, and so destroy the mystery?

After fifty years I can recall in every vivid detail the thrill of just touching my teacher's toothbrush... I can feel the thrill of watching the sun glinting in her hair as she bent over her books on the high desk in front of the classroom, I can recall with sheer excitement the way my heart bounded when I asked my first girlfriend to come out walking with me... my heart stood still during the moment of the leading up to asking her, and it stopped completely whilst I waited for her reply.

Dolly Atkins was a very plain girl and I can no longer remember what she even looked like. She most

certainly did not have sex appeal as we know it now... it was just the sheer mystery of life and being on the verge of a beautiful unknown which thrilled... which stopped the heart, and caught the breath.

By the time I had met Rita being twenty six I was no longer ignorant even though still a virgin, and whilst the feelings experienced when I asked her to walk out with me will never fade from my memory, nor the beauty of the moment die, it was not like the deep mystic feeling experienced when I put the same question to my very first girl, but was a feeling tempered with a little if scanty knowledge.

Boy/girl meeting boy/girl today thrill because they know what the beauty of a face means, what shapely lips are for, what lovely legs mean, what a beautiful figure means.

I only knew I had come up to a 'fence' in life and was taking a step into a mystery world.

I wonder which was the best? For my part I prefer life in this respect to be as it was... it held many beautiful precious moments and my heart can even yet falter when I pause to let my mind go back. There was beauty in innocence.

I have strayed from the path my story was taking... perhaps this was because I want to place you in the atmosphere I lived in when at twelve years old I was subjected for a brief time the thrill of life... when I thrilled in every fibre of my being for something I did not know about... experiencing joy, fright, guilt, wrong doing and causing frustration without knowing it and this in turn heightened Mona's beauty and deepened the look in her eyes so that the sight turned my heart right over.

It was many days after that first incident before Mona spoke to me again more than she had to do in common talk. Her very aloofness thrilled me... angered me... made me feel sorrow... yes, even anguish... for she gave Doris her undivided attention and that little so and so enjoyed my obvious discomfort, for she knew Mona gave me little extras she did not usually receive even to pulling a horrid tongue at me when Mona kissed her and left me without.

This could not go on forever and I would ask Mona why she did not love me any more. 'What have I done, or said that has angered you?' I would ask plaintively and Mona would snap at me and look right through me and tell me coldly to get on with my homework.

I missed walking to the park when she would let Doris run on ahead and with her arm around my shoulder would walk slowly and more slowly behind... I missed her laughing voice directed at me and the funny stories she told me, and being two years older than Doris I was sore that I was packed up to bed at the same time... as senior I thought I had the right to stay up a while longer than her.

Mona used to let me and it was in those brief minutes earned by my seniority that I knew happiness. I was sorry the silly kissing incident had brought it all to an end.

It began however as suddenly as it had ended and it was brought about because Doris was naughty one day and had to be punished accordingly and Mona perhaps to spite Doris for her waywardness turned her attention to me once more and illustrated this by hugging me and kissing me in her presence where once she had reserved that pleasure for Doris.

I was delighted of course and lost no opportunity telling Doris so and soon all was back to normal and we were friends again.

The following weeks reached their own delight again and walks in the park to the lakeside (Newsham Park) became highlights of joy to me with Mona walking slowly along with her arm on my shoulder and Doris bounding ahead heedless of my laughing responses to Mona's funny stories.

Mother and Mr Cairns (funny thing, we never did call him dad) had cause to have to go up to Edinburgh for a few days, he to attend a window dressing conference about the new Burton shop then opening in Princess Street and mother just going along with him for company.

Since our return HOME as a family mother had never left us for more than a few hours at the most and Mona would be there to look after us. This was to be the longest time she would be away.

She must have thought the girl competent and indeed I think she was for I have no adverse memories of the times she had the task of watching over us, indeed they were happy and carefree times and we had much more liberty than when mother was in command, we had much more candy and could stay up later at night and Mona had a fund of jokes and stories to tell us both, we could not help but be happy sitting before the cheery fire, clad in our nightclothes, stealing this delicious extra time before bed.

Mother had been gone two days when Mona having cause to again remonstrate with Doris had sent her earlier to bed. Tears had followed but to no effect and this was her way of administering discipline and Doris knew it and soon the house was silent and it was so lovely being tucked up on the big sofa before the fire and able to share Mona's laughter alone.

I suppose it was perhaps me that started the incident off for a second time but it was all unknowingly and without any plan... I was happy enough that all that was over and we were all good friends again and it was in my saying so to her that started it all off again.

'I'm glad you are friendly with me again Mona. I am sorry, truly sorry I made you mad at me, although I

really don't know what I did.'

'You were a very silly boy' she said, looking up from the book she was reading. 'I thought you were frightened and would tell your mother what we had been doing, and so I was determined I would not let you do it again and by keeping you at a distance you would forget, and in forgetting it would lose its importance and you would forget to say anything about it to anyone.'

'I wasn't going to tell, Mona' I cried aghast. 'I liked you kissing me and even if I had told mother I do not think she would have been mad at you, she knows how much you love us both and how kind you are to us. But you had asked me not to tell and I had promised you I would not. Why wasn't I to tell mother?'

Even before the question was formed I think I knew the answer for a feeling of adventurous guilt swept over me and I realised that what had passed between us must ever remain a secret and I knew then that I would never tell... and I think at the same time this girl knew I had liked the secret and would never tell anyone.

Mona went on reading and for a while I was content to watch the blazing coals and bask in the warmth of the fire, then I became aware that she was not reading, but was looking at me sideways and turning I caught her eyes on me and she laughed and put her arm around my shoulder and held me close but very gently.

'Oh you are a silly whelp she said... I liked seeing you look all forlorn when I was not speaking to you. You did miss me talking to you didn't you?'

I snuggled into her 'Yes and I missed you walking with me in the park and I was mad when you walked with Doris and when you sent me to bed at the same time and you never laughed with me anymore...'

'Yes and didn't kiss you anymore,' she broke in with a mimic laugh... 'I think you liked being kissed more than you admitted young man... I think you know more than you pretend to know'.

'You did say once that you would show me I accused and in saying so some signal in my mind warned me that I was approaching that same ground again and far from stopping I felt a strange elation and went on remorselessly... you cheated me you never did show or tell me any more... I dare you to give me another kiss with your tongue.'

'What a cheeky imp we have got tonight' she cried pulling away her arm and looking at me with obvious mock severity... I knew that look, it was one she used when threatening to put Doris and I to bed for pulling some trick on her as we were oft prone to do.

'You would be scared stiff again I bet' she said with a lovely little laugh that thrilled me in its very happiness for it indicated we both had returned to our former footing and all was now indeed well with our... my world.

'I would not' I said indignantly. 'I wasn't frightened before, it was just that you hugged me so tight that I could hardly breathe, and you had never kissed me like that before and it was a surprise. Where did you learn to kiss like that?'

It's sloppy but it's nice too... if I promise to be good will you give me another like that... not tonight... but when I have been good. I would love to tell mother to kiss me like that, but then she would think I had gone all soppy.'

'And she would want to know how you knew how to kiss that way my lad' she interrupted with some asperity

'I don't think I will ever do that again' and started to read but only for a moment and then turning to me again she announced it was time I went to bed... 'I will give you one kiss only before you go' and the book fell on the floor and she placed her arms around my shoulders and with a laugh drew me close to her and pecked my cheek then pushed me away with the command to get off to bed. 'You are a bad influence on me' she cried. 'It is a pity you were not a few years older... go on, off you go.'

She stood at the foot of the stairs watching my slow progress upward and seeing the evident disappointment on my face as though in mitigation for what she had done she said quietly 'Do not disturb Doris Willie, you can go into your mother's room tonight.'

I gave a whoop of joy for such a gesture meant I had been supremely good and it was an award usually given to Doris. I hastened to the big bed and feeling like the king himself was soon lost in its soft depths and sleep was overtaking me.

Perhaps it was just before sleep claimed me, I lay looking in the shadows cast on the wall from the lamplight outside the window and thought of the strange excitement of Mona's kiss and my reinstatement into her affections. I found myself dreaming wild dreams of my being a knight of old on a big horse and I was galloping headlong through a forest of shadows with first my teacher Miss Qualtrough riding with me, then surprisingly it was Mona.

My favourite dreams were always of being either a knight in armour or a daring Viking looking for the Inchcape bell off the misty Scottish coast.

My most frightening dreams were of being on old Romes bridge across the Tiber and of fighting a lost

battle with hordes of giants who wanted to get over the bridge and into the town.

In such dreams Miss Qualtrough whom I loved, and who had recited that poem of Macaulay to me originally, would always be sitting on the wall above the gate cheering me on to victory and I was always afraid she would fall off amongst the giants and I kept on looking up at her anxiously to ensure she wasn't falling and that she was safe... when I did that the giants would get in close and the cut and thrust of our swords would become hectic.

In this dream tonight as we drew near to the bridge Miss Qualtrough jumped from the saddle and scaled the wall to her seat above the bridge and when I looked upward towards her she had become Mona and I think I must have shouted out a warning for I suddenly woke up scrabbling at the voluminous bed sheets... and Mona was truly there at the bedside... my shout must have brought her from her own bed... or perhaps she had not yet gone to bed for I do not know how long I had been asleep and the street lamp was still lit but now Mona's shadow was merged with the others dancing on the wall

That was it, she was just getting ready to go to bed for I could see she was in her nightgown. I reached out and grabbed her arm... 'I must have been having a dream I muttered... what time is it?'

'You will wake Doris up if you go on like that' she said 'and then there will be ructions if she finds I have let you sleep in your mother's bed instead of her. I will put out the landing light and close the door just in case you shout out again.'

She pulled her hand free and moving around the bottom of the bed she reached for the door and swung it to. 'There' she said. 'That is better' and she came back to the side of the bed and bent over me and kissed me. There was nothing extraordinary about that for Mona always kissed Doris and myself goodnight when finally we were tucked up in bed, but lately without knowing just why, I had found that her kiss was something to look forward to, and I would tingle in anticipation of that moment at bedtime. Now by myself in mother's huge bed glowing with the pleasure of its softness and its cosy warmth, the pleasure was something I was mentally hugging to myself and I didn't want the moment to end.

Perhaps it was because of the recent painful rift and her pointed leaning towards Doris with her favours that made me want to hold the moment longer than usual, and hold it I did. I held her hand tight and then I became aware with a great feeling of happiness that she was not taking her hand away but was standing stock still at the bedside looking down at me, then she again leaned over me bending her head down to me and placed her other hand in mine and she was drawing me slowly towards her, and this time the kiss was very different, it was like that kiss she had given me weeks ago before she ceased to be friendly and it was a long breathtaking one.

It seemed to last for ages and ages and was so sweet I didn't want her to remove her lips and to prevent it I put my other arm around her neck and drew her nearer to me and she sank down on the edge of the bed letting my face rest on her bosom.

After a while, she gave a little shudder and said 'It's very cold here Willie, do you want me to stay with you? Should I sleep in this big bed too?' and without waiting for my answer she drew aside the clothes and eased herself into bed beside me and soon was holding me strongly to her, with both her arms tight around me and pressing me close into her soft body and kissing my lips and face, her hair loosened from its habitual 'bun' tickled me and I struggled very briefly in order to get it from my face... she brushed it aside then settled down with me tucked into her side and together we watched the shadows moving on the wall opposite the window, shadows of the faint moving curtains in the street lamplight.

I could feel her heartbeats and they were fast beats, much faster than mine. Her breast was so soft and made a nice comfortable pillow. Wasn't I the luckiest boy in the world I thought... this was like heaven and just like those brief periods when mother had let me lay in bed with her... she too was all soft and cuddly... but somehow this was strangely better.

'Your heart is beating awfully quickly' I said 'does it always move fast like this Mona?' I pulled her hand over my heart and said 'Look, feel my heart, it is not as fast as yours is.'

She didn't speak at all except to hush me for talking too loud, but she did put up her hand to her heart and fidgeting for a moment she then took mine and laid it hard on her breast over her heart and I could feel it racing.

She had opened her nightgown and my hand was now on her bare breast. Only then did she speak.

'You must promise me you must not tell anybody I have let you do this... Willie... promise me you won't.' Her voice was low and urgent and she began pressing my hand hard against herself and moving it up and down on her bare breast and her breathing was coming faster. I hardly heard what she said when she asked me to lean over and kiss her breast and without waiting for my reply she pulled me closer and placed my face to her bare bosom and I kissed her, and liking this very much kept kissing her softness, flooding with a strange but utterly sweet sensation.

She was still without words and yet she was absorbed in what we were doing and it seemed to have some

importance and urgency in it, her breathing was very audible now and every now and then she would take in a deep breath and shudder right down her body, then 'Willie, if I let you kiss both my breasts will you promise really truly you won't tell your mother when she comes back? I have never let anybody do this to me before and it is awfully sweet don't you think so... Do you like it? Do you want to kiss me like this? Are you going to promise me that you won't say a single word... not even that I slept with you? That is very important, because if you cannot promise I must leave you and go away to my own bed for what we are doing is really wrong and if your mother knew she would send me away... Do you want me to go?' With my face hidden in the perfumed haven of her naked breast I made my promise and with a strangled voice begged her not to go away.

'I want to do this every night it is so nice and you are so soft and lovely... you smell terribly nice.'

She sighed in contentment and fumbled with the fastening of the buttons of her nightdress and tried to pull the neck of it lower so that I could kiss her other breast, and although I tried to help her it couldn't be done, then with a gesture of impatience she sat up and drew her nightgown fully over her head and threw it away onto the floor and completely naked now she settled down with me again and pulled me half over her body and pressed my face into her bosom and soon I heard her breath coming faster and faster and she was pressing me tighter and tighter to her.

I was getting a little frightened, she had become so strong and she was not listening to my weak protests. I couldn't talk because she kept kneading my face into her and once I heard her say almost angrily 'Kiss me... Kiss me hard damn you' and that really startled me and when I tried to draw away from her she placed her leg across me to hold me more firmly.

Her body was moving all over the bed and once she seemed to be right over on top of me and I could feel her whole body writhing above me and try as I would I could not escape although I was truly frightened now and was struggling hard against her. I even got one hand free and tried to hit her face but she caught the hand and pinned it to my side laughing and now kissing my bare shoulder for she had managed to tear off my jacket and I could feel her nakedness against my chest.

Those moments lived in my memory forever... still very vivid in all my waking and nearly sleeping moments... her smoothness... her scented breasts her panting breath. Her legs were wound around my body and she was moving again hard and frighteningly

My struggles stopped and she murmured thank you in my ear then her movement became rapid again and leaning over me she suddenly stiffened right out and crushed me hard against her, then heaved my body up and over on top of her with my back against her. Her legs were wound round me tight and she was sobbing and moving and kissing me and trying hard to turn me over... then suddenly a big deep sigh and her body became still... I could hear her gasping breath and her head was turning from side to side on the pillow... then she was still... very still... with only her rapidly beating heart, and her hands which moved lazily up and down my body which was still laying on top of her (wrong side up*).

'I'm sorry I frightened you Willie' she suddenly murmured out of the stillness. 'I liked feeling you against me so much I got too excited and forgot you.'

'Did I hurt your face Mona?' I asked remembering I had tried to hit her in order to escape. 'No silly... but I knew that was when you started to get frightened wasn't it?'

'Yes I said... It was silly of me because I know you wouldn't hurt me purposely I won't ever try to hit you again, honest I won't... will you let me kiss you better?'

'Of course I will silly... but you will have to turn over you are laying all funny and you will not be able to kiss me like that will you?' And gently she moved me over her so that I was above her face and could reach her lips and I found they were wet... she had been crying... was crying now very softly... quietly... and she kept saying over and over again... please don't tell anybody about this will you. It was awfully wrong and I am sorry and promising, I was kissing her mouth gently and she was quiet, just holding me against her and my heart seemed full to bursting and I was aware of the lovely feeling sweeping through me, being pressed so gently to her... Her legs were moving against me and she was saying to me 'press hard... press hard...' and pressing, I could no longer stop. Her arms tightened around me and she tried to move her body under me taking care to be gentle. I could feel all of her beneath me... her breasts in my face and her soft tummy against me... she tried to pull me lower down but it was so sweet like it was I just resisted and pressed against her tummy harder and harder... I was suddenly drowned in a strange sweetness... and she was kissing me frantically, my face, my lips, my shoulders... my body was rigid with this terrific feeling. When I awoke I was alone in the huge bed and feeling cautiously about me I found I had pyjamas on... I could have sworn otherwise... was it all a frantic dream. Had Mona really come to bed with me and kissed me... fondled me... I felt happy and now terribly shy at going downstairs to face her... she had taught me something... she had opened the Book of Life for me and I would never be a youngster anymore...

Thinking of the incident last night my fears were uppermost... the fright I had felt when Mona seemed to

act so strangely prevented my remembering anything that was nice.

Mona came into the room 'Time to get up my lad, you will be late for school.'

She was smiling as always and drawing aside the curtains letting the sunshine in I saw and wondered how composed she was... it was as though nothing had happened.

Relief flooded over me it must have been a dream... It was a dream... all of it. I leapt out of bed and started to dress 'hurry up' she cried, 'Doris is already having breakfast' and she flounced out of the room her skirt swirling about her and on her face a red blush and her eyes were laughing... Had it been a dream? I had never noticed Mona's skirt before, much less her attractive swelling bosom. I had never really been aware of her perfume... suddenly the world seemed to become a wonderful place and I was singing as I completed dressing. My heart was singing as I dashed down the road to catch the tramcar to Albany Road and school and later sitting in my desk looking up occasionally from my work I was aware of Miss Qualtrough sitting on her high desk... and for the first time I was acutely aware of her figure, her legs, her eyes and the sun glinting in her hair.

Whether I had dreamed or whether last night's Mona had been real didn't matter anymore... She had shown me something precious... and it was a very lovely morning.

*After forty years I have learned this was so.

It is now over a week ago since I wrote the last page, and reading it many times in the interim I have been inclined to tear it up, for it reveals a part of the inner me that perhaps I shouldn't reveal, and yet, is this not about my life and the times I lived in... Do not we all have some experience that is perhaps 'off key' and is not acceptable to the existing conventions... To write in such a manner at the time when I was a boy, when prudery and hypocrisy and ignorance went hand in hand, would have been unthinkable, whilst writing it now it is acceptable and in many ways expected.

The books we read, the daily papers flaunt sex at us from every page, and it would seem there is no such thing as secrecy anymore.

It is perhaps a sad moment for us for it was the secrecy and the hidden mysteries of life that made the world seem less mundane and one always felt poised on the brink of something that was so sweet in anticipation that it hurt... today youth knows at such a very early age what it is that is being anticipated... the sight of a shapely girl, a well formed leg, leads to clinical speculation whilst in my youth it sharpened the anticipation... but of what? ... we did not really know... it caused our hearts to race... yes just the sight of a toothbrush belonging to someone you cherished... just the touch of a hand from your idol... was sheer ecstasy and such moments were breathtaking.

Mona's behaviour and remember she was only about twenty, and was searching just as I for 'something' would be explained away as natural today, was that mysterious sweetness... and left alone with a boy must surely have been a sore temptation to learn... she had breathlessly explored my young body and her knowledge had advanced from speculation towards reality... nature, not to be subdued under such circumstances took her over and if the story could be told from her angle, her own needs had rushed her along willy nilly *** to that wonderful climax that is the very centre of life... her fear of exposure must have always been present in those moments until a stage was reached when she could not go back, when her mind taken over by sheer instinct drove her up and up and up towards a gasping moment when her world must have stood ecstatically still... and then she became aware of the small boy she was holding tightly and alarm was setting in.

She must have become aware that she had awakened me also and that instinct was demanding my appeasement... my appeasement was her salvation... if that could be brought about I would share the same 'guilty' secret with her... if she left me a frightened boy... I may very well speak of the moments to Doris, even to mother, or openly to her herself at an inappropriate moment when the secret she held could be shattered in revelation and so in guiding me towards the inexplicably sweet moment I became a 'guilty' person too and she was safe.

She knew I would not ask questions and that I would keep the moment locked away in my mind, and like herself would cherish it and guard it... the MOMENT was a joint secret... and so it remained.

There were two more episodes of equal joy and we both advanced in knowledge, in guilt... but try as she would she could never manage to get me to take the final step... the years between us... Twenty and twelve... needed far more skilful handling than she was capable of... she too must have been frightened to

take that final step and her hesitation must have radiated uncertainty... and fed my fright and guilt. Now in the evening of my life and knowledgeable I realise I must have caused her complete frustration... I can even feel for her those frustrating moments when I stubbornly resisted her and would go no further. She must be all of sixty years and even more than that now... perhaps sixty eight if she still lives... I do not think she could possibly ever forget those moments and they must have remained vivid in her mind just as they did in my own... her life must have been influenced in some subtle way from the experience for she was not a 'girl of the world' in those early days and her experience was I am sure her first... I wonder what happened to her... I would like to think she married happily and is yet alive with a family about her... I would like to think her mind goes back occasionally to that far off period when her innocence was ending and sweetness was beginning.

For myself the moments left vivid memory and influenced the rest of my life. I was left balanced on the edge of the unknown... I was left with a yearning for something I couldn't fathom... that something concerned girls... and I placed them all on very high pedestals, worshipped them... in my eyes every woman was something sacred, none could think base, nor do any wrong. If anything where women were concerned my world of fantasy that included the knight on a huge horse... an emblem of chivalry came to the forefront... and there was born into me an ability to have compassion, to think of others before myself... BUT I also became very shy of women... of girls and I still am very much so... I suppose it was because I was more than ordinarily shy with them that the 'affair' with Mona, if one can call it that, was the first and the last, and I was, as a result of that shyness, to be still untouched when I met and married Rita.

1926

In June of that year, I was thirteen and a half years old and without having achieved much in school other than being a favourite storyteller the time had come for mother to consider what was to become of me. Fourteen was the school leaving age and so January 1927 I would have to leave and start work. I had nothing in mind, I simply had not given it a thought. Having no father to prepare me for that eventuality the world of work was an obscure place.

Len Cairns apart from ensuring the family's comfort held aloof from such problems and it was left to mother.

I recall being in Church Street in town with mother one day and we passed a shop window which displayed posters inviting immigration to Canada and mother sent me in to obtain some literature. I studied these brochures for many days trying to visualise myself as a Canadian farmer running a huge tractor across a prairie deep in golden grain, but I found the 2d paperbacks of the 'Adventures of Robin Hood' more to my taste and so Canada lost a would be farmer... I do not think mother knew where to turn to get me established... she did not know the first thing about a man's world... I wonder if she experienced frustration with Len when on the subject for he most certainly could offer no solution and he would have been content to leave things as they were if I could have continued on at school it would not have made any difference to him except to remove from his mind an insoluble problem.

I seem to think in retrospect that he didn't even know how I could be kept on at school... he had no thoughts on a higher education for me... and he had no thoughts even to consider an apprenticeship in his own trade for me... He was a completely neutral figure in my life... perhaps that is why he remained just 'Mr Cairns' and not the closer personality 'Dad'.

Mother was ambitious as far as I was concerned, but she did not know how to set about getting me started. It was no doubt a lack of spare money that prevented her sending me to a higher school, if indeed my academic prowess was such that I could be considered.

Being only in Upper 4 when I left school, and one could go as high as Form 7, would indicate I was wanting in the necessary standard to enable me to be considered for further education.

The next feasible step in a boys life in those days was either to take up an apprenticeship with a garage or shop or whatever, or if intelligent to go in for a scholarship and ultimately a Grammar School. One could enter a Grammar School as a fee paying student, but I am to assume that as this was not considered money was the barrier.

I think mother's plans for me were ambitious in that she was determined I would have a better position in life than my own dad evidently had. I am sure that poor man was considered to be very low down the social scale most certainly lower than the Prossors and first and foremost mother was a Prossor and yet I do not recall her encouraging me to better myself by learning... It must be remembered that women of that day did not know much outside their own household sphere, and I honestly believe she was in a complete quandary as to what to do with me.

I was with her one day on the Landing Stage in Liverpool... I do not recall what we were doing there... I cannot recall that Doris was with us and so it must have been a school day and Doris was still at school.

It was a Friday I am presuming and when the Rock Ferry steamer pulled in it spilled out a horde of shouting bustling youngsters who raced away along the stage and up the sloping roadway to the tram terminus.

The youngsters were dressed in naval uniform and without a doubt they looked smart as they were hustled into line by a naval instructor and then made to leave the Stage in orderly fashion, heads held high, chests out, and arms swinging in time to the harsh command of the officer 'Left, left, left right left' I had been in the Sea Scouts and had worn a uniform such as this.

On the hat bands of these boys caps was emblazoned 'INDEFATIGABLE' not just the humble title 'Sea Scout'.

I do not know what contacts mother made after that incident but I can recall pressure commencing and before I realised it I was all for becoming a young sailor on a ship in the Mersey called the INDEFATIGABLE.

I went with mother to a building in south John Street, it was called Church House and at the top of a long flight of stairs was a small office. It was divided into an office proper and with the reception area separated by a frosted glass screen. There was a little sliding window in the glass screen and around the walls a wooden bench.

Mother knocked timidly on the little sliding window... there were some muted words with a girl secretary... and then a gentleman came... and closing the screen door he came out via a large glass door and seeming to tower miles above me looked down at me then shouted 'Attention lad when you face an officer' I gulped... mother nudged me earnestly and said quietly 'Do as the gentleman says Willie... stand to attention.'

The ogre surveyed my rigid stance 'Tummy in, bottom in, chin high' he literally roared... then turning to mother he announced 'Not big enough... how old? 'Has he ever been ill? Does he want to go to sea?... What for? ... Sea Scouts? You say that's not going to sea... Stand up straight boy... Can you box?'

The questions were fired broadside and without awaiting answers, he just roared on to the next set of questions (I was to hear this programme many times in the next two years, when as office boy, and sitting behind the glass screen I would laugh together with the typist at old Wally scaring the life out of all would be entrants. What we did not know at my interview was that Wally was actually scared stiff in case we got scared and fled from the office. I am sure he got a rake off for new entrants).

We were handed a bunch of papers to read and digest and told to come back Wednesday morning at 0915... '0915' questioned mother timidly.

'Yes, 0915, er quarter past nine to you marm' he roared, then slapping me hard on the back he shouted 'Stand easy boy' and he was gone.

If I felt relief when I left that office, I suspect mother did and one can well understand this. I looked at her and saw a smile on her face and a tear caught up in her eye... to her it was a moment of triumph... she had entered a man's world for a moment and had survived.

As we stepped aboard the tramcar in Church Street, a No9, she was laughing and sitting down just inside the door she said 'Why he almost had me standing to attention... what a frightful man.'

I agreed with her but could see nothing to laugh about... but getting off the tramcar at the top of Prescott Street, Low Hill, I walked across the road towards 34 Kensington with head high and chin in and felt ten feet tall... I was becoming a man.

I saw Joey Oscar and Norman Coates my school chums coming towards me, and I broke into a run and caught up with them.

'Joe, Norm, I am going to be a sailor' I cried. 'I'm going to live on board a ship in the Mersey and soon I will be going to sea as a Captain they say.'

'Gerraway' they cried in unison 'you lucky **** how did you get that?'

I told them of the way the 'Man' made me stand up to attention and roared at me., and do you know I couldn't hardly help laughing at him cos in my mind I saw he would have looked so ridiculous standing there and shouting like that cos he had a pair of long johns on underneath his trousers.

Mother had caught us up and asked what we were laughing at and Norman told her I had said Sir Francis Drake had worn out long johns on. 'Sir Francis Drake' she asked. 'What on earth are you talking about?'

'Didn't you notice that 'Draky' had long johns on mother? He had not tucked the left leg of them into his sock as he should do and when he showed me how to stand to attention the right way, his trousers were half up his leg and I could see the bottom of the leg of his long johns sticking out below.'

We all roared laughing and mother louder than us all, then in mock severity she said 'you shouldn't have been looking at his legs Willie, it was very rude of you.'

Promptly at 0915 on Wednesday morning we were back in 'Draky's' office and no time was lost getting through a medical examination. The 'Doctor' was a bald bespectacled man who could only keep on saying

'Grumpumph' whilst he punched at my back and then my chest and then he grabbed hold of my private parts and yelled 'Cough Sir.'

I did not know whether to cough or yell out... I am sure mother waiting in the next room must have thought I was being murdered.

From the doctor back to 'Draky' and this time he was sitting with crossed legs on a high chair at a desk and mother was sitting opposite him. He was holding forth on the advantages of going to sea, and looking down his hooked nose at me standing before him, he appraised me all over. I commenced to grin and he looked a little startled.

'What are you grinning about boy' he roared and I tried to put on a straight face but it was not possible. I think it suddenly dawned on mother what was the matter for she stood up flustered and all red and said hurriedly to the stupefied 'Draky' 'is that all Sir? I will fill in the forms and post them on to you.' She turned to the door and propelled me out hurriedly.

On the stairway she burst out laughing and I joined her. 'Oh what a silly man she said... I could see his long johns this morning.'

'Do all Admirals wear long johns, mother' I asked grinning,

Again the mock severity... then 'You will just have to become an Admiral and find out won't you Willie' and she gave me one of her very rare displays of emotion and placing her arm about my shoulder drew me to her in a big affectionate hug... and her perfume made me think of Mona... I blushed.

The morning the 'papers' came through the letterbox at Reynold Road was one that heralded great excitement for the information they gave was that I William Frank Bramhill aged thirteen and a half years of age, being born at 22 Kensington in the city of Liverpool in the year 1913, and being therefore proved to be of British nationality was to become a trainee seaman on the Training Ship INDEFATIGABLE which was stationed off Rock Ferry, Cheshire,

I was to be bound to serve for a period of not less than twenty four months commencing October 13th, 1926 and in that period I was to solemnly promise to apply my mind diligently to becoming a trained seaman to serve in either the Merchant service, or after twenty months to transfer to a chosen Royal Naval establishment whence I would take up training in the Royal Navy.

I was to be sworn in on board the said Training Ship at 4pm, 13th October and my parents or guardians were to pay a yearly sum of £13 towards my training and my provisions. Proud... I was a man.

They were bound over to promise to supply me with the approved uniform and to ensure that those items were worn by myself and that I was obliged at all times to be clean in appearance and to uphold the proud tradition of the INDEFATIGABLE. (It made no mention of the need to supply 'long johns' on the list of clothes my mother was to supply me with. I was left to presume that such honourable garments were worn only by senior officers and Captains).

I was rushed down to Canning Place and to the Seaman's Home wherein I was informed I would find a Naval tailor on the second floor. Mother took me along and clucked around me as first I tried on large pants and then small pants and finally arrived at the correct size nearest to my requirements (Mother would have to cut three inches off the bottom of the trousers... 'Your boy is too big in the arse and 'is legs are too small' contributed the bored tailor's assistant, and handing me a hat which was several sizes too big for me and handed mother a large paper bag bidding her fold it to a strip and place it inside the leather head band... 'then it will fit alright' then added ominously 'He will have no time to wear these fancy clothes lady... better get 'im overalls, in fact I would suggest you get 'im three pairs, he will need them... that ship's a regular work 'ouse it is.'

That evening, the 12th October, mother was busy getting my kit together and sewing and mending any of my private clothes that were allowable. These were packed into a voluminous white canvas bag and Mr Cairns lent himself to the task of painting my full name on the outside of the bag, and adding to the name the mystic symbol '77'.

The next day at 2pm I was promptly down on the landing stage and saying my last farewells to mother. I was dressed in my brand new ill fitting naval uniform and my shoes polished by Mr Cairns with R.A.M.C. thoroughness glistened and sparkled when along came 'Draky' all smart in Naval officers uniform, his chest ablaze with war medals and his cap at a rakish angle.

He looked me up and down with some ill disguised scorn then opened his huge mouth and bellowed 'Recruits for the 'INDEFATIGABLE' attention... I sprang to startled life and stood rigidly mute with eyes firmly fixed in front and arms rigidly at my side. 'Er right turn' bellowed the deep bass voice... 'Hat the double... MARCH... and being the only recruit that day I marched rigidly and proudly aboard the ferry boat HINDERTON followed by an equally rigid 'Draky' much to the amusement of many bystanders and to the giggles of a couple of young girls, when 'Draky' thrust me rudely aside as we marched in martial order down the sloping gangway on to the ferries deck and I smelled for the first time the haunting smell of

'ship' a mixture of tar and exhaust steam from the idling engines... that smell never left my mind and memory of it can still awake in me chords that race my heart and set my pulse working... At that moment I was stepping into my future... my head was high... I was proud... I was a man.

Soon the engines quickened their throbbing and the ferry slid away from the landing stage grinding her way past the rope fenders which hung over the side to protect her from contact damage... Mother waving to me seemed so small... so pitiable... and yet so proud of me... grew smaller with the increasing distance... and I felt tears coming to my eyes as I watched her turn lonely away and walk toward the sloping landing stage bridge which led up to the tramcar terminus... still waving a very inadequate white handkerchief.

The INDEFATIGABLE lay moored about two cables from the Rock Ferry foreshore and a similar distance from the cadet ship CONWAY, a truly old ship of the line possibly one of the last of the wooden walls who fought at Trafalgar, St Vincent, and the Nile, the type of ship that had known Nelson, Collingwood, and thousands of unsung lower deck heroes who had lived inside the wooden hell of their gun decks.

Such ships had gone only a couple of yesterday's ago with the Battle of Algiers and Navarino.

There is an admirable painting 'The last of the Temeraire' which records this type of ship's swansong. Such ships had been replaced by the Victorian ironclads, and such was the INDEFATIGABLE, herself now a ship from yesterday.

Both lay in the comparative peace of the backwater just out of the busy fairway to Bromborough and to Eastham locks and Manchester.

There was a healthy rivalry between the two ships, and this culminated at the annual boat race which was held in June of each year over a course between the Rock Ferry stage and the now disused stage at New Ferry.

It was a race that was evenly won over the years, sometimes Conway, sometimes Indefatigable.

When the latter ship won there was much rejoicing for she was the poor cousin.

The complement of Conway were boys from well to do families and they were officer material from the start, whereas the boys of Indefatigable were from working class families and sons of families who had lost fathers in World War I whilst on naval service, most were socially at that time not acceptable officer material.

Many however were to prove in the years ahead the fallacy of such a system, many did in fact become officers and many went beyond that point to become superintendents well known shipping lines.

The rivalry of the boat race was to extend down the future years into a rivalry in all fields and the Indefatigable was not hindmost.

If the boys were so inclined, the facilities for the necessary higher education was available and whilst the bulk of them leaving the ship after the prescribed two and a half year period went to sea as junior ratings, a fair proportion commenced their careers as cadets, taken on, in the main, by companies of good name, ie T&J Harrison, Clan Line, Brocklebank Line, Ellerman Line and some even found their way into what had hitherto been regarded as Conways preserves, ie D&O and B&I.

Plonky Whitham and 'Jos' Farmer were two good teachers in the field of maths and physics and navigation and their prowess was backed by the unquestioned naval discipline that ruled overall with an iron fist.

How many of the teaching profession today would envy such an atmosphere in which to work, how many of today's youngsters would benefit from the application of the discipline which at that time we boys hated so much but now in retrospect are glad it was applied.

The INDEFATIGABLE was an early iron class battleship the ex PHATON and whilst I have no details of her age at hand, I would say she must have been built about 1875. She was capable of being square rigged on the fore and main and had been a steam engined crew driven vessel.

She had sponsons, four on each side, which had housed guns, and whilst I do not think she could be classed as a three island construction she did have a fore and aft well deck, whilst outward signs indicated a continuous through build.

She had had a bowsprit, but I do not think she had ever had a ramming bulb forward. Between the forward and after well decks ran a continuous main deck and it was on this deck that divisions took place and the deck tuition classes were held.

At the forward end of the forward well deck, was the huge mess room which seated one hundred and eighty always ravenously hungry boys, whilst below that deck was located the wash places and aft of that ran a long continuous deck on which the boys lived in off duty times and at night slung hammocks for sleeping.

At intervals along this deck, in the centre line were huge openings, similar to hatchways and down below were located the school rooms. The openings ran up to the main deck the sides protected by a heavy gauge wire mesh which served the safety factor and also allowed light into the living or sleeping deck.

I suppose the schoolroom took up the spaces originally occupied by the huge engine and the boilers and possibly the store spaces and ammunitions lockers.

The 'Admiral' (Admiral Miller in my time) occupied quarters abaft the aft well deck and below were located the officers flats.

Parson Saunders our beloved 'sky pilot' occupied a large cabin built into the starboard after gun sponson the door letting out into the aft well deck, or aft square as it was called.

Situated in this aft square was the preserved figurehead carried by H.M.S PHATON when she had been in commission.

That figurehead and I got to know each other very well in my two and a half years sojourn.

What a heartbreaking time was the initial three months in the ship. I had never been thrown so willy nilly into the midst of so many boys before... I had never heard so much swearing before nor witnessed so much open thievery and bullying.

One could not sit still a moment in any place on the wide open decks, privacy simply did not exist. One tried to seek a haven in a corner in order to try to escape the 'horror' of the present by reading but this was an act that invited the 'running' thief. As soon as your book was out and you had started on the first sentence, there would be a rush of feet and somebody would come hurtling past you, pushing you over violently and with a snatch your book would disappear forever.

It was fruitless to chase the offender for the act was planned and in the chase if you so indulged in one, the coveted book changed hands many times and you invariably found yourself outraged catching the wrong boy and of course, if he was bigger than you, then invited an uncompromising clout across the earhole for your impertinence.

On the lower or sleeping deck in the cross alleyways which led between the wire gauge screens projecting the lower school rooms were lockers in which individual kitbags were stowed, each locker bore a number, mine being '77'.

These spaces were the happy hunting grounds for the thief who would watch you receive say a parcel or colloquially 'a pardog' from home by the morning post and he would watch you place it in your kit bag and laugh from a distance when you securely locked it up... once you had left the scene he would come in with a sharp knife and cut out the base of the kitbag and strewing the contents over the deck your 'pardog' would vanish forever.

It did not stop there... the instructor inspecting your kitbag locker every day as was the custom soon found your strewn personal belongings on the deck and a roar would announce the find... you would then be given a sail needle and twine and was made to repair the damage and receive a kick in the bottom for being an untidy wretch with your kit.

It did not take me long to learn the 'drill' you joined a 'gang' and shared your 'pardog' as they arrived, the rest of your 'gang' standing close about you affording you protection whilst you tore open the wrapping and took out the sweets and homemade cakes and sharing them out, with your protectors and ate them ravenously before an attack from a stronger gang than your own developed about your tight knit defence bracket.

Thus is paid you to belong to one of the stronger gangs although this meant a smaller proportion of your own 'pardog' for the leader and his mates took the lions share, and when they themselves got their own 'pardogs' you merely were required to form the defence ring and invariably being small and weak, got nothing from that at all.

Another source of 'horror' was the procedure for the morning and evening ablutions. In the wash places forward were some fifty wash basins and at wash time you took up a position in a queue behind a particular basin. Obviously the stronger boys, the bullies, got to the head of the queues whilst the meek tagged on behind, pushed further and further back until you stood forlornly last in the line, shivering with cold in the damp fetid atmosphere.

These were the days before the modern deodorant sprays. The system was such that the first boy at the basin had the 'right' to (I) give 'afters', this meant that regardless of position in the queue the boy given the favoured afters could then step forward and be second to wash. He in his turn could then give 'afters' to his chum. Additionally the first boy could also give 'tell off' and this allowed a second chum into the long line, the first boys 'tell off' came before the second boys 'afters' in that order.

You might wonder what all this was about, why worry, sooner or later you might think you yourself with patience would arrive at the coveted wash basin... you'd be lucky to find soap... you would be lucky to find even water issuing from the taps, and most assured if water was still forthcoming it would no longer be hot water.

Water was cut off from the wash place twenty minutes after the wash deck bugle had sounded. Prior to that bugle some one hundred and eighty boys would be poised on the touchline jostling for position.

The wash place stood at the foot of a very steep and narrow ladder which was inevitably slippery and wet from usage and when that bugle sounded the ensuing stampede would ensure your passage willy nilly down

the dreaded ladder without having touched one of the steps en route and woe betide you if in going down you stumbled and fell... one hundred and eighty feet would walk blindly and wildly over your prostrate body as you floundered helplessly on the deck at the base of the ladder laying in the stinking stale soapy water which gathered there in great pools.

The shouting, the foul language was indescribable, it was one continuous animal howl. Why?... the answer to that was wash time was strictly kept to twenty minutes and then down would come the instructor armed with a long cane and woe betide the lingering ones, they not only felt the sharp sting of the cane about their bare buttocks but were then urged after washing to clean up the appalling mess left in basins and on the slippery soapy deck.

Such a punishment meant late into the mess room for breakfast or if in the evening, for tea... this literally meant you got no tea at all for those ahead in the rat race simply scoffed the lot.

Extra breakfasts or teas were simply not on... the unfortunate simply went without and hoped to obtain a more strategic position next time.

Meals were the next horror. Breakfast consisted of two slices of bread with a thin spread of margarine. This was the same for tea. At breakfast each mess table was served with a large 'billy' of liquid that was called coffee in the morning and tea at night. There was no notable difference in taste.

If you belonged to a good mess, ie a mess table controlled by a bully and that bully was in good grace with the cook and his cohorts, then that mess was well looked after, and why shouldn't it be so, for our mess bully ensured that all his lesser mess mates paid him a levee each week, and this was subject to sharing with the galley for favours received.

Of course the weak ones on that mess merely paid up, but saw very little favours being given. The bully and his mates saw to that.

In hindsight, and bearing in mind that all the boys were between the ages of thirteen and seventeen, full of vigour, exploited to the full, and were growing lads, two half slices of bread thinly spread with margarine for both breakfast and tea was a little on the meagre side to say the least, and now as a seaman of many years standing and well versed with the practices of Ch Stewards as a tribe apart I don't doubt that the whole one hundred and eighty of us contributed to that particular steward in charge meeting quite adequately the expenses of his own Southport home and any subsequent rows of houses he may later have purchased.

I know I was always ravenously hungry and many of my contemporaries suffered likewise. We learned quickly not to be caught last in the wash house and thus be given the task of mopping up hence missing breakfast, and soon adapted ourselves to the routine of 'afters you' and 'telling off' and so ensured we were at least halfway along the wash house queue by the time we had three months experience. I myself was naturally slow... but after all I was on a training ship and I cannot deny I became well trained in mopping up wash houses before the 'penny' dropped and I myself joined in the fight for survival and made sure I was at my mess table in time to lay claim to my own two 'butties'.

Dinner was always a mystery... one never knew what to call the 'stuff' we were obliged to eat, but because we were always ravenous, it mattered little whether it was an ex Suffolk Punch or perhaps a St Leger horse that failed to make the grade. It was hot, and there was a goodly portion for all and that's all that mattered. It was some six months later before I discovered that our bully mess leader and his mates generally gave up their portion of dinner to us weaker ones, and that our weekly mess contribution helped this little gang to afterwards go up to the galley personally and get a meal on the table from the menu intended for the officers mess.

It took over a year to beat down this 'master' gang, because well fed they continued to be strong and so rule over us supremely.

Once or twice a year so the story goes, a certain Lord somebody or other out of kindness to us all would send along to the ship two or three large cases of venison, venison or deer meat, I believe it is, must be in a mouldering stage before it is cooked and eaten... most certainly the cases we received were well past that recommended stage and they would walk up the gangway themselves when they eventually arrived so alive with prime maggots were they upon arrival.

We had the task of going in the ship's motor boat to the Rock Ferry landing stage to collect this 'gift' when it appeared and for this chore there was actually a reward made to us by the mess bully for he would order us to ensure that the case designated for our mess did not arrive at the ship... it accidentally 'fell' over the side of the motor boat in transit... our reward? Four slices of bread at the next breakfast session.

Hunger was our main preoccupation in life. We would keep watch on the galley storeroom and watch where the keys were hidden at the close of the day and then we would 'borrow' them during the night and becoming expert 'commandoes' we would raid the locker and extract a couple of the 'long tome' loaves and a couple of cans of 'shaky' (evaporated milk) and with these items we made our 'Lune Loaf'.

The recipe for a good lunc loaf is to first scoop out the centres of the long tunc loaf, ensuring the outer crust remains intact, and place the scooped cut bread into a dish and pour the shakky over it and mix well, the proportion being two cans of shakky per loaf, then when well mixed in a nice gooey mess insert it back into the shell of the long tunc and seal up the open end, hide it safely away for forty eight hours and then with the aid of a good sharp sheaf knife cut off generous portions in one inch slices... I enjoyed those nocturnal meals so much I can muster up even at this age a distinct desire for a slice of lunc bread... it was sour and awful... but stolen illicit meals are always nice to share... and the adventure full of dangers, ie detection etc helped the appetite along... Lunc loaves were oh so sweet.

Money was in short supply, remember, we were boys from working class homes and our parents had little enough money for their own needs, with the wage earner of a family bringing in a mere two pounds ten shillings per week (£2.50 in present day currency).

The amount of pocket money forthcoming was infinitesimal, at most about a shilling a week (5p).

Mr Cairns my stepfather was in a supposed good job as the head window dresser and salesman of Burtons the tailors in Norton Street and he earned a good salary... £3 15 shillings per week (£3.75) and I received a weekly 10p as a result. In comparison with others I was classed as being well off.

Of this 10p I was forced to contribute 1d to the wash deck bully to buy 'afters' and 2d to the mess deck bully to ensure my rightful two slices of bread came my way, and if I chose to increase the fee by an extra penny I could be assured of getting a 'knocker' extra, ie an end crust of the loaf in addition to my regulation two slices.

In this way I soon found I could make up for my physical weakness by applying some cunning pressures and the extra slice of bread I was able to purchase in fact became a form of currency and I used it to buy 'telling off' hence from that moment assured I had purchased a stake in the 'afters you' and the 'telling off' system I freed myself from the drudgery of being last at the wash basin and hence the inevitable cleaning up the wash house and I could at last claim I was becoming a 'big boy' with two stakes in the wash house queue. Life was becoming distinctly sweeter.

The weekly parcel that mother sent to me was the next item to receive attention. It invariably contained cake, biscuits, the weeks comic papers, and a weekly magazine called 'Boys Own'.

This latter magazine I found was much in demand and as I was not yet strong enough to beat the bullying thieves who would not let me find a resting place in which to read the book in peace I decided to trade it in for further favours and so bought myself 'protection' to be able to preserve my 'pardog' against all comers. I simply bartered my magazine holding with one of the toughest boys and in return was made a member of his gang and ever after I was able to open my weekly pardog without interference and to enjoy its contents without it resulting in too much indigestion.

New boys were obliged to do three months on board ship before obtaining a weekend leave pass, and never did three months move ever so slowly.

I was homesick every day and would spend all my off duty hours crouched in the mid starboard window and stare longingly at the distant Liver buildings. The sight of them represented 'home' for me and I allowed my tears to flow without shame in the solitude I had managed to procure in that out of the way sponson window.

I can never remember a similar agony to that of the homesickness I experienced. I hated my new life, I hated the constant bullying, swearing, thieving and need for the constant application of cunning which made my miserable life bearable.

I hated the sight of the river, the ships, the foreshore opposite the ship on the Rock Ferry side and I would watch people walking on the sands and think with an aching heart, 'Oh if I was only one of them for a while... I could catch the Rock Ferry boat home from the pier and then the No10 tram from the Pier Head and I would soon be home...' but it was all useless dreaming... and so all I could do was try desperately to hold back tears and swallow the horrid lump in my throat.

If I could wangle myself in getting a place on the motor boat crew I thought this would be great... I would then have an opportunity of escaping. The motor boat made eight trips a day to the Rock Ferry pier to bring the mail and any passenger personnel whose job it was to visit the ship during the day.

I noticed the boat would sometimes stay over at the pier for over an hour at a time, moored at the rear of the small landing stage, whilst the lucky devils crewing her could spend their time in the 'saloon' on the pier working the fruit machines or having a cup of 'lunc' (sweet tea) with the pier hands, or chatting up the 'pansies' (Conway boys).

All this however was fruitless dreaming for I found that to belong to the motor boat crew one had to have done at least twelve months service on board and to have got beyond the desire to escape.

At last there came a break and I seized it eagerly. I found out that within the next three weeks (I had been some six weeks on board) there was to be Confirmation.

The order of the day announced that any boy who would undertake to be Confirmed at the coming service could have his parents come on board to the service which was to be conducted by no less a person than the Bishop of Liverpool.

I entered my name 'volunteering' to be Confirmed and duly had to take evening classes under the tutorage of our 'sky pilot' the Rev Sanderson.

I worked hard at the scriptures and soon became one of the 'apples' in the Rev Sanderson's eye.

The outcome of my diligence in reading the scriptures however was to serve me little purpose for the service of Confirmation never took place and I never learned why, and so my parents did not arrive at the ship as planned. I was then obliged to turn my interest in other directions.

In trying to portray life on the INDEFATIGABLE with its complement of 201 boys, I am already aware that I am missing that which 'made' the atmosphere, that was the incredible noise that went on from 0600 when the first notes of the bugle sounded reveille to the last whimpering sighs that died with the mournful notes of 'lights out' at 2130 each night.

Our day started with the harsh notes of Reveille played sometimes very well, sometimes almost akin to the noise one would expect from a strangled cat in its last throes, depending upon which of the members of the ships band was on 'call' duty that day.

Sometimes it would be one of our prize taking buglers, more often than not however the unpleasant duty was floated on to the youngest, weakest boy in the band, and providing he could at the outset 'blow' the instrument, he invariable was so homesick, so miserable himself, he put into the exercise all the pains he was feeling, his emotions, his fears, and his anger and one can well imagine the horrendous noise that resulted and which went on for a full three tormenting minutes, ripping through the silence of the hammock decks, a raising wailing cacophony of sound that was guaranteed to drag the most reluctant sleeper to the surface of reality in the shortest of time.

Right on the heels of this awful din came the harsh commands of the duty night officer whose voice could be heard first in the distant 4th Division quarter a sound accompanied with the crack of a whacking cane against the canvas sides of the individual hammocks, and which grew louder and more violent as the officer now thoroughly enjoying his job raced amongst the slung hammocks the whole length of the decks shouting 'Come on now you lubberly sons of bitches, rise and shine, rise and shine me boys, don't you know Maggie Weston's got a baby... Come on rise and shine I tells yer... You might breaks your mother's bleeding heart but you won't break mine you baskets... Come on you scruffy lot, out of them flee pits and down to wash yourselves... last out is first up the cap and a nice morning it is for it too! Whack, Whack, would sound the applied cane as he raced from the port side to the starboard side along the narrow passage made at the end of each row of slung hammocks... Come on me bully boys... rise and shine, lash up and stow'

This raucous outburst was followed in the first seconds of time by a blessed silence... then a murmuring of protest, spreading along the decks first akin to a soft breeze in the shrouds and mounting rapidly to the sound of a roaring gale as each boy leaped from his slung hammock and added to the rising din by calling out loudly to his particular mates 'to get cracking'.

Each of us would then be caught up in the frantic race to dress, to stow our blankets neatly folded into the narrow confines of the yet warm hammock, and then to seize the hammock lashing and 'lash' it up with eight regulation spaced turns into the form of a tightly packed sausage, undo it from the hammock rail and leave it over your shoulder and race away with it to the stowage boxes which were situated, one at each end of the quarter or the deck you occupied. The noise became bedlam... with rushing shapes hurtling hither and you, bumping and pushing, screaming and yelling curses as each fought their way to the stowage pens with the unwieldy canvas sausage shaped hammock draped over shoulders, being used as battering rams against the tardy ones, and meeting in the rush forward the tide of early birds who having stowed their hammocks now raced back to grab towel and tidy box in which one kept his soap and toothbrush etc and seek with desperation to get first in the wash place queue at the head of the menacing slippery ladder leading down to the dank smelling wash house forward.

Already one could hear the chanting of 'Afters you Pongo' or 'I hope your 'tell off' as the half asleep boys struggled for position in the writhing queue, some more awake than others making free use of a knotted towel to fight their way through to a better place in the vital line up.

The din, started with such suddenness each morning never abated during the rest of the day, it was one continuous roaring, which tore at the ears of the new boy, filling him with fear and wrenching at his homesick torn heart, while to the more seasoned boy it became an accepted background noise to which he paid little attention as he fought grimly with the others for the many places of advantage during the rest of the day... first in the mess queue... first to the Divisions muster line... first to the class study line... first to the few scattered benches that stood on the main deck and offered to the lucky few a welcome breathing

space for a few precious moments where they could sit and catch their panting breaths, and hurriedly tidy themselves up in a welcome vacuum of space.

Even these few seats became the objects of the 'telling off' and 'afters you' rule, and boys would gather around each one in jostling writhing queues, the bullies to the forefront, the weaker to the rear, often without any hope of being able to sit at all for time for sitting soon ran out and the stampede in another direction would recommence.

Communications between the boys was basic and consisted of yelling out the addressee number in a loud voice, it had indeed to be a very loud voice to get over the din and each strove to out shout each other.

This form of communication went on all day long, and you found that most of the time your ear was always at 'half cock' in case you were being summoned by somebody or other. Incredible din was the daily pattern, the foul language, its accepted tapestry. There were high pitched voices, deep voices, braying, squealing, menacing voices, howls of pain and protest as some unfortunate ran into one of the accepted bullies or foraging gangs that roamed the decks preying on others from a very early hour.

The islands of blessed silence, other than when all slept, was when all were seated in the respective classrooms and under tuition, and then all one could hear was the droning voices of the instructors and the wavering replies from pupils held in rein by the rigid discipline applied during instruction periods, or when the strident notes of a bugle would cut through the tumultuous sound, which would cease as though cut through with a sharp knife, and the voice of the summoning officer could be heard issuing his orders of the day for his class or another class.

Some of the orders issued, like 'Tuck shop open, come and get it' or 'Mail on board, come and get it, would ensure the peace being broken at once by first the rushing of scores of feet and then the inevitable rising cries of joy, anger, bullying, simple addressing to others, squeals of pain, anger, as the cacophony of incredible sound reached new and higher decibels.

Lights out at 2130 brought blessed relief... Discipline ensured the strident notes of the last bugle of the day was instantly obeyed... not a whisper was allowed... and soon the ever present undertones of padding bare feet died away.

The little darlings were at last swung high and snug once more in their hammocks... and the only sounds were snores... or sobs from some wretchedly homesick boy who blessing the peace that now enfolded him before sleep came along, pressed his face into his pillow, and in the privacy of his canvas world allowed tears to flow without interruption... without shame... in those moments of blessed privacy I found thoughts of my home and those who loved me, brought me a sweet aching pain that was almost like a drug in its effect... tears would well up in my eyes... my mother would stand before me in a shimmering hazy light, a veritable angel, even Doris my sister assumed a vision that tore at my heart strings, and dragged pain from me that was almost incredibly sweet in its private experience. Tears tasted of salt... even that taste was a pleasure I sought avidly... in those moments of being just me... before my sobbing breath heralded sleep and forgetfulness.

A new sound was impinging upon my consciousness that at first I was not aware of... a creaking of woodwork, the distant sobbing of an engine pump, the slapping of a racking tide against the outer steel hull of the ship... the wail of a disturbed seagull... such sounds were to be with me and loved by me for the rest of my life... such sounds without my realisation took over my disturbed thoughts... and lulled me into a final deep peaceful sleep.

Music is a certain way of recalling moments of the past in ones life. When we find ourselves humming a particular tune, inevitably our mind turns inward and our computer brain will tick over its main relays and bring forth a mind picture that in itself will cause either joy, or sadness.

The tune most capable of recalling those harrowing moments just described in my story... 'Pal of my childhood days, You've loved me well always... Since I was a baby, and slept on your knee... you sacrificed everything for me... Is there ever a way, I can ever repay... Pal of my childhood days... never fails to bring into my mind those harrowing painful moments and the taste of salted tears coursing down my cheeks... (At sixty three years of age, and with a varied hard grim life of experience abaft my lee rail tears flood into my eyes as I type this and the plaintiff melody of that forgotten tune surges through my mind brings sweet memories and a picture of mother as I saw her but who being very human was not really such a paragon... she was sweet to me... all mothers are... but she had very human traits... I never saw them at such moments... I never wanted to see them... The picture I made of her threaded the dull grey tapestry of my life in those days with glints of gold and joyous colour.

I remembered only her gently chiding voice... and recalled only love shining in her eyes... and in that grim ugly world that was now mine irretrievably... her womanly softness and protecting embraces. I would not shatter such a sweet picture... it was a focal point to which I anchored... it moulded my sentimentality... it taught me LOVE... understanding... sacrifice to others.. A belief in GOD... It made me strong in resolve to

be or try to be always an upright man... who am I that I should shatter such a beautiful memory and why should I try to... ugliness, greed, and selfishness is all around each one of us in our lifetime... memories like this are an oasis, even though they may be only mirages, and they help us to remember to give love... to understand feelings in fellow humans... to understand the problems of my wife, my sons, and understanding to give help, to be ever trying to be selfless and guilty if sinning.

It is feelings like this that were born in the womb and which keep MAN above the animal.

All part of the training received on board H.M.S INDEFATIGABLE.

I was trained in many other ways also, and more so I learned very early how to survive in spite of my weakness and stature, my cowardice at facing the bullies who ever pressed upon me because my obvious weaknesses gave them a vicious delight in tormenting me. I JOINED THEM. We, the new boys always joined them... if we had not done so... the future new boys would never have experienced the hell on those decks... a hell that brought out the best in them... and made them into men.

I would like to think I was not so cruel... I forbore swearing... I was not prone to being in my turn a bully... I would like to think that somewhere in this world today is a once new boy who still remembers how I tried to help him and be kind to him... self preservation is a strong motive for any action and life became decidedly more comfortable as I learned the basic lessons and applied them.

Before long I was a favourite in the 'telling off' pattern and later into the coveted 'afters you' system. No longer did I have to fear the lash of the instructor catching me at the tail end of any queue, nor know the ignominy of cleaning up the dank smelling wash place before breakfast, nor missing my place in the mess and my guarantee of obtaining my meagre breakfast slices of bread.

I was soon a member of the 'Lune' parties and helped to steal the loaves and the tins of 'shaky' milk that made the delicious 'lune' loaves. I found I had a voice and could bellow and bray with the best of them. I did not join the roving bully gangs nor waylay the hapless boys with their treasured weekly 'pardogs' I found that the application of kindness and help, an activity not always genuine on my part, but well meant... got me a part of the coveted 'pardog' or enabled me to obtain a book to read in a quiet moment. I learned that there was more to be obtained by winning the respect of the weaker member than by bullying him and I found in this way I grew in stature well pleased with myself and my growing popularity and this in turn led to a peace in mind so that I was at last able to turn outwards and commence learning that which was useful in life and which was there for the absorbing given by patient well meaning officer instructors.

These people had ceased to be ogres in my mind and recalling the task they had I feel every respect for the way they went about the business. I wonder just how during a day they coped with the eternal noise.

My own circle of friends increased.. There was 79 Lewis (St Helens) and 73 Stelfox the latter a sly but well meaning fellow. There was 248 Evans (Knotty Ash) and 51 Fisher, a tall lanky spotty faced youngster who was always up to something that was advantageous to himself, full of the cunning his shore environment had forced upon him as he strove to survive. We called him 'Liver' after the tall building that dominates the Liverpool waterfront.

He was tall physically and by nature, lending his forbidding height and hence apparent strength in ready defence of a bullied younger member of the ships company. He was their hero and in their eyes could do no wrong. This was purely illusory for if he saw any advantage in a wrong doing he would not hesitate to so act. More about Liver later.

Carr was a quiet individual and of little intelligence and he soon made his mark with Plonky Whitham our maths teacher. Before he left INDEFATIGABLE he was to be rated as equal to any second officer for his knowledge and whilst like myself he left the ship and entered the MN as a deck boy, like me also he was in later years to obtain command.

We all belonged to the 2nd Division and contributed in many ways to uphold that divisions honour. We belonged to the Divisions boat crew and took part in the summer boat races either Division against Division or against the rival 'snotty nosed' CONWAY boys, boys who by reason of better financial circumstances were held to be our betters and who were serving from the beginning as officer cadets.

It was a personal matter of pride that drove us each year to beat them in the annual boat race and to ensure that our own picket boat was always smarter in appearance and handling than theirs was.

It was of course mainly a friendly rivalry. In later months as a member of the picket boats crew I met many of the year 1926-27-28 boys. I have often wondered in the years since how they eventually fared. At least many of that year's INDEFATIGABLE boys made progress and I was to meet many CONWAY boys who became officers in the years leading up to the WAR.

On board ship our one entertainment was to crowd into the Rev Sanderson's cabin in the evening. He was our ship's padre and a kinder man I have never met since.

I often wonder did he realise the balm he applied to our wounded feelings each day after a particularly wearing time. That he allowed us to literally crowd out his small cabin situated under the starboard after

gun sponson was akin to giving each one of us a glimpse of heaven in our otherwise hellish day. In that cabin we crowded his port settee and sat around the edges of his desk, squatted on the deck in a thick mass right up to the door. So dense was the packed cabin that unless you got in early when he 'opened shop' as it were, you just could not get in at all unless you could creep over prone contented bodies covering the floors from doorway to his huge desk.

The Rev Sanderson was an ex Naval padre and he had a fund of stories he would relate to us each evening. He listened to our own boyish jokes and allowed himself to become the brunt of our little tricks. From hindsight he must have seen them all before because boys of any age never change... we all think we are the originals... we learn fast, the padre's patience with us helped us along allowing us to continue to think we each were the greatest and only if we became too boisterous did he gently but forcibly chide us into shamed penitence.

Any one of us could seek him out during the day and spill our troubles out to him and in a quiet way those troubles disappeared and happiness was restored. He joined in our competitive games, took us ashore to the New Ferry football club's field and put us through our paces.

He took Holy Service each Sunday on board, his 'church' being the main classroom on the lower main deck. Every fourth Sunday we went ashore to church and he would lead us all proudly dressed and marching head high with naval precision up to the church steps hence he would bring us to single file and lead us into the cool and strangely silent interior.

Nobody ever tried to dodge his church parades, we felt by acting smartly and giving him a proud moment we were repaying him for his kindness to us during the week of nights when his privacy was blown wide open as we crowded into the confines of his cabin for relaxation.

We played cards, if enough deck space could be found, but most of all we just sat around the padre's desk and listened to his stories of his life in the Navy in wartime and he had a goodly fund of these tales which we never tired of.

Without those few hours of relaxation, away from the bleak decks and in the relative comfort of a cabin, our life on board the ship would have been really miserable.

We had a Rear Admiral for Captain but I only recall meeting him once. He lived aft in spacious accommodation set above the officers flat. Sometimes he had Mrs Miller on board for a while and sometimes his daughter, but although of our age she was a snooty girl and one was always aware that if she ever deemed to give you more than the merest glance it was a glance of scorn.

Class barriers were still very high in those days and a Rear Admiral's daughter was safely on the 'right' of the barrier and untouchable.

Looking back on that period now and at the activities of the so called 'Captain' I often wonder just what he really did, and if he did anything at all. Just how did he manage to keep out of sight so successfully?

As a Master now myself I would say he could not have been doing the job very well... I doubt he knew any of us by name or even number... To be a master properly, you simply cannot remain so aloof... perhaps he had done his bit in helping to win the 1914-18 war and this he considered was enough and the INDEFATIGABLE was a suitable resting place.

Patton the Ch Officer was the contact between the boys and the Admiral. He was a very quiet gentleman... but was also very severe and I remember him most by the cold indifferent look on his face when administering punishment he was seemingly devoid of all feelings. How many times can I recall him standing before the assembled divisions on a Saturday morning just prior to his inspection of us before we went down the gangway to the motor launch and so to weekend leave.

He looked at you with hooded eyes, scanning you from tip to toe and if there was something about your dress not in accordance with utter correctness, without a flicker of an eyelid he would say coldly 'Dismiss' and at that dreaded word you stepped to the rear of the rank, knowing full well your anticipated weekend was now in jeopardy and when others fled away and down the gangway you would be left standing at rigid attention... wondering... hoping... praying to yourself in desperation that he would relent and let you go... He would very often not even come near you again and left standing at attention on the now empty deck you would realise with deep despair that that was the end... your weekend had gone... and you would turn away with tears of vexation welling up in your eyes and wend your way down to the hammock deck and its deadly silence... If ever he did come back to you as the last of the boys filed down the gangway, each giving you a sympathetic glance as they passed your solitary figure, he would stand silently before you, his lips a narrow slit in his face, and he would smack them open and shut, with a clicking noise you came to know so well, then tersely he would say 'Lanyards dirty' or 'Collars not on strait'... Go and get properly dressed, you have two minutes... at which you would turn away at the double and race to get 'correctly dressed' and represent yourself to him and with beating choking heart hope he would relent and let you race down the gangway and jump into the boat just as it was pulling away.

Such moments were horrible. I think he knew that and delighted in letting you experience the misery of them.

With hindsight I do not think he was in reality a hard man. He was in the control of nearly two hundred boisterous boys and if you did not appear to be able to rule steadfastly I should imagine you soon became undone and out of control. He could have used physical punishment but he never did. I believe in private life he must surely have been a very kindly man.

In that strict Naval mould from which Paton no doubt came, came also Stevenson, Stevo was a short wiry haired middle aged old man. Only his blue icy eyes ever smiled and then not always in humour. One had the impression he had ever been the way he was now, even in birth with an old wrinkled face, tight closed mouth, iron grey close cropped hair, upon which always sat his naval cap which one never saw him without. A row of medal ribbons were seated worn inconspicuously across the left side of his uniform jacket, already partially faded spoke plainly of the man's complete competence and shouted out for all to see that here was one of the wars dedicated 'destroyer' men.

What action had those grey blue eyes seen and what horrors, just a decade ago. Was it those inevitable experiences that made him so silent, so foreboding, so respected and indeed loved by all the boys.

He always carried a large cane in his left hand and would stand in silent contemplation of the ever milling stream of youngsters who hurried here and there in unceasing procession, silent for the moment of passing his forbidding figure, then howling with relief when out of his sight, that he had not noticed their passage. He had though, those eyes missed nothing and many a wrong doer learned that to their lasting expense. He had a sudden knack of turning up at the most awkward moments heralded not by his measured step, but by the eternal clucking of the cane slapping the side of his leg, as ceaselessly and as menacingly as the flicking of a lions tail before it springs.

To be suddenly confronted by Stevo on such occasions filled every one of us with dread whether we were doing right or wrong.

He was in charge of the 2nd Division and it goes without saying that that Division was second to none in both smartness, and accomplishment. We did not give this to him because he drove us along, we gave always of our best for we respected him and knew that those of us who did what was expected of us had this little man's respect and protection. The classes he ran whether on seamanship or routine behaviour generally was always of the best. When you love a man you give your best. He expected this of you, and you never questioned.

I would say that resulting from my having met Stevo and studied the man's latent power and his unspoken fairness, his firmness, his shrewd actions, I benefited in later life and applying similar tactics when in command never had need to raise a voice, nor repeat an order. I LEARNED TO EXPECT THE BEST IN MY SUBORDINATES BECAUSE I WAS ABLE IN SOME INDEFINABLE WAY (FROM STEVENSON'S CONTACT) TO CONVEY TO THEM THAT I EXPECTED NOTHING LESS AND THAT I KNEW THEY WOULD GIVE NOTHING LESS.

I had been eight months on board when I became an office boy. This involved being sent ashore to the Head Office in south John St every second day and there make myself available for messenger duties. It was a position of trust that every boy strived for, for naturally it enabled me to get away from the close confines of the ship and its never ceasing noise. It was a task that gave freedom and one worked alone and carried with pride the responsibility.

The duties were simple. One presented oneself at the office on duty day at sharp 9am first having collected the morning newspapers, which one got straight from the Press Offices en route from the Pier Head, the Journal of Commerce from an office in James Street, the Liverpool Courier from the office in Victoria St. You were required to be impeccably dressed in smart uniform and with gleaming black shoes waxed to a mirror like surface by constant evening dubbing exercise. You carried a worn highly polished leather satchel slung by a strap over your right shoulder and held in rigid position under your left hand at your side. In that bag was the ships mail, catering orders for the day, ships daily accounts and you felt proud as you threaded your way through the press of morning commuters streaming from either the ferries from Seacombe, New Brighton, Birkenhead and Rock Ferry and later joined the heavier stream of pedestrians emerging from the Mersey Railway underground station in James St.

The pressing crowds carried you willy nilly up James St towards the junction of South Castle Street, Lord Street, marked with the huge monument in which sat enthroned a stony fat faced hag, with bloated face, who nevertheless was able to look regal, her head bedecked by a royal crown. Victoria, her monument was the rallying point of thousands of pigeons and the stonework was blackened by smoke and whitened from their droppings.

Around this monument plied the tramcars full to capacity with more commuters bound for their office desks or the many big department stores in Lord St and the lower Church St, they clattered past with a loud

screeching rattle, grinding to a shuddering halt every now and then to disgorge passengers and take on others from listless queues of shabby humans.

Horses, pulling hansom cabs, dray horses pulling heavy drays loaded with casks jiggled past and only occasionally would one see a motor car threading its way through the conglomeration of busy traffic, its horn hooting defiantly as if it really was itself heralding in the new age of transport.

There was a smell of horse dung in the air, not an unpleasant smell but one that was ever associated with Liverpool city on a busy weekday morning.

The office, Church House, lay on the left hand side of ?????? St just off the upper end of Lord Street and just out of the stream of heavy traffic. It was a shining red brick building owned by the Diocese of Liverpool and on the first floor was located the office, its frosted window proclaiming 'INDEFATIGABLE'.

It seemed eons ago since I had walked into this same office holding my mother's hand full of apprehension. On this morning I was far removed from the grubby ill dressed frightened boy of that far off day, my head was high, and I felt proud in my naval uniform and well I should be for Mr Collier the Ch Clerk was just inserting his key into the door prior to entry into the office proper, behind him stood a demure Muriel the secretary cum typist. Collier ran a critical eye over me looking for fault in my presentation and Muriel smiled and gave me a friendly wink as I stood rigidly at attention ready to fall in behind them as, door opened we would all file into the musty interior, they to a place behind a further frosted glass partition, and me to stand at the sliding window to open my satchel and disgorge its contents ready for Muriel to slide open the glass panel and take the mass of papers from me, together with the morning newspapers.

My first task was to await instructions which would take me down to the Shipping Office in Canning Place and there I was required to sight the signing on book handed me by a disdainful under clerk, pimply faced and no more than my own age, but who looked down his nose at the new element of seafarer to be, as though he looked at a new species of cockroach. I was often seized with the desire to grab hold of his toffee nose and bang his head down to the desk, but instead was obliged to stand at rigid attention and await his pleasure in handing me the daily log of pending Shipping Office business for the day and I would copy out of it information what would inform which vessels were signing Articles at day and whether or not they required any boys in the crews about to be engaged.

This information was taken back to Church House and then Collier would ring up the various ship owners and ask about vacancies for the many time served boys the ship had ready for sea.

Lamport and Holt, T&J Harrison, Blue Funnel Line, Clan Line, Ellerman Line, Bibby Line, Yeoward Line, White Star Line and Cunard. Any vacancies would be noted and then the information would be put in a letter to be taken back by me that evening a letter which was eagerly awaited by the senior boys on board each evening as soon as I stepped back on board the ship.

My next task was to make the round of various offices belonging to ship chandlers who supplied the ship's daily requirements in food and stores, taking new orders, paying bills. These were scattered over a wide area of the city and usually took up the rest of the morning when I would be seen swinging proudly along the city's many streets stopping at this office, at that office, my necessary air of importance surrounding me like an aura as I pushed my way through the crowded busy streets.

My furthest point of call was in Scotland |Road and to reach there I travelled along Christian St through to Cazeneau St and along to the junction with the shabby slum ridden Scotland Road with its everlasting smell of malt from a brewery near Bevington Bush. It was a street crowded with women in shawls who pushed by, smelling to high heaven, foul mouthed, their faces pinched with cruel poverty as they dragged along with them bare footed youngsters who swore equally with their mums and whose faces always seemed to carry a wolfish impish look as they gauged the crowds about them searching for a possible touch or possible lift from an unprotected pocket.

One seemed to be always dodging rattling tramcars and Foden steam wagons or horse drawn drays bound towards the market or to the docks, carrying market produce, bags of brown sugar, bales of raw cotton. It has often been said that congestion in the city streets was much less in those days than it is today (1977) but this was not so, and I suppose it was because whilst the volume of traffic was understandably less obviously, it moved so slowly that the congestion met with was the piling up of slower moving vehicles without the manoeuvrability of present day traffic. Most certainly a heavy Foden steam wagon possessed much less manoeuvring ability than the present day juggernaut, and this can be understood when one considers not only the speed it was capable of, but the steering arrangement which consisted of a vertical wheel which was turned on a direct gear motivated heavy chains which in turn moved the front axle and its solid rubber tyres in a slow moving arc.

The driver sat on a high uncomfortable and exposed seat, adjacent to a boiler and smoke box which gave off heavy black smoke and belching steam. He had no shelter from the elements. Invariably his uniform

was a burlap sack cut down one side which he placed over his head so that one corner of the sack afforded him protection from the rain, its soggy peak invariably falling over his face dripping water down his muffled chest. His trousers were corduroys, and invariably were bound by a cord halfway up the leg to keep out the wind and rain. 'Bowyanks' I believe they were called.

The horse driven vehicles moved slowly along in the congestion, their driver similarly clad. He plied his whip with dexterity, causing it to snap viciously about the horses head, but never actually striking the animal. The animals were decorated with heavy brasses and some with decorative bound manes and tails. Horse dung littered the streets and polluted the atmosphere. In comparison, the driver of the electronic tram, which ran on lines set in the middle of the road, was an '????', who whilst being equally exposed to the weather from his open ended cab, was clad in a set of voluminous oilskins which covered his body from throat to toes an oilskin flat uniform cap protected his head from the rain and wind. He stood in position behind a front metal apron his two hands engaged, one on a brake handle, the other on a driving handle, which when turned fed power to the electric motor which powered the car. Electricity was fed in from an overhead cable. A trolley led up from the roof of the car to this overhead cable, and was held in position by a roller wheel which ran along the miles of power cable set overhead and along the tracks.

At the terminus the driver would alight from his cab, and seizing the rope which was fastened to the trolley he would bear down upon it, freeing the guide wheel from the wire and then he would move out from the vehicle taking the trolley around with him in a wide arc to the other end whence he would then juggle with it and reset to wheel back on to the power wire ready for the return journey.

The rest of the congestion was made up of bicycles, a few motorcycles, some very noisy motor cars, and handcarts pushed along by women in shawls.

Such carts would be laden with market produce, or perhaps a mountain of precariously tied household furniture, or a collection of rags and sacks of bones. Crossing the street on foot was even in those days a precarious undertaking, dodging errant traffic, shying horses, agile cycles, clanging tramcars, and skipping delicately around mounds of horse dung.

Such was the common day scene in Scotland Road as I strode proudly along, my sailor hat at a jaunty angle, and my leather satchel swinging at my side, its shining polished surface slapping my leg... I felt a very important person 'Move over you small fry' I would mutter to myself 'Make room for the 'INDEFATIGABLE' They didn't move over... I forgot... I really was very small and really insignificant but the moment was the birth of pride... and there was no wrong in that.

My wide 'bell bottom' trousers were creased to a knife edge, my blue sailors collar spotless and my lanyard... whiter than white... I literally felt the bestest... I walked along head high, my steel tipped black shining shoes beating staccato time along the pavements. The months of strenuous drilling were having the effect 'I am the Navy... you louts... move over' they didn't.

With the morning rounds over, I returned to Church House and was promptly sent to lunch. This was taken at the Flying Angel Mission at the far end of Paradise St. I had a little table booked all to myself... and received special attention from the motherly lady behind the counter. Compared with what I would have had for dinner on the ship, what I now had before me was a banquet. I remember mostly 'College pudding' a doughy mixture richly spread with currants and sultanas and covered with a rich creamy custard. I always got two helpings of this.

Behind the counter, between two great chromium plated urns was a large horned gramophone. I can recall one of the tunes... 'If you don't like palm trees swaying... Stay out of the south...' or 'Pack up all your cares and woes, here I go, singing low, Bye Bye Blackbird' or 'My girls got long hair... got long ginger hair... she never had it shingled, she's never had it bingled.'

I did not have to report back to the office until 2pm and so after dinner I was allowed behind the counter and could play the gramophone myself... Truly I was now a KING.

There was very little activity in the Church House office in the afternoons, and I was more or left to my own devices, which of course was to naturally try to make myself invisible and thus avoid any unpleasant tasks that Mr Coleman the assistant secretary might think up.

It was widely held by the four 'office boys' of which I was one, that the afternoon was a time when Mr Coleman returning from a satisfying lunch, would ensconce himself behind the wood partitioned office and have his pretty secretary continue her task of typing from a perch on his knee. Such a thought filled me with envy, but I couldn't say exactly why, because my knowledge of sex in those days, was as with all youngsters very sketchy and thought to be highly improbable, but thrilling to think about. My ears grew ten times their size trying to listen to what was going on behind the wooden and frosted glass partition... I would occasionally hear a giggling and a laughing admonishment... but not much typing activity... The secretary was a very pretty girl, but she was an oldie, about nineteen I would say.

I think it was in those days watching her move in and out of the office, swaying her body (sensually, I now

know the term is) and pouting her nicely painted lips and giving me sometimes a very delicious smile from her large blue eyes, that brought back from what I thought in terms of time then as the very dim past, the thoughts of the thrill that swept through me when Mona kissed me... and I found myself wondering if this oldie typist could kiss in that same thrilling way and succeed in making my heart beat as Mona had done. It was only a dream however and both she and Coleman did not disturb me during those lazy afternoons, but left me to stretch out on the wooden bench seat in the office foyer either sleeping or reading the days news. At 1530 I was sent packing, loaded with the ships mail and papers to catch the 1600 hrs Rock Ferry steamer from the landing stage.

It was on just such an afternoon that I read of the loss of the Lamport and Holt line ship VESTRIS. She had left New York for Rio and it was found that a side bunkering door had not been properly closed, and in a storm in the Atlantic on her way south the ship had taken water, listed heavily, and in consequence had taken more water, and had finally listed over so heavily that she sank with a considerable loss of life. For the next few days the stories of that epic in the newspapers held me enthralled and terrified of my future... with the merciless sea.

It was also the period when enthralled with imagination as to what may have been going on behind the wood partitioning in the afternoons between Coleman and the pretty typist, my eyes turned for the first time with interest towards a girl.

I called her 'The girl in blue' she was dark and pretty and wore a blue coat and a very attractive hat. She always travelled over to Rock Ferry on the 1600 hrs boat and sat in the general saloon away from the other passengers looking so composed and so breathtakingly beautiful. I found I was becoming aware of her female charms, particularly her pretty silk clad legs and well fitting black but ridiculously small shoes. I found the thoughts of her beginning to haunt me and that I was to be found literally running down to the landing stage, so as not to miss the boat not my customary seat in the same saloon as her.

I would board the ferry as early as possible, so that I could catch a glimpse of her coming down the gangway on to the boat and I was so seated that to take her customary seat she had perforce to pass close by me, which she did always without a sideways glance, and in doing so I found myself thrilling to the smell of her perfume... perhaps that sensation was not altogether one arising from waking sex instinct, but was because she smelled so fresh and clean... and I came from an eternal world of sweaty male bodies, sweaty feet, coarse and foul mouthed language... hard wood inhospitable decks of an alien world... ship.

I watched her covertly during the twenty minutes river crossing... weaving stories in my mind, with her my central figure. Not stories with sex involved because it must be recalled I knew very little of the subject... but silly youthful adventures about her being in distress and calling pleadingly for my help... and of I a fourteen year old coming manfully to her rescue, and of her kissing me in gratitude.

All dreams... Dream... I fell in love with her... I thought of her every waking moment... I would search the ferry boat for her every morning, every night, panic rising in me if she was not immediately visible.

At night in my Spartan hammock, I would find myself thrilling with the conjured up picture of my 'Girl in blue' seeing with held breath the white chiffon scarf she so carelessly but so prettily hung about her neck... seeing her blue eyes... her rich dark tresses which showed beneath her hat.

My mind would stray to seeing her silk clad legs crossed and swinging... such thoughts left my heart pounding... but I did not know the reason for this but it was a thrilling thought, and one that I considered base but nice... not fit for my Blue Angel... but it was always there in constant and naughty repetition... thrilling me through and through... I was happy because I shared her with nobody else... I would not speak of her to the other boys... she was mine...mine... a delicious secret.

I never spoke to her... perhaps, and most probably she never even saw me... yet I was her constant travelling companion for nearly six months. I kept tryst with her with religious punctuality, morning and evening... then one day... one very black day she wasn't there anymore... she never came back... she never knew how much I loved her... I wonder where she is today... let me see... I would say she must have been about fifteen years of age... now in 1977 she is sixty three or even sixty five.

Perhaps it is just possible that I am wrong, that somewhere in this England is a woman who once in a while pauses to reminisce on her past and thinks too of an obviously shy young boy whom she saw every morning and every evening on the Rock Ferry boat as it plied between the Wirral port and Liverpool.

Perhaps in thinking she sees again a small fair haired youngster, clad in the uniform of a naval rating, his ridiculous navy hat with its shining new ribbon pushed to the back of his head, and in that moment of freedom from dress discipline and his blue eyes shining, his face just hiding a wide grin, he surveyed the usual nondescript occupants of the general saloon, those eyes, friendly and smiling darting here and there eagerly and always pausing at her when he thought she was not herself looking. Those eyes would sweep over her, she could feel them trying hard to catch her attention, she noted too how quickly they were averted in utter confusion if she purposely allowed their eyes to meet and at such moments she tingled with

a forbidden pleasure when she observed a blush stealing across his face and his sudden pre-occupation with the heavy leather satchel he carried slung over his shoulder held by a worn leather strap.

He seemed a very nice young man, always so impeccably dressed, his uniform well brushed and stiff with regulation creases, his neck lanyard gleaming white against its black silk neck scarf... only his hair was ever unruly and always sought to escape from the sides of the silly flat navy cap he wore with such apparent negligence... Why did he never smile directly at her in invitation to speak.

In all the months they travelled together he sat in the same place opposite to her... but remained silent.

Once when she was just about to speak, to say good morning to him, he frowned so fiercely for a moment she felt a little frightened. Once in trying to tempt him to discourse she brushed close by him in going to her seat, he moved sideways to allow her passage, she was aware that her new perfume was at its best and that he would surely notice it... she sat down, stole him a furtive glance, smiled inwardly at his reddening face, his quick confusion... then with downcast eyes he concentrated on the fastening of the silly leather bag at his side... the previous moment... the precious chance of an opening conversation... gone.

Every morning, and every evening she would hasten to the boat and hope to see him, and always he was there, almost as though he was also keeping a tryst with her... She wished her mum would allow her to wear a different dress and coat... perhaps if she could wear her best dress he would notice her more... he may even think she was pretty enough to speak to... what if one morning she should try the old fashioned approach and drop her handkerchief and this give him chance to retrieve it and so talk to her... she blushed at her absurd thought... then one morning she dared to drop it on the deck in front of him... he never saw it. Upon leaving the boat he walked right over it... Damn silly creature she thought angrily.

Perhaps tomorrow he would look directly at her and say 'hello' perhaps it would be this evening... her heart pounded with pleasure at the thought... but then, perhaps it was all her imagination, perhaps he never even noticed her... six months later she got that dreary office job at New Ferry, and now never with a boat to catch morning or evening she never saw him again. It was very probably that silly blue outfit she always wore.

I was becoming rich. I had a working capital of five shillings.

It was usual when on morning rounds at the various offices in the city to be given a copper or two gratuity, and very soon I had such hospitable offices well marked and would strive to give them better service.

The very nice secretary at the office in Scotland Road would call me 'Smiler' and always greet me with a cheery smile herself, and then ask me to go out and get her the morning papers and some sweets from the nearby general store.

Sometimes she gave me a few sweets, but often she gave me 2d or 3d. Once I met her boss and he gave me a whole shilling... that was a grand day... I had never had a whole shilling to myself before... The most I had ever been able to get from mother was 3d a week, and this was augmented by Grandad Prossors meagre halfpenny, a reward hard won by walking down to the Haymarket from Kensington every Saturday morning to get a packet of tea from Liptons.

Liptons, as with all the other shops on the south side of the Haymarket were already by late 1927/28 being earmarked for demolishing to make way for the new Mersey tunnel. The face of Liverpool was about to change... the bustle of the cobbled Haymarket was soon to be gone forever and replaced by the vast maw of the modern tunnel which was to come up from the river under Dale St and emerge facing northward with its entrance about halfway across the old Haymarket Square. The hansom cab stand would disappear, as would the well known tram routes and the tram terminus just hard south of St Johns Gardens gate.

Trams No 27 and 20 together with the 21 Aigburth would have to be re-routed elsewhere. I did not know it then but the upheaval about to commence was to go on and be with the people of Liverpool until well into the 1980s.

There was a little sweet shop in the Haymarket that sold the famous 'Everton Toffee'.

Outside the shop, above the small window was a sign showing a benevolent old lady who carried a basket over her arm and who smiled to the passers by inviting them to pop into the shop and purchase some of the famous toffee.

The sign was huge, and inside the shop was her miniature, a real benevolent old lady who was forever smiling and who always bid me a pleasant good morning when I popped in to replenish my stock of toffee that would last the day as I trudged my rounds to the many offices that did business with

INDEFATIGABLE.

In addition to 'Everton Toffee' she sold halfpenny bars of toffee, one called a 'Chicago bar' and the other, made of a creamy milk substance well laced with coconut chips called a 'Milkymac bar, this too was a halfpenny.

One day, having bought more toffee than usual, I had some over at the end of the day and took some bars back with me to the ship and of course shared them with my few friends. These toffee bars took on, and

soon I was being requested to bring some back with me every evening. The order became larger and soon I would have my leather dispatch case full of these halfpenny bars of toffee and selling at 1d for the Chicago bar and 1½d for the Milkymac bar I found I was getting into good business.

By the end of the first month after the discovery I actually had made a ten shilling profit, in six months my monthly profit had become eighteen bob.

When one considers that I eventually went to sea on my first voyage earning only £2.10s per month, it can be realised I was becoming an astute businessman.

As an office boy for the INDEFATIGABLE I was earning very soon £1.5s per week, and as my capital was based on the gratuities I picked up, I was highly successful. I never told the other office boys where my shop was, and although they caught on to the trading facilities, they could not obtain the favourite toffee here and so did not do too well. Perhaps they lacked too, my ready smile and my willingness to help do extra work at the offices I visited, for they could never obtain the similar gratuities obtained by myself. I became known on board as 'MILKYMAC BRAMHILL'. Life was wonderful and with everybody on board seeking favours of me, life was suddenly very sweet to be living.

I had become by this time a 'mid senior' boy and enjoyed the status that went with it. No longer did I have to fight for a place at the wash basins, rather one was reserved for me every morning by my circle of friends. A few 'free' bars of toffee ensured that little privilege, a few more would ensure my towel was laundered and my day suit used every day for office work was taken from me every night, ironed back into a knife edged crease and laid out by my hammock every morning.

I could even get a boy to lash up and stow my hammock and to get it from the hammock rack at night and rig it up ready for my occupation. I had become a successful businessman.

The cost of all such services was no more than twelve bars of toffee given free, at a total outlay of 6d.

Wignall one of the tough boys, much feared by others became my bodyguard at a cost of two bars daily and for seven days a week my secured well being cost me but 7d.

Carr one of the clever boys would help me with maths in the evening, for in this subject I was well astern, for my office boy occupation left me little time for school and instead of attending every day, it was perforce only every other day. Another two bars daily to Carr kept me abreast of the lessons in physics and trig (cost another 7d). So for 1/8d per week I was living the 'sweet' life.

Alas the life was not to last long, for Mr Sheridan one of the instructors noted my success and with adult avarice he stepped in by obtaining permission to set up what was sorely needed by the majority of lesser fortunate's, a tuck shop, which stocked with a much wider variety than I could obtain soon ruined my business and within weeks of the first opening of the official tuck shop backed by adult capital I was soon out of business and broke. But happy.

I had made my name and never more was I bullied or pushed around. I found being an office boy, with its relative freedom ashore every other day, I loved my 'Girl in Blue' and hells bells I was even getting to love the sea (or muddy river).

Then at long last came the day for saying goodbye to INDEFATIGABLE.

March 27th 1929 I was sent ashore with Wignall to be interviewed by the Marine Supt at Harrison Line offices in Covent Gardens just off Dale St and by the mid morning of March 29th I was with Wignall as one of two deck boys on my first sea going ship the ASTRONOMER, joining her in Manchester and sailing at 4am on the morning of March 30th down a frozen Manchester ship canal towards Partington coal tips where the ship would bunker for the coming voyage.

My life at sea had now truly commenced and I hated every moment of it and found myself 'homesick' for INDEFATIGABLE.