

# The Early Years - Rice Pudding and Radio

## Introduction

Do not waste time looking for some significant inspiration which led me to write down these memories. You will be disappointed. It was just a casual idea that came into my head when I was obviously short of something more significant to consider.

Given my well-known poor memory, I am probably the last person in the world who should attempt to recall a childhood and so a large degree of tolerance is requested especially with the exact sequence of events and some names.

Correction of anything dramatically wrong will be welcome but, please, no “geek” remarks like...it can't have been the Buddy Holly record at that time because it was only released in England one year later..blah blah...

The biggest hurdle I faced was knowing where and how to stop. Therefore, you will see inconsistencies where I carry some subjects to a later time in my life than others.

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## **Earliest Beginnings**

I once read that we are often mistaken as to what we recall as our earliest memories.

Early images are somehow changed and influenced by what others tell us.

So, I gloss over vague mental pictures of being in a large pram outside a caravan which my Mum once identified as a holiday in Wales or Cornwall when I was around 2 years old.

My clearest first memory is when I was 4 and suffering from some childhood illness or other. I was sitting in a child's chair with fitted desk and doing a simple jigsaw of a rabbit. I can even remember that the paint on the desk was damaged.

How this image has survived in my head is beyond my understanding but I am convinced it is a real memory.

In those days, children did not have any schooling before the age of 5. I suppose that today, 4 year olds are already proficient in calculus or at least Grand Theft Auto or the parents are panicking.

Moving forward but still before school, I recall being with my Nan ( Grandma) during the day as, about this time, My Mum went back to work.

My Nan must have been then around 64, an age I have already well passed.

My most persistent memory is of her cooking rice pudding using the very basic oven placed above our living room fire and fitted into the chimney stack itself.

At the age of 5, my life changed in two dramatic ways;

I started school and I acquired a brother within the space of less than a year.

At that time and until I was 12 years old, I lived at 11 Harrow St in what was called Higher Crumpsall on the outskirts of Manchester. I now realise that the designation "Higher" probably referred to the geography of the area but for some time, I thought it was a social comment!

My address meant that I was sent to Crumpsall Lane Primary School, around 10 minutes walk from my home. Slowly, over later years, I realized that this was a piece of good luck since it enjoyed a much better reputation than other infant schools in the area.

My brother, Philip, arrived 5<sup>th</sup> September 1954.

He was born, as I was, at Beechmount Maternity Home. Astonishingly, this place still exists although I am unsure what are its current facilities and services.

I do remember my Dad taking me to look through the maternity ward windows in order that I could see my Mum and new arrival.

I do recall that I couldn't see anything but pretended that I did. I do not recall and cannot confirm the story told often by my parents that I was only really focused on getting a Kit-Kat chocolate bar from my Dad's jacket pocket.

I am pretty sure that I did not experience any serious sibling jealousies of the kind that seem to worry child psychiatrists these days. However, I did notice a serious falling away of special treats, especially my Saturday morning toy gift, as, presumably, my parents modified their spending habits to feed a new mouth and cope with a return to household duties for my Mum.

Only later through life have I realised that this new arrival was the greatest gift I could ever have received.

## My Home

Harrow Street was a typical “modern” row of terraced houses with similar streets located either parallel or at 90° in a cluster of perhaps 400 homes close to Crumpsall Park.

At the time, the space seemed more than adequate even though my Nan occupied half of the downstairs and a medium sized bedroom upstairs.

Years later, when I visited an identical house in the same area, it seemed tiny and I almost fell down the stairs which, for space reasons, were dangerously steep.

My Nan had originally rented the property but, when her son, my Dad returned from the war and married, he bought the house from the landlord and became probably the first owner-occupier in his family.

This history resulted in my Nan feeling that she had “given” the home to my parents and this, in turn, led to several disputes, about which I may write more later.

The neighbourhood was a typical post-war environment, where most people knew each other and drifted between extreme friendship and minor feuds in a peculiar microcosm of the world in general.

I have heard people talk about the days when you did not have to lock your doors as there was no fear of criminal or vandal activity. I don't remember things being so casual but it is true that neighbours moved in and out of each other houses freely during the day.

Having said that, I can only remember a couple of those neighbours with any clarity.

Immediately next door, was an elderly lady whose married son seemed periodically to be living there. Tragically he died quite young, falling in front of a train at the local Crumpsall station. I believe it was some kind of diabetic collapse.

I also remember that it was on this old lady's TV set that we watched the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

A small black and white screen showing a fairytale coach and horses sticks in my mind. I suppose I should remember the beautiful deep tones of Richard Dimbleby, the commentator, but I am not sure that I do.

I dimly recall a street party for the coronation but details are sketchy. Ours was a very quiet street anyway so there was no problem to simply put chairs and tables in the middle of the road.

I often heard that all children got a special mug for the coronation but, if I got one, I don't remember.

The names of other neighbours have largely passed from my mind although I remember a stout lady across the road called Mrs Barlow and that another Barlow family lived 3 or 4 houses away. The daughter from that second Barlow clan was called Linda and much later in my life she moved to somewhere near my parents' last home together in Rochdale.

Much more clearly I remember the Taylor family at the end of the row of terraced houses.

Bernard was a male nurse, and his wife was Ethel. There were 3 daughters of which only one, Alison, was close to my age. I think the older girls were called Denise and Angela.

I met Alison 20 or so years later at some event in Rochdale where she and her husband were performing folk songs.

Ethel Taylor gave me my first records after my Dad bought a simple record player deck which he had to fit into a box and connect through the wireless (radio) for amplification.

Ethel took me into the front room and let me choose any 3 disks, presumably from her daughter's collection.

I chose "Battle of New Orleans" by Lonnie Donegan, " 3 Steps to Heaven" by Eddie Cochran and the 3<sup>rd</sup> escapes me for now. I think it was slow ballad and was soon put aside.

Bernard Taylor was a tall kindly man who took us in his car to distant places where there were slides and swings to enjoy. He also organized an annual bonfire on 5<sup>th</sup> November on some land at the back of his house. He died relatively young and probably gave me my first feeling of sadness at the passing of another human being

Scattered around the group of terraced streets were perhaps 5 or 6 close friends and I am both sad and ashamed that I cannot remember much in the way of names. I remember Keith who was a bit of a cry-baby and often got me into trouble when I may have inflicted minor harm. Paul Alison was another, the rest drift away into a vague cloud.

What is a strong memory is playing football in the streets using the end wall of a house as the goals. This must have driven the people crazy inside the house and it was no wonder that they often came out shouting at us and were also reluctant to return "lost" balls that went over their yard wall. They also had a fierce boxer dog. I don't remember the dog ever attacking any of us but he did like to catch the ball and bite it until it was a mangled misshapen lump. Strangely, despite the discomfort we inflicted on them, the owners always replaced these half-eaten balls with new ones. This "inconsistency" did not strike me at the time but now I wonder if, despite the

chaos we caused, we somehow reminded them of their childhood when street games were even more of the norm.

If anyone feels I was uncaring in my football games, rest assured because, many, many years later, I was to suffer almost identical discomfort, in Saigon, when local boys used my metal gate as their “goal” and drove me nuts on Sunday mornings with the noise..ahh!..Karma.

On Birch Rd, two blocks away from my house, there was a small memory from the war.

One or more houses had been hit by bombs and demolished. This left a rather sudden and unexpected end to the street.

Looking at what was now the outer wall of the row, you could still see the images of a lost home, fireplace, wallpaper, lines where walls and ceilings had formed the interior of the house.

Immediately adjacent to our streets was Crumpsall Park, a very pleasant small park with crown green bowling, tennis courts, putting green and areas big enough to accommodate 2 or 3 concurrent games of football.

There were also some very convenient small hills perfect for home made sledges ( toboggans) in the snow season.

There was a bandstand.

I think that, in those days, most parks had a bandstand. I think that when I was around 6 or 7, I actually saw a band play there. But, from then on, it remained just another play area. Recently, I saw that there had been some kind of concert in Crumpsall Park so that was a small link with the distant past.

One thing I remember very well was that Crumpsall Park had no slides or swings, a very serious omission in my childish mind. There were always rumours that such a play area was going to be installed.

The years went by with this hope always in our hearts. Finally, it came.

A small playground was installed. I rushed eagerly to try it out and found that, according to a brightly painted sign, I was one year too old to use it. In those law-abiding days, such notices were to be taken seriously and I felt so cheated!

Discussing my surroundings, I have to mention Chadwicks, the traditional corner shop at the end of my street.

This small shop seemed to my young eyes to sell everything anyone could need on a day to day basis. But that’s probably because we had such simple tastes and needs in those days.

Miss Chadwick ran the shop with her aged Mum. I think there was a man around, sometimes glimpsed in a back room but the two ladies were the “face” of this shop.

There were two great advantages to Chadwicks.

Firstly, it was never really closed. If the shop was locked, you simply knocked at the small living area at the side of the building and one of the Chadwicks would get up and sell you what you needed.

Secondly, through some manipulation or other, Chadwicks would accept promotional coupons for one item against the actual purchase of another. I am not sure how this was handled administratively but all that mattered to us was that a 3 pence coupon off Persil washing powder could be use as a discount on a chocolate wagon wheel. Probably, today, we would be told that the computer system couldn't handle such a transaction..

Coming back to our actual house, it had 3 bedrooms and toilet upstairs and two main rooms + kitchen downstairs.

At the time I didn't realise it but now I can see that the rooms were all very small. I remember playing darts and table tennis in a tiny living room. It must have been quite comical but, at the time, it was great fun.

There was no garden front or back. The front door opened directly on to the street with not so much as a window box in sight. At the back was a small yard which was dominated by a large concrete structure, originally some kind of air raid shelter and now the storage for coal.

The back yard opened on to a narrow entry across which were the backs of Newlands Street a parallel street to ours.

And, now, I come to the most important “neighbours”, The Kytes.

The Kytes were to become an important part of my life for nearly 40 years.

I came to know the family because somehow I was introduced to them as a possible “errand boy” and that's what I became.

Each Saturday morning, I would receive a shopping list and walk perhaps 3-400 metres to a collection of local shops. The list almost never varied. There was meat from Lomax's and vegetables from Myatt's. I think general groceries came from what had been a family shop, later becoming a “Spar” store. I think I received around 8 pence for this “work” ( around GBP 1.5 or USD 2 today)

From this beginning grew a friendship which withstood the test of time, growing up and, even, my move to Asia.

I suppose, in a way, the Kytes were a rather glamorous family to me.

Gwen Kyte, tall and elegant worked in a night club called "The Cromford" where some famous people gathered. She was able to get me a lot of autographs including Sir Matt Busby and some Man U players. Unfortunately, I have no idea what happened to my autograph book of that time.

Dick Kyte was a musician who had played with some famous bands in the 30's and 40's. His son, Graham and I managed to find some old 78 rpm records where he had a trumpet solo with a couple of big name bands.

By the time I knew Dick, he was working full time as a clerk on the railway and part-time at weddings and other private parties with his own small band. Eventually, he was to play at my 21st birthday party

Later, I learned that he gave up his music career because it involved too much travel and he chose to settle down with Gwen. As a young man, he looked a little like Clark Gable so they must have been a very photogenic couple when younger.

I remember that both smoked a lot and collected coupons from packets of Kensitas cigarettes. Their house was full of various household items a reward for their endless puffing !.

Later Gwen would develop a very painful and severe form of arthritis which effectively crippled her despite a lot of specialist treatment. I can still remember visiting her in a spa at Buxton.

Graham, the son, was quite a character. I guess he was in his late teens, early twenties when I first got to know him. He was a traditional travelling salesman, initially for a carbon paper company and later for Evan Williams Shampoo. His profession meant he was inevitably a fast talker with charm and personality. He had a very beautiful fiancée called Gina.

If I was to outline all the fun and "adventures" with Graham, it would fill a book so I'll try to focus on the sharpest memories.

He was the first person I knew to buy a Mini car.

It was white with a black roof and I became the official washer of this vehicle.

He was losing his hair and spent hours at carefully chosen hairdressers to get what hair was left styled in the most flattering manner. He used to look at me endlessly combing my hair and declare I would be bald by 20...that didn't happen. I guess that the hair problem was a pain for him because an earlier photo showed that he had once sported a fantastic "teddy-boy" cut where the curled front hair extended outwards for around 4 ins (10 cm)



In later years, Graham continued to be a “larger than life” figure with extremes of good and bad times. However, he always seemed to bounce back eventually from the darker days.

## Mum & Dad

I wonder if most small children have the same simple view of their parents as I do.

I was aware, from quite an early time that Dad worked at a factory and that Mum was mainly at home. Any outside work she did seemed unclear to me.

Around the age of 8 or 9, when visiting the local library in Cheetham Hill, I was shown the department store where she worked. It was a furniture shop called Baxendales but somehow, the image of Dad out all day and Mum more “around” persisted.

Traditionally, Dad was the enforcer of discipline. I know it’s a cliché but I did actually often hear the phrase “ wait ‘til your Dad comes home”.

The worst time was when I accidentally shot a friend in the eye from a home-made bow and arrow. The damage proved to be minimal but for a while, I really thought I had blinded him and would face the most dreadful punishment.

The slipper was my Dad’s choice of instrument. A big floppy slipper capable of inflicting serious pain.

Dad was slim, usually in some kind of sports jacket, dark trousers and substantial working shoes. He wore a cloth cap to and from work later switching to basically the same item but more expensive and stylish when he eventually became a car owner.

Mum was often in floral dresses. I never remember seeing her in trousers or slacks of any kind. I suppose it is inevitable that those early images of Mum always included an apron or “pinnie” as she called it.

I remember that my Dad was always “doing something” in the house.

I don’t remember seeing anyone coming to fix anything in our house. My dad did everything himself. Decorating meant wallpaper all over the place and the smell of the dreadful looking “paste” that fixed the paper to the wall.

He painted, cut carpet, hung pictures, fixed broken toys and even repaired shoes.

How pathetic that I now have someone who comes to change lightbulbs.

My Mum made clothes following a paper pattern on the floor or sitting for hours with knitting needles click-clacking away. My Dad always complained about the noise but it was not serious. He knew, as I did, that this was just a family sound and showed all was well with us.

By the way, I can confirm the oft-mentioned statement about families in those days eating together. We never ever ate separately. The meal times were all determined by my Dad’s needs and no-one chose what food they would eat. I can still make

myself feel sick remembering forced consumption of cabbage and sprouts, foods I detest even today.

## **Extended Family**

Of my 4 Grandparents, I only really knew one of them, my Dad's Mum, Jessie.

A round small woman who always seemed to be bent over.

I always thought of her as being ancient although now, I realize she was only about my age, today, or even younger, when I was a child.

Born in 1888, her generation lived to send husband and son to war, a sobering thought.

It was only in my early twenties, that I found out that her marriage to my Grandad was her second marriage.

The story passed to me was that her first husband died of pneumonia at an army camp in Wales. Assuming this was during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War I think she must have only been married a very short time before the death. I have a recollection of my Mum saying it was about 6 months. It must have been a shock and a tragedy.

In many ways, she was a tragic figure as she also lost her second husband, my Grandad, to an accident when he was working on the railway. Not only that but, in her mid-fifties, she was diagnosed with cancer of the bowel and given 6 months to live. In fact, she lived around another 30 or more years so I guess she came from a tough generation.

Sadly, by the time I knew her she was not someone who created sympathy. She was a heavy drinker of stout ( a dark rich beer) and her "local" was the Robin Hood on Cheetham Hill Road. Later she moved to a nearer pub as, presumably, she wanted more drinking time and less walking time.

She often used to come home drunk and singing.

" Kind words will never die" was a favourite refrain and was pointedly directed at the family for some imagined "crime".

At these times she would shout and complain about how her home had been taken from her. She was a real pain to my Mum and an embarrassment to my Dad. As kids, my brother Phil and myself were often wakened to a noisy mix of my Nan singing and my Dad shouting.

At times, she was so difficult that my Mum had to leave the house and just walk around for a while to get some peace and perspective. I used to fear she wasn't coming back but she always did.

Later, as a teenager, I hated Nan's presence in the home (even though we moved to a bigger house) because I could not have friends to visit. She would come in and depending on her mood behave either in an aggressive or embarrassing way.

I used to watch TV and read books where Grannies were always kind and loving. I resented that she was not.

Perhaps, if I had understood better the blows that life had given her I could have been more understanding and kind. I regret this now.

I think my Dad felt much the same way. When she died, my Dad cried at the funeral but later said he cried because he did not love her as a son should love his Mum.

Of the other 2 Grandparents, alive when I was born, my Mum's parents were not visible in my life. I have no memory at all of my other Nan and think she died when I was very small. I recall meeting my other Grandad only once. He remarried after his wife died and was somewhat ostracized in the family for doing so. I was somehow amused once to find I had a "step" Aunt younger than myself. By the time I was 5 or 6, he had disappeared from my life and I remember perhaps 7 or so years later, my Mum getting a phone call to say he had died.

In later years, my Mum talked much more lovingly of her Dad so I guess she regretted the period of separation. Through these later comments, I learned he was a very literate man who had some poems published as well as being what we call today, a "man of letters".

Through the hard work of an uncle, I have a lot of reprints of articles he had published. Mostly they concern worker's rights as he was a part-time local union official. ( as, in fact, was my Dad)

I don't know much about any "ancestors" beyond my Grandparents but I did hear that a Great, Great-Grandfather was responsible for us becoming Mancunians. He worked on the family farm, somewhere in the Midlands and was responsible for some sheep.

One day, after making a routine trip to the market to sell his sheep, he ran away to Manchester with the money, being fed up with years of hard work and low pay. It rather amuses me to tell people I am descended from a "sheep-stealer"

Like most kids, I had a collection of Aunties and Uncles.

We spent, by far, the most time with my Dad's sister, Rene and her husband, Harry.

They lived in Salford and had two children, Alwyn, a couple of years older than me and Jean, a couple of years younger than me.

Rene was, believe it or not, a shirt-folder. She worked at home folding shirts and putting in all those dreadful pins that always cut you when you opened the shirt pack, at least, in those days.

Harry worked at a printers. At one time, he moved away for a promotion, couldn't stand the responsibility and came back to his own job.

Harry was a what my Dad called a true Salford lad.

I think he meant that Harry wanted a simple uncomplicated life.

Harry was a sportsman of sorts. He was a good darts player and a very good crown green bowler.

He was also a fisherman and took me fishing with him on a number of occasions.

We visited Harry and Rene every week, originally by bus and, later by car.

We also spent a lot of time together when Harry was learning to drive. We would travel in convoy every Sunday for Harry to get practice.

My Mum also largely learned by a similar series of Sunday drives to places like Haworth, Blackpool and other "local" heritage sites.

My Mum's family was definitely more "complex"

Her elder sister, Alice was the proverbial "black sheep" of the family, having served jail time at some point before I was born. It was some kind of fraud and I think it involved forging cheques to keep her hair-dressing business solvent.

I can hardly remember her or her husband, Ernie but I do remember their son David. He visited my house once and he was quite a shock. He was what we would probably describe today as "hyped". He ran all over the house banging around and followed this by climbing over our coal shed and scrambling over the back door - things I would not have dared to try.

Later, I learned that he was somehow rather out of control with a whole host of misdeeds to his name.

Some few years later, he was part of a tragedy to hit his family.

He had calmed down and, I believe, was somehow entering the service of the Church.

But, sadly, at the age of around 24, he came home one night wet from a sudden rain and went to bed. In the night he contracted and died of pneumonia. At least, that was the simple explanation I was given. Alice found him in the morning and never recovered from this terrible experience. One year later, on the anniversary of David's death, she committed suicide by an overdose. In those days, that usually meant aspirin.

Then, there were the three brothers.

The eldest was Bill, whom I saw hardly at all when I was young. He had been in the RAF as some kind of technician, was a lover of classical music and had four children, Tommy, Wendy, Anne and Ralph. I didn't realise at the time but Tommy and

Wendy were actually his step-children as his wife Dorothy ( always called "Dot") had been married before.

I think I was into my teens before, as a family, we spent much time with Bill.

I do remember one specific piece of "philosophy" from Bill. Like most of my extended family, his car purchases were limited to old "bangers". He told me once that the secret to making sure you got a good one was to only buy those with very big engines. He reasoned that it meant they had never been over-worked. Someone far more knowledgeable than me about cars would have to confirm or denounce this strategy.

Only as I write this paragraph do I realise that I have no idea what Bill did for a living. I have a vague memory of being told he was connected to a laundrette business belonging to my maternal Grandad but that might have been earlier or even completely wrong.

At the time of the events which I am describing in this document, both Jack and Cliff, my other uncles, were unmarried. I think I am right in saying both got married when I was in my mid to late teens.

Cliff was a builder, meaning, I believe that he was some kind of manager or supervisor on large residential building projects.

In that wonderful TV drama " Boys from the Blackstuff", there is a some kind of inspector who checks the work done by the labourers. He has a constant battle to get the quality required and also seems to only get real pleasure when he finds something is wrong. From something my Mum said, some years later, I think Cliff, at one time, had this role.

Obviously, Cliff also saw himself as something of an architect since, whenever he entered anyone's home, he would start advising about walls that could be knocked through or doors that were in the wrong place.

As I am supposed to be writing mainly about my childhood, I should say that Cliff was, in many ways, the most exciting relative. He would disappear for months at a time and would suddenly appear late in the night without warning. Almost always, it seemed to me, he arrived with a new car. On at least one occasion, I was allowed to have a ride in the latest car whilst in my pyjamas, having already, theoretically, gone to bed.

Later, Cliff married Betty, a nurse. I don't remember all the details but, somehow, Betty was a visitor to a house next to where Cliff lived. She used always to tell the story about watching him park his car so skillfully. At the time, Betty was struggling to learn to drive and was somehow frustrated at how easily he accomplished this task.

Well, once married, they had two boys, Michael, who became an administrator in the health sector and Ian who became a fireman.

I suppose I shouldn't mention favourites but the fact is that Jack was the uncle who was closest to me, perhaps because he was the youngest.

In later years, Jack was a Hackney Cab driver and, very late in life, qualified and taught as a teacher of philosophy.

Jack, like my Mum, was someone who, in their younger life worked well below their intellectual level, a victim of a time when people often had to sacrifice further education for the practicality of earning a living.

Anyway, when I first knew Jack, he was a lorry driver. He drove very large lorries, probably of various types but the one I remember most was a very long vehicle carrying huge steel pipes.

The point is that, as a special treat, I was sometimes allowed to go on journeys with him. I can still feel the thrill of riding in the large cab and stopping at typical lorry drivers cafe's for what must have been very unhealthy food.

In those pre-health and safety days, not only did we have no seat belts, I didn't even sit in the proper seat. Instead, I sat on the huge dashboard with a wonderfully high and wide view of the road.

Jack used to stay with us from time to time, usually when he was in-between flats or unwell. Probably, I was a bit of a nuisance, pestering him when he was ill but he taught me how to play chess, draughts and card games.

Eventually, Jack's life stabilised in the nicest possible way when he married Chris and had a daughter, Anna and a son, Matthew.

The only other relative I remember seeing as a boy was Auntie Annie ( I think she was my Mum's Aunt) who lived in Rusholme. She had 3 children that I know of, Lloyd, Elsie and Edith.

The memories are a little fragmented but we used to see Edith and Elsie when we went to Blackpool. I may have this the wrong way round but I think Elsie had a bicycle shop and Edith had a toy shop and a business re-furbishing cowboy hats... really.. she, and presumably her husband, of whom I have no recollection, used to buy the discarded cowboy hats (traditionally worn by holidaymakers), from the council rubbish department, in Blackpool and re-cycle them the next year to the same market.

Of course, to a young boy, having relatives owning a bicycle shop and toy shop built up all sorts of daydreams that they would, one day, give me a new bike and big fancy toys.



That never happened although I did get a small toy from the toy shop when we visited around once per year ( usually a small metal cannon that fired matchsticks).

In fact, there was never any chance of a bike gift as Elsie ( if it was her) had a reputation for being very tight with money. I remember for years my Mum complaining that when you visited Elsie and her husband, Sam, you never even got offered a cup of tea.

As for Auntie Annie, she was a formidable woman who lived to be 99 and could claim an unusual "Royal" connection. Her son, Lloyd severed with the Greek prince, Philip, who was to become the Duke of Edinburgh, husband, of course of our Queen Elizabeth II.

On one occasion he came, with her son, to her home and they made a meal for themselves..so I am able to say that the Duke of Edinburgh actually made chips in my Auntie's kitchen. So far, this connection has not got me an invitation to Buckingham Palace.

## School

I did not attend any kind of pre-school activity and began school close to my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday

Crumpsall Lane Primary School was a 10 minute walk from our home with just one main road to cross.

I attended this school for 6 years and have a series of fleeting and pleasant memories.

Early teachers seemed kind and motherly with discipline only creeping in slowly from around the age of 7 onwards.

Sadly, I can only remember the names of 3 teachers.

Mrs Holden was a large rather stern, but kindly, woman who was my teacher when I moved from the “very small people” to the upper part of the school. Mrs Reynolds was a teacher and some kind of second-in-command to the Headmaster Fred Honebun.

Fred seemed a huge imposing elderly figure at the time but now I realise he must have been only in his early 40's

I was terrified of his stern gaze and booming voice.

Regarding actual wrongdoing, there were two episodes which are still in my memory today.

I was punished severely around the age of 8 for stealing valve caps from the wheels of some poor guy's car near to where I lived. This “crime” was initiated because these small metal caps could produce a wonderful sharp and loud whistling sound when blown skilfully. There were four of us caned and our names entered into some kind of “black book”... a rare occurrence.

I remember Fred Honebun somehow enjoying the fact that we did not know how we were found out. In hindsight, someone connected with the school must have seen us... but who gave up our names?

The second “event” was rather odd.

At one morning assembly, it was announced with great gravity that some boys had “attacked” some girls with snowballs resulting in injury and some genuine distress.

The previous day, I had carried out a minor snowball attack on the way home from the school and so, when the culprits were “asked” to make themselves known, I marched to the front of the assembly and, as was normal in such cases, stood

quietly with my face to the wall, disgraced, ashamed and, mostly, in fear of the physical punishment to come.

But, I was also surprised because 3 to 4 other boys had also moved forward with heads bowed.

I was puzzled because no other boys had been involved as far as I could remember, I had simply, alone, thrown snowballs at a girl on the way home and recall that she may have cried a little. There was no “gang” attack.

Well, when interrogated after the assembly, it was clear that the snowball incident mentioned by the Headmaster was a more aggressive and prolonged affair than my escapade. I was innocent..well sort of... I was released and warned as to further behavior.

Another snapshot of disgrace was a incident where I wanted to join a gang of kids and, by way of initiation, I was told to hit another boy for absolutely no reason. The power of peer pressure prevailed and I did so producing a nosebleed of a level to shock me. Years later, when attending ( forced) my Church Sunday School class, I became re-associated with my victim who strangely bore me no ill will..perhaps he was affected by the Christian surroundings.

Crumpsall Lane brought many other experiences... the first time I witnessed tragedy when the Dad of one of my schoolmates ( David Sparrow) died in a accident on his push bike. The teacher sent David out of the classroom on some pretext and then informed the rest of the class. We were 7 years old so I suppose we did not really know how to react and I don't recall any action except perhaps a silence when David re-entered the room.

Despite this sad loss, David went on to a certain small fame as a participant in “University Challenge” a kind of thinking-man's quiz programme on TV.

Like most children, at that time, I was introduced to classic books and heroes leading to day-dreaming of swordfights and sea journeys.

I first began playing football at Crumpsall Lane, walking from the school to the local park once per week with boots dangling from my neck by tied bootlaces - no fancy sports bag!

I was a fringe player, only getting into the school team when others were sick or otherwise unavailable but it started a love affair with the game that still continues today.

Crumpsall Lane exists today and still looks a magnificent building. Up to a few years ago Fred Honebun was still alive in his 90's.

## Technology

I tried to look up when the term “technology” was first used in normal speech.

Despite the wonders of the internet, I failed to find out but I think it was in the early 1960’s as I entered my teens.

Before then, this word was not used by “ordinary” people.

“Machine” and/or “Automatic” were enough to describe any or all clever devices in the home.

I only remember 4 pieces of “technology” in my childhood and one of those was a fantasy.

The first was television.

We did not have one in 1953 because I remember having to go to a neighbour’s to watch the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II as I described before.

My guess would be that we got our first set within 12 months after that event. I say this because I am fairly sure we had a set before I went to school.

The set was small and dark and the “tube” a dull grey colour. The screen size must have been around 10-12ins.

Not surprisingly, I remember the children’s programme “Watch with Mother” and, even today, more than 50 years later, I can recall the sequence...

Monday: Picture Book

Tuesday: Andy Pandy

Wednesday: Bill and Ben

Thursday: Rag, Tag and Bobtail

Friday: Woodentops

What a useless piece of information to carry around all these years!

I can also remember very clearly, Dad bringing home a convertor box, one day, so that we could watch ITV as well as BBC programmes.

ITV seemed much more “exciting” than BBC. Torchy the Battery Boy seemed very dynamic. I can still sing the first line of the signature tune..how sad is that!

The second piece of “technology” I recall was an electric washing machine. I think it was called “duomat” or similar and had two tubs.. One for washing and one for

spinning (drying). In those days before "equality" and "political correctness", this was seen as a special treat for my Mum, almost like a Xmas gift.

The third item did not exist except in my mind. I used to daydream about owning some kind of ride-along electric train, similar to what we might see today in a children's fun-park. I used to imagine myself driving it around the streets, picking up friends and giving them rides. I saw myself as some kind of hero possessing such a thing.. I would be admired and envied by all.

I have deliberately left for last the most important device which was to have a lasting impact on me.

Incredibly, I have forgotten who gave me this piece of magic. It could have been Uncle Jack or Uncle Cliff... I don't think it was Dad.

It was what, in those days, we called a "crystal set", a simple radio which required no power and where the sound was transmitted through large headphones that would have looked at home in a submarine sonar room.

But, what a world opened up for me.....

Plays, discussions, book readings and a long awaited 1 hour per week of "pop" music with David Jacobs

"Any Questions", "Any Answers", "Round the Horne", "Hancock's Half-Hour" and more and more....

Every night I was in bed by 6pm listening until falling asleep halfway through a play and with the headphones still firmly on my head.

It was magical world. Even today, with all the options available, I am still a big radio fan.

## Music

I cannot pinpoint when music became such an important part of my life but the crystal set and the very very occasional pop music shows must have been some sort of beginning.

At that time, music was in transition. There still existed successful "light" ballad type groups such as the "Inkspots" and also individual "crooners" like Andy Williams but change was definitely coming.

Musicians were beginning to be seen as rebels and, with adult disapproval, came teenage worship.

Richie Valens with "La Bamba" and The Coasters with "Poison Ivy" represented what would soon be simply known as rock music. Elvis, hated by almost all parents had also arrived.

UK imitators like Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele were more sedate but showed that the pop music tide was unstoppable.

I have mentioned our first record-player and my first records received as a gift.

The first record I actually bought was "House of the Rising Sun" by The Animals and, as I passed from childhood to teenager, The Beatles arrived and soon dominated my "collection"

Dad also bought me a  $\frac{3}{4}$  size guitar although I never really progressed from a few simple 3 chord songs. Even today, I can only strum through a few tunes.

I am not ashamed to admit that music has helped me through some difficult times and has always been a true friend

## **Munich - Thursday February 6th 1958**

I have included the events of this day for two reasons.

Firstly, because it is the only “external” tragedy that I can remember as having created real feelings of sadness in my home.

Secondly, because it led to the first time I saw my Dad cry.

At this time, I suppose I had supported Manchester United, knowingly, for about 2 years.

The Busby Babes were known to me mainly through newspapers and the footballer cards given free inside bubble gum packs

I think I had probably been to watch them play but I cannot remember specifically going to a match until after Munich.

What I do remember clearly is hearing, on my Nan's radio, about the Man U team being in an air crash with deaths and injuries reported.

As the crash happened around 3pm, I guess I heard the news shortly after coming home from school.

I have a very clear memory of going into the street to tell some friends who did not believe my story.

The next few days seemed to be almost 100% dominated by news of the tragedy and, in particular, the condition of various survivors.

The media seemed focused on two people, Matt Busby, the famous manager of the “Busby Babes” and Duncan Edwards, the young incredibly talented wing half back ( now we would say - midfielder). He had been the youngest player to appear in the First Division ( now Premiership) and the youngest player to appear for England.

At the time, it was felt that he would survive due to his enormous physical strength. In reality it was not to be so.

2 weeks later, my Dad came into my bedroom, early morning, with tears streaming down his face to say that Duncan had not made it.

I never saw him cry again until the death of his own Mum, many years later

I wasn't old enough, at the time, to fully appreciate why people were so devastated by the death of Duncan Edwards. Only much later did I understand it was not because of what he had achieved but because of what he would have become if he had lived.

A couple of years ago, I was privileged to attend an event with Bobby Charlton as the guest speaker.

Himself a Munich survivor, he had indicated in advance that he wouldn't talk about the crash.

But he talked at length about the astonishing talent and potential of Duncan Edwards.

Fifty years after the accident, he was still visibly moved when he talked of this player of great physical power and talent

The only other firm image I have from that February of 1958 is a special edition of the local paper with a black-edged tribute poster of the team just before they left on that fateful trip to Europe.

10 years later, I was at Wembley with Dad to see Man U become the first English team to win the European Cup

In the joy and emotion of that victory, I think everyone was thinking of the team "lost" in the snow of Munich.



## Religion

I am slightly confused about my parent's religion. They were both brought up as "Anglicans" ie Church of England but, somehow, we all became associated with the Methodist Church in Crumpsall

Despite being a firm atheist since my late teens, I still have very good memories of this church and my association with it.

As a young child I was obliged to go to "Sunday School" where a simple service was followed by activities supervised by teachers who were, in fact, simply local members of the church community.

Eddie Bradshaw was one of my "teachers". Like all of these people, he was a very kindly man well used to rowdy children and, especially, children who would have really preferred to be out playing somewhere.

I heard he had been a very good footballer in his day, briefly associated with Manchester United but the timing of the Second World war was particularly bad for him and he was never able to really take up a career as a professional player when peace came.

As I grew older, this was replaced by evening meetings at the home of Alan and Shirley Watkinson. There, a small group of us were encouraged to debate aspects of religion and we felt very "smart" arguing complex points of the bible. Actually, we probably sounded like real "know-it-alls"

Alan and Shirley were a lovely couple. Although they failed to convince me to share the faith they had, they taught me a lot about human nature and the need, religious or otherwise, to treat people with kindness. I wish I had followed their lead more in my life.

When I look back, I realise that the move by the established church to be so open to debate and analysis in the 1960's ironically, probably weakened it since such self-examination tended to throw up more doubts about a supreme being than a confirmation.

In my late teens, I became very active in the Church Youth Club, acting as Chairman for a considerable time and getting my first taste of social responsibility. I threw myself into the role giving a lot of my free time to event preparation and other duties. One day, Brian the Youth Leader came to me and told me I had to stand down. Some "elders" of the church objected to a Chairman who was not a committed Christian.

At the time, I was very upset but I suppose, as the club was wholly funded by the church and I was, by then, a firm atheist, they had a point.

So the church never convinced me of its beliefs but I still remember it with great fondness and a certain feeling of lost peace.

## Recreation

Many times, my parents would talk about how lucky we were to grow up with so many toys and TV, record-players etc.

Their voices contained a certain envy, a certain pity and, certainly, a kind of warning not to be seduced by “modern” opportunities for fun.

How strange that I look at today’s technology and media sector and think we had so little by way of entertainment.

However, a few moments thought soon reminds me of the pleasures of football in the park, the Saturday trip to the cinema and games which seemed always to involve a tennis ball and hordes of kids running and screaming around the streets.

Football has always been my passion as a recreation.

In those days, it was an informal kick-around in the park followed, later, by school teams.

How could I have imagined that, in my 60’s, I would still, occasionally, be playing in competitive games?

I have always had considerably more enthusiasm than skill and, over the years only remember a handful of times when gave a performance of any note.

I have touched on the subject of the primary school team and it did give me a short moment of great pride.

I can see in detail before my eyes, the first day when the school PE teacher came to the classroom on a Friday and handed out 11 shirts to the boys chosen to play for the school the next day. I had made it ( somebody better must have been sick haha) . As the shirt ( maroon) I think was placed on my desk I felt like I had been picked for Man U.

Sadly, the next day saw us thrashed by a school obviously more inclined to sports than academic matters. I honestly don’t remember the score – maybe embarrassment has erased it from my mind.... But I know Christopher Knott scored our only goal and I remember arguing for about a week with John Proudfoot as to which of us had actually provided the “assist”.

I just caught the end of the time when Saturday morning cinema was almost compulsory for all kids. I do remember the never-ending serials with the hero making improbable escapes each week from what had seemed unavoidable disaster at the end of the previous week’s episode.

In those days, cinemas were noisy places where it often seemed that nobody was really all that interested in the film. Those in the balcony would throw all sorts of stuff, probably better not identified, down on to the victims below.

I recall the full length feature films, still often in black and white. I don't know if my memory deceives me or not but It seems that 90% were about war with all the old stereotypes.

One particularly brutal movie called "Yesterday's Enemy" with Stanley Baker stands out. I often wondered why I remembered this one. Perhaps because it was a hero fighting the Japanese in Burma... something my Dad had done.

In those days, there was usually some kind of on-stage entertainment – magician, balloon figure man or similar. I particularly remember someone coming who demonstrated tricks with a yo-yo – I went straight from the cinema to buy one and became quite good.

## Health

There was always a lot of prompting to eat “foods which were good for you”. These were usually basic and unadulterated such as cheese, fruits, vegetables etc. There was not, of course, the more obsessive approach we have today and I don't recall calorie-counting or anyone studying the packet contents lists too deeply before purchase.

Visits to the doctor were rare events and, actually, as I recall, it was more usual for him to come to the house when someone was sick.

I have been struggling to remember my first doctor. I think it was something like Dr Raines or, perhaps, Rainsbury.

My second doctor, in my teens was an alcoholic and, once, my Dad went to consult him and found the good doctor lying on the surgery floor drunk out of his mind. He died young in his 40's.

I only stayed in hospital once when I was young. This was for what people called “Having your tonsils out” which I think, more accurately, was a kind of trimming back of the tonsils to prevent or cure an infection.

I don't remember much about the operation but I do remember vividly that I was limited to drinks and ice-cream for some days!

I also recall that, following the operation, my bed was brought down to the living room, presumably so my parents could keep their eyes on me.

It meant that I could watch TV until late and this pleased me a lot.

## Holidays

Holidays meant one week in Blackpool at Gorst's Guest ( Boarding) House on Shaw Rd.

For anyone who doesn't understand the concept of a boarding house, as opposed to a hotel, here are just a few pointers from those times ( and probably still today)

1. You eat what you are given. at rigidly fixed times..... Don't expect much choice and certainly don't expect "posh" food like muesli or low-fat milk
2. You sleep in small rooms and share bathrooms with 5-6 other families
3. You are not allowed in your rooms during the day... it inconveniences the landlady (owner)
4. Don't expect constant hot water.. it's expensive you know
5. If you go the same time every year, expect to see the same fellow-guests

Anyway, we used to travel mainly by train and there was always a reward of a few pence for the first person to see Blackpool Tower.

However, cynical I sound today, as a child, I adored these holidays.

Strangely, even today, I retain a strong affection for the sounds and smells of Blackpool

We often went with Harry and Rene's family, making a substantial group of 8-10 people.

I remember...

- ◆ Playing on the beach but rarely feeling warm
- ◆ The constant battles to set up a deckchair without losing any fingers
- ◆ Candy Floss and Fish & Chips
- ◆ Having 1 Pound to spend at the rate of 7 days at Half-Crown
- ◆ Not realising that 1 Pound contains 8 Half-Crowns
- ◆ Shows on the Pier ..often quite amateur but simple and fun.
- ◆ Not wanting to go home

## **Conclusion**

As soon as I end and circulate these memories, I will probably remember some key event which was stupidly missed out. Well..so be it.

These few pages have been a work in progress for 2-3 years, picked up and put down a hundred times.

So what am I left with as my final images of my childhood.

It's not easy to isolate and prioritise but I will try...

*My Nan feeding me before I developed all the negative views of her.*

*My Mum taking me to the library and searching through Billy Bunter and Just William books for one I had not yet read.*

*My Dad organising the annual seaside holiday*

*My Brother waiting for me each day at the end of lessons on the school stairs.*

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